

# The Concepts and Practices of *Vinaya* in the Humanistic Buddhism: A Case Study of Fo Guang Shan Monastery<sup>1</sup>



## Tzu-Lung (Melody) Chiu

Postdoctoral Research Fellow,  
Buddhist Studies Department of Religious Diversity

Tzu-Lung (Melody) Chiu is a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. In 2016 she received a Ph.D. at Ghent University, Belgium. In her dissertation, *Contemporary Buddhist Nunneries in Taiwan and Mainland China: A Study of Vinaya Practices*, she explored Chinese Mahāyāna nuns' perceptions of how they interpret and practice *vinaya* rules in the contemporary contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Previously, Tzu-Lung was a Postdoctoral Fellow in Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley (2016-2017). She obtained her MA in Women's Studies at Lancaster University, UK. Her research interests include India Vinaya rules, Chinese Buddhism, gender, the Bodhisattva rules, the qinggui (rules of purity), Humanistic Buddhism, and Contemporary Chinese Buddhism in Southeast Asia (especially Bangkok, Yangon and Mandalay).

---

<sup>1</sup> *This is a preliminary draft. Please do not cite or distribute without the prior permission of the author.*



## Introduction

In Buddhism, monastic rules embody the ideal of how followers should regulate their daily lives, and Buddhist monks and nuns are required to observe precepts established nearly two thousand five hundred years ago. A saying recorded in the *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, one of the most important commentaries by Master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667),<sup>2</sup> illustrates the pivotal role that monastic rules play: “The Vinaya Piṭaka is about the lifespan of the Buddhist Dharma; as long as the Vinaya Piṭaka exists, the Dharma exists.”<sup>3</sup> Similar comments have been made by numerous modern scholars. As Michael Carrithers puts it, there is “[n]o Buddhism without the Sangha, and no Sangha without the Discipline” (1984: 133). However, it is important to bear in mind that the Buddhist precepts were compiled in Ancient India, a context dramatically different from contemporary Chinese monastic conditions. In this context, it is worth considering Thubten Chodron’s comment on the application of Buddhist monastic rules in the contemporary world: “All religious traditions face a similar challenge: to maintain the continuity of the tradition from the past while at the same time making it relevant to the present” (2001: 28). As Ann Heirman has aptly pointed out (2012: 428), the Vinayas “inform us about what an ideal monastic setting is supposed to look like. It is still hard to know, however, to what extent people actually observed all the rules given by disciplinary and thus normative texts.” Stuart Chandler reminds us that not many monastic members, in any Buddhist tradition, are doing exactly at all times what the Vinaya requires (2004: 165). Since there has been

---

2 As a rule, most books and articles today use the pinyin system to transcribe Chinese names and terms. I have done the same throughout this article. Nevertheless, when referring to Taiwanese authors, I have opted to use their personal romanization, as it appears in their publications.

3 T40.n1804, p50b18–19.

the subject of considerable debate and controversy (traditionalist vs. modernist) about whether and how monastic disciplines should be appropriately observed and/or reformed in the contemporary world.

Stuart Chandler claims that current religious leaders categorize the “traditionalists” and the “modernists,” using the historical rhetoric of religious revivals to garner support (2006:178). However, the distinction between religious traditionalists’ and modernists’ viewpoints is complex because each camp regards itself as promulgating already established religious missions (ibid).<sup>4</sup> Chandler argues that “[Modernists], unlike traditionalists, however, ... are more likely to question both the continued viability of certain interpretations and customs associated with inherited practice and whether certain aspects of cumulative tradition ... were central elements of the religion or even date back to its founding” (ibid:179). The founder of Fo Guang Shan Monastery, Venerable Master Hsing Yun,<sup>5</sup> and the other two leading Buddhist organizational leaders or founders in Taiwan—Venerable Sheng Yen (Dharma Drum Mountain)<sup>6</sup> and Cheng Yen (Tzu Chi)<sup>7</sup>—

4 This paper only focuses on the modernist aspects for the analysis of Fo Guang Shan Monastery. An in-depth discussion of Chinese Buddhist Perspectives on Traditionalists aspects is beyond the scope of this study.

5 Venerable Master Hsing Yun 星雲 (b. 1927) is the founder of Fo Guang Shan Monastery 佛光山, one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan. He strongly advocates humanistic Buddhism and Buddhist education and services, and has opened numerous monasteries and universities for both monastic members and laypeople worldwide. Currently there are more than 1,000 monastic members (of both genders) affiliated to this monastery.

6 Venerable Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930-2009) was a prominent Chan master and religious scholar as well as the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan* 法鼓山), one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan. Currently with about fifty monks and 200 nuns affiliated to the monastery.

7 The Tzu Chi Foundation (or *Ciji Gongde hui*) 慈濟功德會, founded by Venerable Cheng Yen in Taiwan, has been recognized as the largest non-governmental and international humanitarian organization for worldwide social welfare and charity. For details, see C. Julia Huang (2009) and Yao (2012).

have utilized the “modernistic rhetoric” to advocate Humanistic Buddhism via the influence of Master Taixu and Venerable Yin Shun.<sup>8</sup>

While there is a consensus among Buddhist monastics in Chinese Buddhism that lay people are not allowed to read the content of Buddhist precepts for *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*,<sup>9</sup> Venerable Master Hsing Yun openly discusses his view on Vinaya in his book, *For All Living Beings* (*Renjian fojiao de jie ding hui* 人間佛教的戒定慧). He indicates that the contemporary Buddhist community should not expect monastics to behave as they would have during the Buddha’s period. Even though the Buddha was an expert in law, establishing Buddhist precepts in accordance with the Indian customs and culture of that time, certain precepts are out

---

8 Master Taixu 太虛 played a crucial role in early twentieth century Chinese Buddhist reform, advocating “life Buddhism” (*rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教), whereby Buddhist monastic members should contribute to society by involving themselves in the world through Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, rather than concentrating primarily on other-worldly funeral rituals. For details, see Pittman (2001). Yin Shun 印順 (1906–2005) was a Chinese monk famous for having promoted Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) in Taiwan. Humanistic Buddhism encourages monks and nuns to interact closely with the wider community.

9 In certain Buddhist canons, laypeople and monastic members who have not yet received full ordination should not read Vinaya rules. For instance: the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* (T23.n1442, p672c4–c05: Vinaya Piṭaka is for monastics’ rules, lay people should not hear it); the *Fenbie gongde lun* 分別功德論 (Treatise on Analyzing Merit), a commentary on the *Ekottarāgama*, traditionally said to have been translated into Chinese in the Later Han (25–220 CE) dynasty (T25.n1507, p32a14–a15: Vinaya Piṭaka should not be heard or seen by novices or laypeople); or the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論, *Mahāprajñāparamitāsāstra*, attributed to Nāgārjuna and said to have been translated (or compiled) by Kumārajīva in the Later Qin (384–417) dynasty (cf. Williams, 1989:74–75) (T25. n1509, p66a12–a13: Vinaya Piṭaka should not be heard by laypeople). For details, see Chiu (2017: 157–159).

of step with the times (2009: 38-39).<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore how Vinaya rules are interpreted and practiced by the Fo Guang Shan (FGS) founder and monastics in the context of Humanistic Buddhism. The research was undertaken via interviews and fieldwork observation, supplemented by the collected documentary data.

### (Selected) Research Findings

Before presenting the analysis of my fieldwork findings, it is first necessary to see how Venerable Master Hsing Yun's viewpoints on the overview of Vinaya rules.<sup>11</sup> As Xiaochao Wang (2007: 175) points out, religious organizations generally revere their founders or leaders, whose words, deeds and writings often become the basis for their institutional norms and systems. In

---

10 For example: (I) Having a bare right arm: India has a tropical climate, so it is unreasonable for monastics living in a cooler climate to observe this rule. (II) No touching money. People did not use coins in ancient India; modern people cannot avoid using money for food, clothing, travel and other items of daily life. (III) No contact with women. In his time, the Buddha established strict rules about sexual contact to ensure a sound Buddhist community. But with modern gender equality, monks and nuns have more contact with each other, for example, during meetings and riding. So, as long as monks and nuns observe the boundaries between public and private in normal social contact, this will reflect modern times. (IV) Preventative precepts. Some Buddhist monastics may practice these precepts more than necessary, afraid of criticism for failing to do certain things, which in turn undermines Buddhists' responsibility to benefit others, and thus eroding the power of Buddhist preaching in the modern world.

11 Chinese Buddhist monks following the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* observe 250 rules and nuns, 348 rules. Due to the relatively narrow scope of the study, it will not be possible to discuss the complete list of *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* precepts in detail. However, I have selected certain monastic rules for particular attention, on the grounds that these rules have attracted considerable interest among academics and/or are considered especially difficult observe by monastic members in contemporary contexts.

the present context, this dictum helps us to understand how the institutional leader (Venerable Master Hsing Yun) influences his disciples in their Buddhist beliefs and practices. In other words, this factor exerts considerable influence on how the rules are practiced, and plays a crucial role in explaining how Fo Guang Shan monastics may observe some rules differently in various institutions, i.e., as a result of the founder's personal interpretation of the Vinaya rule.

### **Key Concepts about “Humanistic” Vinaya Rules (summarized as follows)**

1. *Breaking rules and breaking a correct knowledge or viewpoint*: Breaking rules means transgressing precepts through mistaken individual behavior, which can be repented and corrected. Breaking a correct knowledge or viewpoint means a fallacy (deliberately misunderstanding the truth), which is a fundamental misreading. A person who has broken a correct viewpoint will never accept the Buddhist truth, so cannot learn Buddhist dharma. Breaking rules can be confessed but breaking a correct viewpoint cannot. Some people think receiving precepts may unavoidably transgress them. People are (wrongly) supposed that they do not worry to offend rules by not receiving precepts. In fact, those who transgress rules after receiving precepts have committed only a small sin if they feel shame and can repent, which means they have a chance to be saved. Those, however, who do not receive precepts do not repent and do not correct their behavior when transgressing rules, so they have more sins and will experience the suffering of the three lower realms: hell, the hungry ghosts and animals). So a monastic who breaks a rule is not shameful in Buddhism as long as s/he sincerely repents, and therefore still has a chance to be reborn. However, a person breaking right viewpoints is beyond cure. Similarly, political thought offenders are regarded as more serious sins in politics. In Buddhist vinaya, wrong thought and viewpoint are the deep-rooted afflictions and an obstacle to the Buddhist path.

Anyone practicing Buddhism must therefore first cultivate right knowledge and views. After receiving precepts, they can rely on the rules to guide their behavior and learn self-restraint; they can confess even though they may transgress the rules. Buddhist precepts are not to be feared; rather they bring peace, security and protection.

2. *In Buddhism, there are two ways to observe rules: 1) Prohibitive precepts (avoiding doing wrong 止持), and 2) Prescriptive precepts (doing what is right 作持).* “Refraining from evil” (諸惡莫作) is a prohibitive precept; “practicing all good” (眾善奉行) is a prescriptive precept. In other words, you observe prohibitive rules by not doing wrong, because you transgress precepts when behaving wrongly. By contrast, you observe prescriptive rules by doing things to benefit others, because by not doing so, you offend the rules. Thus, vinaya not only passively prevents wrong against evil (防非止惡) but also actively practices good. Buddhist vinaya is not a set of inflexible rules but should embody the spirit, meaning and humanity of the precepts. For example, in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism the Triple-Platform-Ordination embodies the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism to benefit sentient beings. The ordination of *śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerī* precepts is to keep *sajvara-śīla* (攝律儀戒); the ordination of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts should process *kuśala-dharma-sajgrāhaka-śīla* (攝善法戒); and the ordination of bodhisattva vows should have the spirit of (饒益有情). It is the way of spreading Mahayana Buddhism by all *tri-vidhāni śīlāni* (三聚淨戒) together.

Buddhist precepts should benefit life and the future. Theravada Buddhism, however, only confers the ordination of *bhikṣu* precepts, which lack the humanity that bodhisattva has for all sentient beings. Furthermore, Buddhist vinaya historically over-emphasized the prohibition of passive wrongdoings, which is not in the spirit of actively doing good. Therefore, when discussing vinaya, most monastics say negatively “don’t do this or that.” Other examples include that Buddhist monastics should not



give money and possessions to lay-people, lay-people are [not] allowed to listen to *bhikṣu/ bhikṣuṇī* precepts, and *bhikṣus* should not associate with nuns etc. Although receiving five precepts is the basis of the human world, in the past people often explained vinaya by using the example of ‘five hundred rebirths as a being deprived of hands while hands touching wines’ based on *Fanwang jing* (Brahma-net) rules. Those wishing to learn Buddhism may be discouraged by feeling unable to live up to so many rules, and this is especially true for the *gurudharma* over the last thousand years which may have prevented many brilliant women from going forth. What is needed today is clear positive guidance which “humanistic” Vinaya: “*you should do this and that.*” “Humanistic” Vinaya rules both passively regulates behaviors and minds, and actively promotes doing good deeds by developing the spirit of bodhisattva vows to make a contribution that benefits both oneself and others (Shih Hsing Yun, 2009: 32-38).

### The *Gurudharmas*

Firstly, the *gurudharma* rules for Buddhist nuns have been the subject of considerable debate in the past and present. Since the first nun, Mahāprajāpatī, accepted the eight “fundamental rules” almost two and a half millennia ago, the *gurudharma* rules are seen to have had a profound impact on the subordination of the nuns’ order to the monks’ order.<sup>12</sup> When discussing the *gurudharma* rules, Venerable Master Hsing Yun commented that these have prevented many brilliant women from going forth over the last thousand years (2009: 37). In Su-Wen Lin’s work, “Humanistic Buddhism’s Ideas on Women—A Study Focusing on Venerable Master Hsing Yun” (*Renjian fojiao de nüxing guan—yi Xingyun*

---

<sup>12</sup>For the detailed discussions on the *gurudharmas* applied in Taiwan and Mainland China, see Heirman & Chiu (2012: 273-300); Chiu & Heirman (2014: 241-272).



*dashi weizhu de kaocha* 人間佛教的女性觀——以星雲大師為主的考察), the monastery's founder required all his disciples in Fo Guang Shan to obey Buddhist precepts set down by the Buddha. *Bhikṣuṇīs* there, however, did not need to observe the *gurudharmas* because of the changing times (2001: 254-255). Moreover, when Shih Chao-hwei launched her movement to abolish the eight-gurudharma rules, Venerable Master Hsing Yun publicly expressed his support in the media.<sup>13</sup> In China Times (*Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報), 1 April 2001, he further stated that, since times have changed, for a long time Fo Guang Shan has 'frozen' the *gurudharmas* and has implemented a system of gender equality (Su, 2001). Fo Guang Shan is very sensitive to gender issues, and also engages in the international nuns' (*bhikṣuṇī*) movement (Cheng, 2007: 49). Its views on, and practice of, the *gurudharmas* have been thoroughly investigated by numerous researchers,<sup>14</sup> showing how at Fo Guang Shan the eight rules can indeed be qualified as "frozen," without having been officially abolished.<sup>15</sup> This is confirmed by David Schak's interview data, in which a nun says:

No one bows down to anyone else here. That just isn't the way things are done. The Master has addressed this before ... In our studies, we see the egalitarianism of the

13 In 2001, Chao-hwei submitted an article to *Ziyu shibao* 自由時報 (*Liberty Times*, 9 September 2001) in appreciation of Master Hsing Yun's support of her protests and activities. Shih Hsing Yun again expresses his respect for Chao-hwei's work, emphasizing the problems caused by gender inequality and the eight fundamental rules (2010: 26–30). See also Goodwin (2012: 204).

14 For example, see Lin (2001: 254–255); Li (2005: 120–121); Laliberté (2004: 84).

15 Shih Hsing Yun comments that it is unnecessarily painstaking to abolish the rules, and advocates that they should be dropped gradually (Yuan, *Lianhe bao* 聯合報 [*United Daily News*], 21 April 2002).

Buddha. We don't go into this much because the question of discrimination against women doesn't arise. There are no Eight Strict Rules here ... (quoted in Schak 2008: 157)

My Fo Guang Shan informant nun stressed that Venerable Master Hsing Yun has practiced the gender equality in monastic daily life while taking meals, entering the Buddha-hall, and attending the meetings or classes in different sides: East (*dongdan* 東單) for monks; West (*xidan* 西單) for nuns. Besides, Venerable Master Hsing Yun states that many learned *bhikṣuṇīs* in his monastery lectured in the Buddhist College for student monks (2002: 233). The phenomenon (of senior nuns teaching junior monks), nevertheless, seems not to be “allowable” based on one of my Mainland Chinese informants' experience. The Zizhulin nun, for example, told me that some courses run by the Buddhist College of Minnan did not have enough teachers, and scholars had suggested that teacher nuns could fill the gap. Certain monks, however, could not accept being taught by nuns in the private discussion. The nun expressed confusion about the fact that female professors could lecture monks but nuns could not. She considers that this is a key example of the impact of the eight rules in Mainland China; nothing similar is likely to happen in Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. From the above, it is clearly to see how Venerable Master Hsing Yun has practiced the gender equality of Humanistic Buddhism in his monastery without the implementation of the *gurudharma* rules. Fo Guang Shan nuns in this less patrilineal-hierarchy context thus enjoy the ‘infinite worlds’ to develop themselves and contribute to the Buddhism that we should not overlook.

### **The Rule of Not Touching Money**

Venerable Master Hsing Yun considers that the rule of not touching is difficult to observe strictly in modern society (2009:

37). The rule is “impractical” when customs change with the times since people did not use coins in ancient India; modern people cannot avoid using money for food, clothing, travel and other items of daily life (ibid: 39). In another book by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Buddhist Light and Monastic Order* (*Fo guang yu jiao tuan* 佛光與教團), he writes at length about certain regulations on money. He asks his followers not to privately save money: money contributes to Buddhist business and practice, but is also the root of affliction and disaster. Fo Guang Shan monastics should have right attitude toward money, and Venerable Master Hsing Yun suggests several ways of dealing with money appropriately:

- I. There should no borrowing or lending between monastics and laymen.
- II. Fo Guang Shan monastics may accumulate pure money for the monastery rather than for themselves.
- III. Do not ask for private donations and do not be greedy for donors’ support.
- IV. Spending money on Buddhism and people or monastic groups is the right way to use money.
- V. Monastics saving money to fulfil an ambition, or for a business or a plan should put the money in the Fo Guang Shan monastic savings account. If this cannot be done, it is unsuitable money.
- VI. Fo Guang Shan monastics must not enquire about another persons’ bank deposit, gossip or interfere in someone else’s behavior. (2006: 100)

In Fo Guang Shan, Buddhist monks and nuns receive a small monthly wage. Shi Yiren, a senior member of Fo Guang Shan, points out that the monastery is not against members having monetary savings individually, provided they are not for one’s own benefit: in principle, at least, money must be used for Buddhist causes and the general good of society, and saved on Fo Guang

Shan's account.<sup>16</sup> Monastic members in Fo Guang Shan are not allowed to save money privately, invest in a secular business, commit usury, or leave money for use by secular members of their families (1985: 220). According to the detailed information collected by Stuart Chandler, members of Fo Guang Shan regularly receive money from four sources: (1) a monthly stipend, varying with an individual's rank and post; (2) money as a present from relatives; (3) a red envelope from laity on a special day, such as Chinese New Year; and (4) royalties from their produced works (if any), such as books, radio and TV programs (2004: 171-172).

One Fo Guang Shan nun interpreted the precept of money handling in her own way:

What about people using shells as money in the ancient times, rather than gold and silver? I can explain that to you: I often joke, "Sorry, I do not hold money, but only use a plastic card (credit card)." On the surface, this means I do not touch money. A plastic credit card is neither gold nor silver, but it nevertheless represents money. It is not enough to only see the literal meaning of the Buddhist rule about not touching gold, especially as gold or silver is what we call money. It is used differently in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which emphasizes the importance of giving money. Venerable XX<sup>17</sup> is "the

---

16 Stuart Chandler's fieldwork data indicate that monastic members in Foguanshan "had not bothered to close saving accounts in banks on ordination but ... did not use them much" (2004: 172). My informant nun also told me that she sometimes uses her personal bank account (opened before ordination) to do Buddhist business, not relying solely on Foguanshan's own banking system.

17 Here I make the monk's name anonymous. The monk is famous and has a high-ranking position in Fo Guang Shan. It is not surprising that the monk has some money to give to students, because devoted laity in Taiwan (and Mainland China) makes cash gifts in red envelopes in accordance with the Chinese custom of supporting monks or nuns they admire.

envelope monk” in Fo Guang Shan because he gives each of my (lay foreign) students an envelope containing cash generously as an attempt to build good rapport. The monk receives money and then redistributes it, as he has no attachment to money. I would be taking money if you were to give me a million dollars. Why would I not accept money for educating students, or Buddhist events? By redistributing it, I can spend money on charity and social work. If you ask me whether I have broken the rule about touching money, I can tell you I receive money with the mind of a bodhisattva: money is not for myself but for other people. I just use money as a tool or a medium, for the benefit of others, rather than regarding it as my own. Money itself is neither good nor evil.

The nun explicitly disagrees with interpreting the Vinaya literally, citing the examples of the credit card and other objects that have been used as currency despite having no intrinsic value; but she quickly and somewhat unexpectedly bends this argument into a criticism of the rule itself. In particular, she underscores the fact that money can be used for specific purposes according to Mahāyāna Buddhism, which focuses on the path of the bodhisattva who saves all sentient beings within a compassionate mind, and stresses the practice of donation. Therefore, we can see that both the nun and the monk from Fo Guang Shan do not mind receiving and handling money in order to re-distribute it for Buddhist work and charity; and the nun, in particular, does not consider that she has transgressed the precept against handling money, because she does so under the countervailing, and seemingly broader, ideal of being a bodhisattva. It is worth noting that the practice of benefiting others through the use of money is stressed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who claimed that “only a person who has a carefree attitude toward money and who knows how to spread it on

Buddhism and the general public, truly knows how to use money” (Chandler, 2004: 172). This is one of many instances of the leader of a monastic community seeming to exert a strong influence on his disciples.

## Conclusion

Via both documentary data and fieldwork interview, this study may not only shed some light on the picture of Vinaya practices (e.g. the *gurudharma* rules and not touching money) but also reveal that the Fo Guang Shan founder, Venerable Master Hsing Yun take flexible attitudes toward rule observance under the influence of Humanistic Buddhism. It is, however, worth rethinking the degree to which Buddhist monastics can be flexible in observing the rules before they are questioned or challenged by members of different traditions. Indeed, a dispute over whether to observe the precepts flexibly or not still exists between modernists (Humanistic practitioners) and traditionalists (non-Humanistic ones). As Chandler has noted, Along with downplaying asceticism, Humanistic Buddhists believe that treading the middle path implies a certain openness to altering aspects of Buddhist practice, especially those concerning monastic life that, having been rendered outmoded by current circumstances, have become obstacles to benefiting others. Any literalist interpretation of the Vinaya or of tradition, in fact, is said to contradict the founding teacher’s exhortation that each person is to think for himself or herself so as to respond appropriately to every new situation. This understanding of how to emulate the Buddha has the advantage of allowing for flexibility. The hermeneutical challenge is to determine the degree to which such flexibility is permissible (2006: 186). Monastic members who do not follow Humanistic Buddhism accuse those affiliated with Fo Guang Shan, DDM, and Tzu-Chi (all Humanistic Buddhist institutes) of being lax in the practice of monastic discipline, and thereby of weakening the

whole edifice of Buddhist monastic ethics; they also specifically reject the Humanists' claim that the latter's "adaptation of precepts and custom in light of current conditions" is acceptable (Chandler, 2006: 186–187). The Humanistic groups refute the charge, saying that "it is easy to claim complete purity for oneself when one remains behind shut doors and therefore has almost no interaction with others" (ibid). This Humanist counter-claim echoes Holmes Welch's compelling remark: "In general, observance of the rules was in inverse proportion to contact with the populace" (1967: 128), a view which partly resonates with my fieldwork results. Inevitably, a gap exists between ideal religious practice and daily life in a monastic community, unless a monastic member chooses to live a completely detached life in the forest or some other isolated place where s/he has little or no contact with people or society. In short, no consensus on the degree of flexibility that should be discerned in Vinaya rules has yet been reached even within Taiwan's Buddhist communities, let alone in Chinese Buddhist contexts across both Taiwan and Mainland China.





Loving words are like sweet music.  
A smile is like a budding flower.  
Kindness is like a clear stream in a muddy world.  
Truth is like a rain after drought.

—Source: *The Everlasting Light:  
Dharma Thoughts of Master Hsing Yun*