

# ***Bodhisattva* Precepts and Their Compatibility with *Vinaya* in Contemporary Chinese Buddhism: A Cross-Straits Comparative Study**

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## **Abstract**

*Bodhisattva ideas have steadily developed since medieval times, to become key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. Monks and nuns in the Mahāyāna tradition generally have bodhisattva precepts conferred upon them while undergoing the Triple Platform Ordination, and adhering to both these precepts and the bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī precepts is a conspicuous feature of Mahāyāna monastic practice. Against this backdrop, it is worth exploring Chinese monastics' perceptions of the bodhisattva precepts and ideal, and the practices surrounding them, in the current sociocultural contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Though both these regions share the same tradition of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, it has very different manifestations. This long-term, cross-Straits comparative study also reveals a hitherto under-theorised conflict between vinaya rules and the bodhisattva ideal.*

## **Introduction**

In Buddhism, *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* are required to obey the rules of monastic disciplinary texts (*vinaya*), which are deemed crucial to their daily religious lives

and spiritual cultivation. *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律 T.1428)<sup>1</sup> has become a major reference point for monastic discipline in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition. In addition to the *vinaya* rules, Chinese monks and nuns generally have *bodhisattva* precepts conferred upon them while undergoing the Triple Platform Ordination (三壇大戒 *San tan da jie*).<sup>2</sup> Incorporating novice (*śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerī*), full (*bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*) and *bodhisattva* ordinations in sequence, the Triple Platform is the key characteristic of Chinese Buddhist ordination that differentiates it from its Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhist counterparts (Li, 2000b: 171). The component of ordination in which *bodhisattva* precepts are conferred is based on either the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra*)<sup>3</sup> or the *Pusa jie ben* 菩薩戒本 (the *Bodhisattva-śīla Sūtra*).<sup>4</sup> Yu-chen Li comments that “[i]ncorporating the *bodhisattva* precept ceremony into the Triple Platform Ordination procedure illustrates how Chinese Buddhism integrates Mahāyāna doctrine and Dharmagupta [*vinaya*] into the ordination ... [and] demonstrates the importance of the *bodhisattva* ideal for their Mahāyāna identity” (2000b: 171). Against this backdrop, all Chinese nuns (and monks) I met and/or interviewed have taken the *bodhisattva* precepts while being ordained as well as observing both *bodhisattva* precepts and the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* rules in contemporary practitioners’ religious life.

<sup>1</sup> For the historical background and subsequent development of the *Dharmaguptaka* tradition, see Heirman (2002, 11–61).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview and discussion of the Triple Platform Ordination in modern Chinese Buddhism, see Welch (1967: 285–300), Bianchi (2001: 89–95), Hsieh (2005: 28–37), and Wen (2010: 1–19). However, not all Chinese monastics undergo Triple Platform Ordination, as some monasteries’ traditions do not include it. For example, members of a *vinaya*-centric nunnery such as Nanlin or Pushou Si will receive novice precepts, *śikṣamānā* precepts, full precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts separately on different occasions. It is worth noting that nuns in Pushou Si also participate the Triple Platform Ordination because of the normal ordination procedure in Mainland China.

<sup>3</sup> The *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484). Kumārajīva translated this *sūtra* in 406 CE, though some regard this scripture as apocryphal. It consists of two fascicles, with the second – comprising the 10 major and 48 minor precepts – differing markedly from the first in both style and content. The authenticity of the *Fanwang jing* has given rise to much debate among scholars and monastic members. An in-depth discussion of whether the *Fanwang jing* was an authentic *sūtra* is beyond the scope of this work, but for details, see Shih Sheng Yen (1997: 336–340) and Satō (1997: 618–621).

<sup>4</sup> The *Pusa jie ben* (T24.n1500) is derived from a chapter of *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* 瑜伽師地論. *Pusa jie ben* introduces the stages of development of the *bodhisattva* and *bodhisattva* precepts, and was translated by Dharmarakṣa in Guzang, the capital of Northern Liang, around the fifth century CE.

This study will mainly focus on the *Fanwang jing*, which has been popular and influential in China since the fifth century CE. Hōdō Ōno (1954: 265) notes that *the Fanwang jing* received the most attention of all *sūtras* of Mahāyāna precepts. It has proved eminently suitable for extension and adaptation to China's culture and its changing societal priorities, while also absorbing various Indian sources. This adaptability is especially evident in the codes of the major<sup>5</sup> and minor precepts,<sup>6</sup> where the *Fanwang jing* takes into account various walks of life across different socio-economic classes in society, creating a classic scripture for a living morality (translated in Shih Sheng Yen, 2008: 67). Additionally, as Ann Heirman has pointed out, the *Fanwang jing*'s *bodhisattva* precepts "provide the Chinese Buddhist community with a guideline of [Mahāyāna] moral precepts ... seen as a [Mahāyāna] supplement, a guideline ... for [monastic members] on their way to enlightenment" (2009: 83). In this context, Chinese monks' and nuns' monastic activities seem to connect strongly with the *bodhisattva* precepts; and all my informant nuns in various institutions told me that they recited the *bodhisattva* precepts (and *bhikṣuṇī* precepts) at the *poṣadha* ceremony.<sup>7</sup> Both the existing literature and my fieldwork data suggest that adhering to both *bodhisattva* precepts and Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts is a conspicuous feature of monastic practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism in both Mainland China and Taiwan today.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The 10 major precepts in the *Fanwang jing* are: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) to observe sexual abstinence; (4) not to lie; (5) not to sell or trade alcohol; (6) not to speak of monastic members' faults; (7) not to praise oneself and disparage others; (8) not to be stingy and abuse others; (9) not to bear resentment and refuse apologies; and (10) not to denigrate the Three Treasures (the Triple Gem). Those who commit major transgressions will not only lose all merit in this life but will also fall after death into one of the three lower realms: hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals (Heirman, 2009: 83).

<sup>6</sup> The 48 minor precepts in the *Fanwang jing* are less serious offences; they can be fully expiated by face-to-face confession and repentance (T24.n1484, p1008c19–c20).

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, at the twice-monthly *poṣadha* ceremony, the *prātimokṣa* (list of rules) is recited. In this way, the ceremony serves as a bond between the members of the same *vinaya* tradition.

<sup>8</sup> In the Theravāda tradition, there seems to be considerably less emphasis on becoming a practitioner of the *bodhisattva* path. For example, Wei-Yi Cheng's fieldwork data revealed that *bodhisattva* precepts and practices were not widely approved of by Buddhist monastics in modern Sri Lanka (2007: 23–25). Similarly, Kawanami has pointed out that some nuns engaged in "this-worldly" philanthropic matters were considered "foreign" and divergent from the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism (2013: 47–50). That being said, however, not all monastics in the Theravāda tradition pay so little attention to the *bodhisattva* ideal; as Anālayo points out, "[t]he path of the *bodhisattva* has for a long time been a recognized vocation in the Theravāda tradition, and some

Before discussing my fieldwork findings, it is first necessary to juxtapose the *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Fanwang jing* to the *vinaya* rules, given that these two sources of sets of rules have hitherto only been studied in isolation, and usually as part of a relatively narrow quest for particular issues or methods. In principle, the major precepts (*pārājika*)<sup>9</sup> of *vinaya* and the *bodhisattva* precepts are the same, but differences exist in their functions or range, as noted by Shih Sheng Yen (1997 [1965]: 343). For example, the main root of *śrāvaka* precepts concerns killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying (on spiritual matters). The ten major *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Fanwang jing* likewise include killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and (spiritual) lying, but also go beyond these four aspects. In the same vein, a careful reading of the minor precepts of both sets of rules reveals considerable complementarity. Specifically, the 2nd minor precept of *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484, p1005b06-09), on drinking alcohol, is connected to the 36th *pācittika*<sup>10</sup> offence (T22.n1428, p0735b24), and the 4th minor precept of *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484, p1005b14-16), on eating garlic, to the 70th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0736c05- p0737b15). Likewise, the 9th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c08-13) relates to the 93rd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0745b08-p0745c06), on care for the sick; the 10th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c14-17) to the 46th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0735c21), on the killing of animals; the 12th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c24) to the 11th *nihsargika pācittika*<sup>11</sup> (T22.n1428, p0728a24), on business activities; the 13rd minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006a02-6) to the 2nd and 3rd *samghāvaśeṣa*<sup>12</sup> offences (T22.n1428, p0718b09-24), on slander; and the 14th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006a06-9) to the 11th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0734c26), on destroying nature, land and villages. The 19th minor *bodhisattva* precept

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renowned *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka occupying high ecclesiastical positions, like the late Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya or Nauyane Ariyadhamma, are well known for being practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path” (2013: 128-129). For further details, see for example Anālayo (2013: 129 n53).

<sup>9</sup> A *pārājika* offence is regarded as the most serious transgression “as if one cuts off someone’s head and he cannot stand up again” (Heirman, 2002: 244). For further details, see Heirman (2002: 119-127).

<sup>10</sup> A *pācittika* is a minor offence that needs to be expiated. For details, see Heirman (2002: 141-147).

<sup>11</sup> A *nihsargika pācittika* is an offence that concerns an unlawfully obtained object that needs to be given up (Heirman, 2002: 138-141).

<sup>12</sup> A *Samghāvaśeṣa* offence is one that leads to temporary exclusion from the main activities of the community (Heirman, 2002: 128-138).

(T24.n1484, p1006b07-8) is connected to the 3rd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0734c13), on speaking divisively and on duplicity. The 21st minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006b21) partly connects to the 62th and 63rd *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0736b15-18), on striking others. The 27th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007a13-16) is related to the 22nd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0735a19-21), on eating apart from the assembly. The 29th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007a23-27) relates to the 169th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0774c21-775a14), on making a living by means of worldly skills. The 30th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007b01) is connected to the 1st *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence (T22.n1428, p0718b06-b08), on matchmaking. The 33rd *bodhisattva* precept relates to the 33rd, 35th and 79th *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0735b18; T22.n1428, p0735b22; T22.n1428, p0740a27-b23), on military parades and entertainment. The 37th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1008a25-29) connects to the 97th and 98th *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0746c22-747b25), on dangerous wandering. And lastly, the 46th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1009b02-8) is connected to the 86th, 87th, 88th and 89th *śaikṣa*<sup>13</sup> offences (T22.n1428, p0712b29-c14), which involve the location/position of Dharma teaching.<sup>14</sup> From this, it is fairly clear that some of monastic precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts complement each other, at least when it comes to what a monastic member ought not to do. The guiding purpose of this general category of prohibitive precepts (*Zhi chi* 止持), to which the *prātimokṣa* (list of rules) belongs (Shih Sheng Yen, 1997: 251; *Fo guang da ci dian*, 1988: 204), is the avoidance of wrongdoing. However, the 10 major and 48 minor precepts of the *Fanwang jing* include not only prohibitive precepts, but also prescriptive ones (*Zuo chi* 作持), which positively require various right and good actions. In other words, individuals observe prohibitive rules by not doing wrong, because they transgress precepts when behaving wrongly, whereas they observe prescriptive rules by doing things to benefit others, because not doing so offends the rules. Therefore, while multiple versions of *bodhisattva* precepts exist,<sup>15</sup> their general principles can be summed up as the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts (*San*

<sup>13</sup> There is a list of 100 rules for both *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* concerning decency in the category of *śaikṣa*, which means “rules of good behaviour” (Heirman, 2002: 148-149).

<sup>14</sup> An in-depth comparison of *vinaya* and *bodhisattva* precepts is beyond the scope of this study, but further documentary research in this area is needed.

<sup>15</sup> For example: *Fan wang jing pu sa jie ben* 梵網經菩薩戒本; *Ying luo pu sa jie ben* 瓔珞菩薩戒本; *Yu qie jie ben* 瑜伽戒本; *Di chi jie ben* 地持戒本; *Shan jie jie ben* 善戒戒本; and *You po sai pu sa jie ben* 優婆塞菩薩戒本.

*ju jing jie* 三聚淨戒).<sup>16</sup> They are: (1) renounce evil deeds by keeping the precepts (*she lü yi jie* 攝律儀戒); (2) accumulate merit by performing beneficial deeds (*she shanfa jie* 攝善法戒); and (3) work for the salvation of all sentient beings (*she zhongsheng jie* 攝眾生戒) (Shih Seng Yen, 1997: 329; Shih Hsing Yun, 2009: 34; Shih Wu Yin, 2009: 8).

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that a close reading and careful comparison of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones reveals various crucial differences between these two codes of conduct. For example, Shi Ruijin 釋瑞金 offers a detailed explanation of the differences between these two sets of precepts, such as the timing of establishing rules, the qualification of ordination preceptees, the presence of ceremony masters, the names of transgressions, the ways of repentance, and so on (2008: 287–295).<sup>17</sup> Most importantly, the fundamental spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism is to focus on the path of the *bodhisattva* who liberates all sentient beings from suffering through a compassionate mind, and to stress the practice of the *bodhisattva* ideal.<sup>18</sup> The means a *bodhisattva* uses to benefit others, however, may deviate from monastic ethics, and may even go against common worldly criteria. As Peter Harvey points out, “skilful means” and “overriding the precepts” are sometimes utilised compassionately to save or teach those in need. Different Mahāyāna scriptures also express varying degrees of permissiveness regarding *bodhisattvas*’ breaking of *vinaya* rules or committing other minor transgressions in the service of this greater good (2000: 134–135). For this reason, Donald Lopez has commented that “[t]he tension between the demands of the monk

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<sup>16</sup> The term “Three Cumulative Pure Precepts” originated in *Zui wu bi jing* 最無比經 (Supreme Incomparable *Sūtra* T16.n0691, p0787c26 and T16.n0691, p0787c29) translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 in 649 CE. Shih Sheng Yen comments that the term “The Three Cumulative Pure Precepts” in this *sūtra* neither clearly explains the contents of the term nor its implications (2008 [1996]: 44–45). The contents of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts were later explained in the *Ying luo jing* 瓔珞經 (*Yogācāra bhūmi sūtra*), translated by *Zhufonian* 竺佛念 between 376 and 378 CE. This *sūtra*, however, did not directly mention the term but stipulated the major precepts, and rituals of conferment and confession (ibid: 45–46). Sheng Yen comments that the requirements of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts can be either simple or complex: either difficult to receive and difficult to observe, or easy to receive and easy to observe. The contents of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts can be performed either strictly or less strictly, so they can be adapted to meet the needs of time and place (ibid: 54–64). For details, see Shih Sheng Yen (2008 [1996]: 19–75).

<sup>17</sup> See also Fu (1994: 246–249).

<sup>18</sup> For a general introduction to the discourse of compassionately saving others in the Mahāyāna tradition, see Harvey (2000: 124–126).

and the demands of the bodhisattva are illustrated in some of the secondary infractions of the bodhisattva vows” (2001: 149). Some scholars thus have stated explicitly that one set of precepts takes priority over the other. Christoph Kleine, for example, suggests that “the traditional monastic code of the ‘Lesser Vehicle’ [Hīnayāna] ... [was] invalid when it conflicted with the precepts or ethical principles of the ‘Great Vehicle’ [Mahāyāna]” (2006: 164). Likewise, the nun Shih Nengrong has remarked that Chinese monastics place greater emphasis on *bodhisattva* precepts than on *śrāvaka* ones;<sup>19</sup> and that if there is a contradiction between *bodhisattva* precepts and *vinaya* rules, they choose the former (2003: 477). In short, among some Chinese masters dealing with such conflicts, Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts appear to be de-emphasised while *bodhisattva* ones are regarded as the supreme criteria.<sup>20</sup>

Building on the above introduction to some key issues surrounding the *bodhisattva* precepts, the remainder of this study will present monastic practitioners’ general views on the *bodhisattva* precepts, with particular reference to nuns’ perspectives on the potentially contradictory relationship between *vinaya* rules and the *bodhisattva* precepts/ideal in the sociocultural contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Since *bodhisattva* ideas have steadily developed since medieval times, and are key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism as practised in both Mainland China and Taiwan today, they should not be overlooked in any discussion of the Mahāyāna tradition among either monastics or the laity.<sup>21</sup> As my first step towards achieving that aim, I set out to capture present-day Chinese nuns’ general perceptions of and practices involving *bodhisattva* precepts.<sup>22</sup> My data indicate that, within the two

<sup>19</sup> *Śrāvakayāna* is the vehicle of the hearers, a term used by Mahāyāna Buddhists to describe early Buddhist followers who heard the teachings of the Buddha and who, by practising them, sought to become *arhats*. In the eyes of Mahāyāna polemicists, disciples of the vehicle of the hearers are only focused on individual salvation, which is opposed to the path of the *bodhisattva*, which calls for all beings’ liberation.

<sup>20</sup> Self-immolation is a key example: while Yijing greatly disapproved of the act of burning the body and fingers, some masters, such as Zanning 贊寧 (T50.n2061, p0861c19–c25), Yuanzhao 元照 (T40.n1805, p0285a05–a24) and Congyi 從義 (X28.n0586, p0323c15–p324a05), openly criticised his viewpoint, exalting *bodhisattva* precepts/practice above the *śrāvaka* ones approved in Mahāyāna teachings.

<sup>21</sup> In this study, however, Buddhist nuns rather than the laity are the main research focus, and an in-depth discussion of lay *bodhisattva* precepts is beyond its scope. For further details on this issue, see Jones (1997: 113–139).

<sup>22</sup> An in-depth discussion of the *bodhisattva* doctrine and *bodhisattva* ordination in Chinese contexts is beyond the scope of this research. For details, see Satō (1997: 427–563); Shih Sheng Yen (1997 [1965]: 305–405; 2008 [1996]); and Huang (2006).

regions I studied, observing *bodhisattva* precepts is seen as more “advanced” and/or difficult than following *vinaya* rules, on the grounds that the former must be policed within the mind rather than in the sphere of external behaviour. However, in the course of that research, I tentatively identified subtle but important differences in the practice of the *bodhisattva* path in Taiwan vs. Mainland China – differences to which scant scholarly attention has hitherto been paid, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the similar permeation of both regions by Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

### 1.1 Selection of Buddhist Nunneries in Taiwan and Mainland China

Buddhist nuns rather than monks are the main subjects of the present research. As a female researcher, I was at an advantage when seeking access to Buddhist nunneries.<sup>23</sup> But more importantly, amid a revival of Buddhism taking place in China, the population of Buddhist nuns there is increasing dramatically, along with their educational standards and influence within Chinese Buddhist monasticism as a whole.

Though Taiwan and Mainland China both have rich monastic scenes, it is impossible to conduct fieldwork in all monastic institutions. It is thus crucially important to select samples of those Buddhist institutions that do allow fieldwork, to ensure a balanced overview. My target nunneries were carefully selected as encompassing the major types, not least in terms of their attitudes towards disciplinary rules. These types can be summarised as follows:

1. *Vinaya*-centric institutes,<sup>24</sup> such as Nanlin Nisengyuan (Nantou, Taiwan), and Pushou Si (Wutaishan, Mainland China). Nanlin Nunnery 南林尼僧苑 was founded in 1982, and there are about 80 resident nuns there today. Its name, meaning “southern grove”, was taken from the name of the monastery where a second ordination ceremony was held ca. 433 for more than

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Holmes Welch explored the Chinese Buddhism of both Republican and Communist China during the 1960s and 1970s. He considered that a female researching Buddhist nuns and nunneries would be more effective, and thus did not interview any female monastics (1967: v).

<sup>24</sup> In this study, “*vinaya*-centric” institutions are defined as those whose members eagerly follow rigorous interpretation and practice of traditional *vinaya* rules to the letter, as a priority of their religious lives. These monasteries rigidly observe some rules (e.g., the *gurudharmas*, not touching money, and fasting after midday) that others might treat more flexibly. However, it would be wrong to assume that monasteries outside the category of “*vinaya*-centric” institutions are lax in discipline or not based on *vinaya*. Each has its own representative characteristics and different foci in its religious practices, as will be further explained in the main text.



300 Chinese nuns, who received full ordination from a dual *saṃgha* with the help of a quorum of Sinhalese nuns according to the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T50.n2063, p939c21–c24). This choice of name clearly indicates how Nanlin Nunnery sees itself as part of a development traceable back to India and to the first lawful dual ordinations of medieval China, and also highlights its strict observance of the *vinaya*. As already noted by Yu-chen Li, numerous young nuns regard Nanlin Nunnery's strict training and ascetic lifestyle highly, seeing these features as a "symbolic revitalization of the [*bhikṣuṇī*] *vinaya*" (2000a: 153). Pushou Si 普壽寺, which started to rebuild in 1991, is located in Shanxi Province. It is a well-known *vinaya*-centric monastery and now the largest Buddhist nuns' college in China (with around 1,000 nuns). Its tradition includes the training of each *śrāmaṇerī* (novice) as a *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer) before *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and offers various *vinaya* study programs.

2. Buddhist nuns' colleges, such as Dingguang Si (Guangdong, Mainland China), Chongfu Si (Fuzhou, Mainland China), Zizhulin (Xiamen, Mainland China), Qifu Si (Chengdu, Mainland China), and Xiangguang Si (= Luminary Nunnery) (Chiayi, Taiwan). Dingguang Si 定光寺 opened as a Buddhist college with Master Honghui as its dean in 1996. It was then promoted to the status of Guangdong Buddhist Nuns' College, the first of its kind in the Buddhist history of Guangdong. The college currently has around 300 student nuns and 20 teacher nuns. Chongfu Si 崇福寺, located in Fujian Province, is a well-known site for nuns' spiritual practice, and Fujian Buddhist College for nuns was established in the temple in 1983. Currently, Chongfu Temple is the cradle for the cultivation of a new generation of Buddhist nuns and one of Mainland China's most famous Buddhist monastic institutions to confer ordination. Around 300 nuns live and study there. Zizhulin 紫竹林, also located in Fujian Province, belongs to Minnan Buddhist College, which is a well-known institution of higher Buddhist learning in Mainland China. Zizhulin Temple became Minnan Buddhist College for

female monastics in 1995; currently around 200 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there. Qifu Si 祈福寺 is famous for its nuns' education, and is also known as Sichuan Buddhist Higher Institute for *Bhikṣuṇīs* 四川尼眾佛學院 (formerly located in Tiexiang Si nunnery, also in Sichuan). The previous abbess, Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006), devoted herself to the education of Buddhist nuns for many years and played a key role in shaping contemporary Chinese nuns' views on, and practice of monastic rules. Student nuns in this institute receive the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* precepts and are required strictly to observe Buddhist rules and lawfully follow the Buddhist ceremonies of *poṣadhā* (recitation of precepts), *varṣā* (summer retreat), and *pravāraṇā* (invitation ceremony held at the end of the summer retreat). The college currently has more than 100 female monastic members, including teacher as well as student nuns. Luminary Nunnery 香光寺 (also known as Luminary Buddhist Institute) was founded in 1980 by the nun Wu Yin (b. 1940), who is well known for her research on *vinaya*, and currently has about 120 nun members.

3. Humanistic Buddhist institutes,<sup>25</sup> such as such as Fagushan (Taipei, Taiwan), and Foguangshan (Kaohsiung, Taiwan). Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan 法鼓山, sometimes abbreviated to DDM) is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, currently with about 50 affiliated monks and 200 nuns. It was founded by the monk Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930–2009), a prominent Chan master. Foguangshan 佛光山, recognised as one of the three largest monastic institutions in Taiwan, was founded by the monk Hsing Yun 星雲 (b. 1927) in 1967. There are more than 1,000 male and female monastics affiliated with this monastery, which promotes Humanistic Buddhism in particular.

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<sup>25</sup> Humanistic Buddhism encourages Buddhist monks and nuns to interact closely with the wider community. Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan – such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) – advocate Humanistic Buddhism in various ways, including monastic and secular education, welfare work, and protection of the environment.

4. Institutions that do not fit neatly into any of the above three categories, including Tongjiao Si and Tianning Si (both in Beijing, Mainland China). Tongjiao Si 通教寺 is a well-known and highly respected Beijing nunnery, whose members focus on *vinaya* study. Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 studied Buddhism in Tongjiao Si. It is now a place for Buddhist nuns' religious practice and study, holding the Seven-day Recitation of the Buddha's Name every month. Around 30 nuns live there. Tianning Si 天寧寺, also located in Beijing, is one of the oldest temples there, and is famous for its twelfth-century Liao Dynasty pagoda. It was declared a national site of cultural preservation in 1988. Currently around 30 Buddhist nuns reside in this nunnery, which focuses on the combined practice of Chan and Pure Land methods.

When studying Chinese Buddhism (or indeed any other Chinese religion), it is necessary to apply historical, textual, and fieldwork approaches. As Daniel Overmyer has pointed out (1998: 4), "knowledge of history and texts can enrich field observation, and field observation can often provide a sense of context for past practices." Following Overmyer's recommendations, this study's primary method for gathering information was fieldwork (including observation and interviews), combined with historical/documentary study of Buddhist scriptural texts. A total of 35 face-to-face interviews were conducted in four Taiwanese and seven Mainland Chinese monastic institutions, 15 in Taiwan and 20 on the Mainland.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. General Viewpoint on *Bodhisattva* Precepts

The following sections present my fieldwork data in detail, juxtaposing Taiwan- and Mainland-based monastic practitioners' general perspectives regarding *bodhisattva* precepts as a means of exploring the similarities and differences in practising the *bodhisattva* path/ideal in various Mahāyāna contexts. To this end, I have categorised these data into two distinct dimensions: (1) the relationship between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts; and (2) social engagement by practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path.

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<sup>26</sup> Taiwan (total of 15 interviewees): Nanlin Nunnery (2 interviewees); Luminary Nunnery (8); DDM (3) and Foguangshan (2). Mainland China (total of 20 interviewees): Pushou Si (5); Tongjiao Si (2); Tianning Si (2); Dingguang Si (4); Chongfu Si (3); Zizhulin (2) and Qifu Si (2).

## 2.1 Congruence between *Bodhisattva* and *Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī* Precepts

Before turning to a closer examination of my fieldwork findings, it is first worth exploring the broader context of how my informant nuns perceived the relationship between *bodhisattva* and Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. Some responded that the former precepts represent an advanced stage for monastic members, with stricter demands than the latter, and can be adhered to by focusing the mind. My interviewees at Dingguang Si and Qifu Si both stated that it was much harder to practise *bodhisattva* precepts because they require more detailed observation than *vinaya*. From their perspective, Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts focus on outward behaviour, while *bodhisattva* ones focus on the mind. One Dingguang nun then used an example to stress the difficulty of controlling the mind: you may outwardly follow the rule of not eating after midday, but still be envious when you see others eat. One nun at Zizhulin shared a similar view, that being a *bodhisattva* means you have an inner *bodhisattva* mind, as well as observing Buddhist precepts externally. She also indicated that the *bodhisattva* criteria are much stricter and more detailed than the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts: that is, you disobey the former if you have bad thoughts, whereas you do not offend the latter by such thoughts unless you also take action. A similar viewpoint was shared by one informant nun at Chongfu Si, who described *bodhisattva* precepts as an “upgraded” version of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts, which mainly focus on monastic members’ behaviour and speech rather than their minds. One Taiwanese nun, at Nanlin, echoed the Mainland nuns’ view that monastics practising the *bodhisattva* precepts should eradicate defilements and bad habits, and that this placed greater spiritual demands upon them. In sum, it appears that *bodhisattva* precepts are commonly regarded as more advanced and difficult to follow than *vinaya* rules among current monastic practitioners at various nunneries in Mainland China and Taiwan.

Broadly speaking, the receiving of *bodhisattva* precepts represents the final stage of ordination criteria and procedure, for both monastic members and laypeople. For instance, a layperson must first receive the Three Refuges and Five Precepts (or Eight Precepts) prior to receiving Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* precepts.<sup>27</sup> Monastics must also first receive the Three Refuges and Five Precepts,

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<sup>27</sup> The Three Refuges are the initial stages whereby non-Buddhists convert to Buddhism, by reciting the formula “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha”, which is done formally in lay and monastic ordination ceremonies. The Five Precepts constitute the basic Buddhist code of ethics, adhered to by lay followers: (1) not to kill; (2) not to

the *śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerī* precepts,<sup>28</sup> and the *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣunī* precepts, prior to receiving *bodhisattva* precepts. The transmission of the latter thus clearly involves a gradual process from the basic level of the Three Refuges to the more advanced levels.

Readers will have noted how often my interviewees referred to the “mind” when discussing *bodhisattva* precepts. The founder of Foguangshan, Master Hsing Yun, has stated that a *bodhisattva* who develops *bodhi* mind will help to liberate sentient beings. Those who lack *bodhi* mind to attain awakening and liberate living beings, cannot call themselves *bodhisattva* (2009: 41). While the *bodhisattva* precepts include the 10 major precepts and 48 minor ones, their shared fundamental principle is to initiate the *bodhi* mind; and a person’s failure to develop it strikes at the fundamental spirit of the *bodhisattva* precepts (ibid). Unsurprisingly, then, the *bodhi* mind indeed plays a key role in many Mahāyāna scriptures, texts and ordination ceremonies, especially in relation to saving sentient beings through the *bodhisattva* ideal.<sup>29</sup> In this context, mind also appears to be closely related to the observance of *bodhisattva* precepts in terms of spiritual cultivation, since some of my interviewees expressed how hard it was

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steal; (3) not to engage in sexual misconduct; (4) not to lie; and (5) not to drink alcohol. The Eight Precepts are for Buddhist laypeople who wish to practise Buddhism more strictly than those who adhere only to the Five Precepts. They are: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) to observe “sexual abstinence”; (4) not to lie; (5) not to drink alcohol; (6) not to eat at improper times; (7) not to wear flowers, sing, dance or make music or use perfume; and (8) not to sleep in a high and luxurious bed. For further details of the eight precepts, see Gomes (2004: 47–63).

<sup>28</sup> Before they receive full ordination, both male and female novices are required to follow the Ten Precepts. The *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T22.n1428, p924a2–a16) specifies them as follows: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) not to have unchaste behaviour; (4) not to lie; (5) not to drink alcohol; (6) not to wear flowers, perfume or jewels; (7) not to sing, dance or make music, or go to see singing, dancing or music; (8) not to sleep in a high, large or big bed; (9) not to eat at improper times (i.e., after noon); and (10) not to handle gold, silver or money. These precepts are described in very similar terms in the other *vinayas*. For further details, see Heirman (2002: 66).

<sup>29</sup> For example, the *Pusadich jing* 菩薩地持經 (*Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra*), translated in the fifth century CE by Dharmakṣema, holds that those who have the *bodhisattva* nature (sacrificing oneself and benefiting others), but lack the *bodhi* mind and cultivation, cannot attain *Anuttarasamyaksambodhi* (T30.n1581, p888a26–a28). Another example is the *Wuwei sancang chanyao* 無畏三藏禪要 (*Tripitaka Master Śubhā’s Guide to Meditation*), which is a record of Śubhākarasimha’s lecture on meditation. It states that people who want to enter the Mahāyāna *dharma* must initiate the *bodhi* mind and receive *bodhisattva* precepts with a pure body (T18.n0917, p0942c06–c7). And in the *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony, precept masters ask both the laity and monastics whether they have developed the *bodhi* mind as a *bodhisattva* before they confer the precepts (Shih Sheng Yen, 2008 [1996]: 162).

to control the mind or avoid improper thoughts.<sup>30</sup> From this, we can surmise that present-day Chinese nuns share a broad consensus on the relationship between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. The next section, however, will dig deeper into nuns' perspectives on the contradictory relationship between these two sets of precepts.

### ***Bodhisattva* and *Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī* Precepts in Conflict**

While some existing literature has explicitly discussed the differences between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts (e.g., Fu, 1994: 246–249; Lopez, 2001: 149–150; Shi Ruijin, 2008: 287–295), it is not unsurprising that some of my Mainland informant nuns referred spontaneously to the compatibility of these two sets of precepts. For example, my interviewees at Qifu Si and Zizhulin both volunteered that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts complement each other without conflict. One interviewee at Dingguang Si even responded to one of my questions by saying straightforwardly that there is no conflict between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones, and asking rhetorically how monastic members could attain Buddhahood if their minds were in conflict between one *dharma* (the *bodhisattva* precepts) and another (*vinaya*)? Even this nun, however, indicated that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones differed, at least in emphasis: the former focusing on self-benefit and the latter on benefiting others.

Additionally, two Mainland informants provided interesting answers to my questions about the issue of *bodhisattva* practice within Mahāyāna Buddhism. One, at Dingguang Si, used a story of the Buddha to clarify her standpoint: Buddhists cannot tell a lie.<sup>31</sup> When the Buddha was alive, he saw a rabbit running away, and a hunter asked him whether he had seen the rabbit. The Buddha said no, so the hunter left. Then Ānanda asked the Buddha why he had lied, and the Buddha answered that the rabbit would have met its death if he had told the hunter where to find it.<sup>32</sup> As the nun saw it, this story meant that the Buddha told an expedient ‘white lie’ to save another sentient being, which was in keeping with the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* tradition. By way of conclusion, she remarked that Chinese Buddhist monastics do not forget receiving *bodhisattva* precepts, even as they

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<sup>30</sup> Shih Sheng Yen explains how an inappropriate mind crucially affects the action of body and speech so as to transgress the 10 major precepts of the *Fanwang jing* (1997 [1965]: 345–346).

<sup>31</sup> According to the 1st *pācittika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* deliberately lies, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman 2002: 529).

<sup>32</sup> The nun, however, did not give me concrete textual references for this story.

observe *śrāvaka* ones in the meantime. Similarly, a nun from Chongfu Si gave an example of an exception to the rule that monastic members may not have physical contact with the opposite sex. According to the 5th *pārājika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* has defiled thoughts and has physical contact with a man with defiled thoughts below the armpit and above the knee ... this *bhikṣuṇī* [commits] a *pārājika*... That is ‘to have physical contact’” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 252). This rule would even forbid a nun from saving a man who has fallen into a river because she would have to touch him. However, according to the *bodhisattva* precepts, the nun *must* save the drowning man because she must show mercy to all sentient beings. From these two nuns’ comments, we can see that some behaviours forbidden in the *vinaya* are deemed acceptable within the spirit of the *bodhisattva* ideal, provided that they occur under certain specific conditions involving compassion for others.

While some Mainland nuns’ perceptions that there is no incompatibility between these two systems may be based on textual references, their responses nevertheless revealed a cautious or even defensive position when discussing these issues with me, perhaps because I was not a member of the monastic community.<sup>33</sup> Another group of my informants, meanwhile, also conceded the existence of some differences or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* ones, but did not use concrete textual references or examples from their daily lives to support the positions they took. It is also worth noting that, broadly speaking, the views of Mainland interviewees on these matters were more conservative than those of their Taiwanese counterparts. One senior nun in Taiwan’s Luminary Nunnery, for example, explicitly presented a theorised conflict between the *vinaya* rule against money-handling (T22.n1428, p618c22–619c25) and the *bodhisattva* precept that allows the acceptance of money on behalf of sentient beings in the *Pusa jie ben*:

Not Accepting [an] Offering: If a Bodhisattva, out of anger or pride, resists and rejects offering[s] of gold, silver, pearls, wish-fulfilling pearls, lazurite and various treasures, this is named a transgression, multiple transgression, is a transgression of a defiled nature because one forsakes sentient beings. If [done] out of laziness or slackness, such a transgression is of an undefiled nature (*Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*, 2012: 108).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Still, we should not overlook the possibility that the above statements could be interpreted from the Buddhist apologist viewpoint: Buddhist followers understandably defending their faith against outsider criticism.

<sup>34</sup> T24.n1500, p1107c06-9.

As interpreted by this Luminary nun, the precepts suggest that a *bodhisattva* is allowed to accept gold, silver, money and treasures for the sake of sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* precepts, according to this nun, are more open than Buddhist *śrāvaka* precepts because *bodhisattva* and *śrāvaka* precepts have vastly different standpoints and foci, compounded by various interpretations. She commented that those who follow Buddhist precepts strictly believe that accepting gold or silver from others one has breached the rule of not touching money. Those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts hold the belief that accepting valuable offerings will benefit sentient beings, even though it sits uncomfortably alongside their own adherence to the precept of not touching money.<sup>35</sup> However, being a *bodhisattva* does not imply that monastic members may accept anything without restrictions. Those who have attachment to treasures transgress another *bodhisattva* precept in *Pusa jie ben*, which was also mentioned by the Luminary nun I interviewed:

Being Greedy for Material Wealth: If a Bodhisattva, with much desire and discontent has greed for and is attached to material wealth, this is named a transgression[.] (*Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*, 2012: 107).<sup>36</sup>

The nun explicitly used textual references to support a position on the contradiction between the *bodhisattva* precept (of accepting money) and the *vinaya* rule (against touching money). This shows that those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts and path may compromise themselves in terms of transgressing a rule in order to benefit others. Another senior Luminary nun also shared an explicit example about the differences between the *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts as applied in day-to-day life:

Some nuns from other institutions came here to study at Buddhist College but many found it hard to adapt to our lifestyle here. For example, here we monastics cook for laypeople.<sup>37</sup> They wonder why we cook for students and laypeople. However, in Mahāyāna

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<sup>35</sup> The Luminary nun stressed that Buddhist monks and nuns following the *bodhisattva* precepts strictly would not transgress *pārājika* and *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offenses in *śrāvaka* precepts unless they want to renounce the precepts and return to secular life.

<sup>36</sup> T24.n1500, p1107 b14-b15.

<sup>37</sup> Nuns are assigned to work in the kitchen as trainees. The nunnery regularly holds activities and Buddhist courses for laypeople and young students.



Buddhism, I as a *bodhisattva* am willing to do everything, as long as it benefits all sentient beings. No matter who you are, whether a layperson or not. I am willing to do anything meaningful, and offer it to all sentient beings and future Buddha. Do you see the difference between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts? This [cooking for laypeople] is the difference: the *śrāvaka* precept is strict [i.e., makes a strict distinction between monastics and laity]. Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* precepts treat both equally, as long as you have the *bodhi* mind that everyone is a future Buddha. That is the difference.

The example of cooking for laypeople raises an important possibility for rethinking how the *bodhisattva* ideal is put into practice. According to the 113th *pācittika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* carries out orders for a lay person, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman 2002: 753). A *pācittika* is a minor offence that can be dealt with by making a formal act of repentance. The Luminary nun’s comments above implicitly reveal that cooking for laypeople is not a perfect observance of the *śrāvaka* precepts. However, as she saw it, this action was compatible with *bodhisattva* practice, since it benefits others, all of whom are regarded as having the potential to become a future Buddha. The same nun also commented that no differentiation or discrimination should be made between laity and non-laity, since both are treated equally as a future Buddha in terms of *bodhisattva* practice. Her viewpoint reveals how *bodhisattva* precepts (and in particular, their starting-point of benefiting others) contribute to monastics’ openness and flexibility when dealing with various events they encounter in daily life. Meanwhile, the fact that nuns from other institutions who were studying at Luminary Nunnery temporarily found it uncomfortable serving laypeople, interpreting this as transgressing *śrāvaka* precepts, signally reminds us of another phenomenon that we cannot neglect: that monastics’ divergent attitudes and values regarding precept observance relate to individual and/or institutional conditions and contexts; the adaptability and flexibility of Buddhism; and the local level of interaction between society and laity. This being the case, the atmosphere of Luminary Nunnery generally appears to be more open and active than that of some of other nunneries in Taiwan. It regularly holds activities and courses for laypeople and young students as a means of propagating a form of Buddhism that includes close interaction with society at large. However, it remains an open question whether Luminary nuns’ flexible

views of the observance of precepts is more a cause, or a consequence, or both, of the high value they place upon the practice of the *bodhisattva* ideal for the sake of benefiting sentient beings.

From the above, it might seem that the views of my Mainland informants, or at any rate the answers they provided to me, were less sophisticated than those of their Taiwanese counterparts. Therefore it seemed worthwhile to ask explicitly about Mainland nuns' attitudes toward the act of burning the fingers or body encouraged in the *Fanwang jing*, as a means of probing deeper into the question of the contradiction between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. According to the 16th minor precept in *Fanwang jing*, which mentions the action of finger and body burning as an offering to the Buddha,

when you see a newly initiated bodhisattva who has come from as far away as a hundred or a thousand li [kilometres] for the Great Vehicle scriptures or Vinaya, you should, according to Buddhist doctrine, explain all of the arduous practices, such as the burning of the body, burning of the arm, and burning of the fingers. If he will not burn his body, arms, or fingers, as offerings to the Buddhas he is not a renounced bodhisattva[.]<sup>38</sup> (Muller, 2012: 349)

According to a Chongfu Si nun, Buddhist monastics “offend the precepts if they hurt themselves; but they violate *bodhisattva* precepts if they do not burn their fingers or body”. A Zizhulin nun had a similar response: “You don’t offend the precepts if you don’t burn your fingers, but if you burn your fingers you must practise the *bodhisattva* path.” These two nuns’ statements clearly suggest the existence of a paradox. Interestingly, the same Chongfu Si nun told me about her personal experience of witnessing a monk’s ascetic practice of burning his fingers over a period of years. She said he did not feel physical pain because he was separated from his body, adding that “[t]he *bodhisattva*’s state of mind transcends experiencing physical pain. Conventional explanations do not capture the *bodhisattva*’s experience – only a sage can understand this.”<sup>39</sup> This monk’s experience of painless burning, however, was not seen

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<sup>38</sup> T24.n1484, p1006a17–a20.

<sup>39</sup> This monk may have achieved the status of non-self-attachment through *bodhisattva* practice. Jianguang Wang annotated the 16th minor precept in the *Fanwang jing*, to the effect that if Buddhists do not follow this burning practice, they are regarded as still having bodily attachment; but that this opinion is not the way of the *bodhisattva* (2005: 181). One who lives an ascetic life for

as an exceptional case.<sup>40</sup> Rather, his ascetic practice was seen as illustrative of how bodily form can be eradicated, and how there is no suffering in the state of formlessness. However, this abstract state of mind and level of religious devotion are difficult for ordinary people to comprehend, since it would be normal to feel pain if they burned their finger or arm, never mind the whole body; and as such, the Chongfu Si nun remarked, only a sage could understand the *bodhisattva* experience. As for Buddhist immolation, the Zizhulin nun offered an interesting observation: “Buddhist monastics burn their fingers with great faith and mind to substitute for people’s suffering, showing that the body is impermanent”. This suggests that this practice is a form of self-sacrifice to benefit all sentient beings. This nun’s comment on burning also corresponds to the stories of Sengyai. A monk asked Sengyai whether it was possible to substitute for sentient beings’ suffering. Sengyai replied that this was unworkable, unless their minds can substitute for others’ sufferings. The monk then asked: “*Bodhisattvas* burn themselves and sentient beings commit transgressions. Each bears their own hardship. For what reason to substitute?” Sengyai replied that it is like burning one’s fingers, thinking of it only as a wholesome way to eradicate evil (T50.n2060, p679c14–c17).

The above discussion reveals a number of facets of opinion regarding immolation in monastics’ religious faith, which is explicitly countenanced in the *Fanwang jing*. It is, however, worth mentioning in this context that the Buddhist Association of China (BAC)<sup>41</sup> has forbidden monastic members to burn their fingers.<sup>42</sup> Due to the limited scope of this study, burning acts in

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years will achieve the status of not seeing him- or herself, and reduce attachment to self. One begins to see the *dharma* body when there is no appearance of form in the self (ibid: 180 n4).

<sup>40</sup> According to the *Xugaoseng Zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*), the monk Sengyai 僧崖 (488-562 CE) was asked whether he felt pain while burning himself. He replied that pain arose from the mind, so why would his fingers suffer when the mind was not in pain? (T50.n2060, p0678c21–c23). Another monk asked Sengyai why *bodhisattvas* did not experience physical pain when they were on fire. Sengyai replied that sentient beings have forms precisely so that they may feel pain when burning (T50.n2060, p0679c11–c13).

<sup>41</sup> The BAC, founded in 1953 as the official organisation of Buddhism in Mainland China, but suspended between 1966 and 1980, today has branches on the provincial, county and sometimes city levels. It supports Buddhist educational and research institutions, and assists local efforts to build and maintain temples and safeguard holy sites.

<sup>42</sup> In Chinese history, many rulers opposed burning, probably because the masses of people who gathered to witness it were seen as a potential threat to the ruling class’s governance (Lin, 2001: 99–101). For example, the *Biqiuni zhuan* (T50.n2063, p941b13–b20) records that the nun Huiyao 慧耀 was prevented from burning her body as a worship offering by a local governor.

medieval Chinese Buddhism will not be further explored here.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the practice of burning scars on the scalp as a means of demonstrating one's religious faith and devotion (which is similar to the act of burning discussed above) should not be overlooked in studies of the contemporary Buddhism of Taiwan and Mainland China, whether it is actually practised or not. The ordination-ritual custom of placing incense balls on preceptees' head and burning them to make a scar<sup>44</sup> plays an important role in the final stage of Triple Platform Ordination in Taiwan, and has resulted in most monastics having had at least three scars on their scalps since 1953 (Jiang, 2000: 126).<sup>45</sup> One of my informants, who came from Hong Kong but was ordained a nun in Taiwan in 2009, described the final stage of the Triple Platform Ordination as follows:

The preceptees continued rehearsing for *bodhisattva* ordination and practised repentance ritual, to complete the third ordination on Days 40 through 51. On Day 52, the preceptees engaged in visualisations of Sakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri and Maitreya Buddha conferring *bodhisattva* precepts, gently inviting the ordinands with three *vinaya* master monks. One teacher explained to the student

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Examples of Chinese monks who requested the ruler's permission to burn themselves also can be found in the *Hongzan Fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (e.g., Sengming 僧明, T51.n2067, p24b27–c13; Daodu 道度, T51.n2067, p24c14–p25a21) and in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (e.g., Fayu 法羽, T50.n2059, p404c11–c18) (Lin, 2001: 100–101).

<sup>43</sup> For details, see Benn (2007) and Lin (2001: 57–120). For instance, Hui Sheng Lin indicates that self-immolation has been prevalent among Buddhist monastics since the Sixth Dynasty (2001: 60). The prime examples can be found in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T.2063), which recounts that six nuns took their own lives by burning themselves (2001: 65–67). Additionally, the translation of the *Sūrangama Sūtra* suggests that in the Tang Dynasty, monastics worshipped Buddhist relics (*śarīra*) with the admiration and support of the Tang Emperor Xianzong (憲宗). Acts of finger- or body-burning attracted numerous Buddhists to follow suit (Lin, 2001: 90). Several monks in medieval China were also recorded as having undergone self-immolation in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T.2059), *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T.2060) and *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (T.2061) (ibid: 65–72).

<sup>44</sup> The practice of burning at ordination occurs only in Chinese Buddhism. For a detailed introduction to the custom's history and the practice in China, see Benn (1998: 303–310) and Welch (1967: 298–300).

<sup>45</sup> After the PRC government came to power in Mainland China in 1949, many refugee Mainland monks came to Taiwan. In 1953, the Buddhist ordination ceremony was regarded as the first postwar transmission of higher ordination by Taiwan's Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC). For details, see Jones (1999: 97–136).

preceptees why following the traditional way of personal religious practice was necessary, even though certain alternative methods are permitted when preaching Buddhism in ways appropriate to modern people's needs. It was also deemed important to follow the older generation's way of chanting Buddhist *sūtras* rather than casually amending it, because chanting to the Buddha is very solemn. In the evening there was another incense-burning ritual to worship the Buddha. Preceptors put three incense balls on preceptees' heads, burning it to make a scar, after which ritual *Parināma* was practised. The final day consisted of *bodhisattva* ordination for the preceptees, who received the precepts' substance via visualisation.

In my personal experience of living in Taiwan, authentic monastics there are recognisable by these scalp scars. Ven. Ching Hsin 淨心,<sup>46</sup> honorary president of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (Taiwan), said of this burning practice in the ordination ceremony:

There is no practice of burning scars in Mainland China because it is against government regulations. Monastic members in Theravāda Buddhism do not receive *bodhisattva* precepts so they have no burning practice. This practice of burning scars originates in *bodhisattva* precepts in the *Fanwang jing*, which asks monastic members to burn their body or arms as an offering to the Buddha while receiving Mahāyāna precepts. We, however, cannot burn our arms or bodies, so we burn three scars on the scalp to show religious determination and destroy self-attachment. Thus, the ordination hall still practices this custom for monastic members who receive *bodhisattva* precepts, for this reason[.] (Hsieh, 2005: 105)

Counterintuitively, the act of burning appears to be more important in *vinaya*-centric monasteries than in others. Yet must monastics and laypeople receive burn scars on their arms while receiving the *bodhisattva* precepts? Are there exceptions? The answers given by the *vinaya* discussion group of *Zheng jue*

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<sup>46</sup> Ven. Ching Hsin (b. 1929) is a well-known senior monk in Taiwan, who has more than 40 years' experience of conducting the Triple Platform ordination ceremony held by the BAROC.

*jing she* 正覺精舍律學研討小組 imply that people should burn scars onto their arms and fingers as an offering to the Buddha in accordance with the scriptures regarding *bodhisattva* precepts. That is, if people cannot tolerate the minor pain of a burn, it is questionable that they will be able to practise and tolerate the hard path of the *bodhisattva* (Luxue shiyi, 2008: 397).

The ordination custom of putting incense balls or *moxa* on a preceptee's head for the purpose of scarification was officially abolished in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1983, by the Second Conference of the Fourth Standing Council of the BAC 中國佛教協會第四屆理事會第二次會議. This ban had two grounds: (1) that it was not an original Indian Buddhist ritual, and (2) that it impairs monastics' physical health (*Fayin zazhi*, 1984: 5–6).<sup>47</sup> The BAC's decision, however, may have had a political subtext, insofar as the PRC government directly controls all decisions or policies made by the BAC.<sup>48</sup> The PRC government announced that this ritual custom was 'illegal' and rejected 'any form of self-mortification (Bianchi, 2001: 94). Bianchi's fieldwork data confirmed that *moxa* was not performed in Mainland monasteries (2001: 94), and my fieldwork observations resonate with hers: i.e., most nuns I met or interviewed in the PRC do not have scalp scars, with some citing a preference for expressing their religious devotions in private.<sup>49</sup> One senior nun stressed that current religious regulations regarding ordination are more detailed and standardised (than they were in the past); and in combination with reasonable fears about ordinands' physical safety, this has made the ritual custom of burning scalp scars at ordination ceremonies effectively impossible. However, one of my Mainland informants shared different information: i.e., that the custom of burning scalp

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<sup>47</sup> "Decision Concerning the Tonsure and Ordination Problems in Monasteries of Han People's Buddhism" 關於漢族佛教寺廟剃度傳戒問題的決議. The ninth article of Chapter 1 of the Procedures for the Management and Administration of Three Platform Monastic Ordination in Chinese Buddhist Temples Nationwide 全國漢傳佛教寺院傳授三壇大戒管理辦法, as revised and approved by the BAC, required that "The ordination ritual custom of putting incense balls on preceptees' heads and burning it to make a scar shall be abolished." See also the website of the PRC's State Administration for Religions Affairs.

<sup>48</sup> For example, the PRC government has the power to decide "which monasteries should be reopened, how many monks and nuns should be recruited, and which monks and nuns should be restored to leadership positions. None of these key matters were decided democratically by the Buddhist populations" (Qin, 2000: 238).

<sup>49</sup> According to Amandine Péronnet's fieldwork observations in Pushou Si, many nuns there had the scalp scars. The guest prefect (*Zhike* 知客) of the same nunnery had nine scalp scars when I met her.

scars was held at the end of Triple Platform ordination in Baochan Si 褒禪寺 in 2016. This was not a compulsory option, but decided upon by each preceptee. In the same vein, one teacher nun from another nunnery also told me that the ordination hall could help fulfil the wishes of those preceptees who wanted scalp scars. From the diverse opinions I collected, the extent of the practical effect of official abolition of this ritual custom is questionable.

To sum up, while Mainland China and Taiwan both share similar contexts of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, one key difference – the burning of scalp scars in ordination ceremonies – reminds us that we cannot ignore the ways in which various regions' politics and government policies exert important influences on Buddhist religious practices. Even more significantly, the *bodhisattva* ideal/path itself appears to be developing differently in these two regions, as will be discussed in detail below.

## 2.2 Socially Engaged Practitioners of the *Bodhisattva* Path

In the previous sections, I have attempted to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese nuns' perceptions of abstract issues: the sometimes contradictory relationship between *vinaya* rules, on the one hand, and on the other, the *bodhisattva* precepts and the *bodhisattva* ideal of benefiting others. In this section, I will focus on nuns' practical experience of socially engaged practice in both regions, with special attention to cross-Straits differences in the manifestations of such practice arising from differences in their historical and political development and current socio-economic situations. I shall thus discuss the nuanced differences in how monastics in these two states engage in social work and religious life.

Ching-chy Huang has suggested that Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教)<sup>50</sup> in Taiwan represents the modern promulgation and development of the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* path, citing Ven. Taixu, Yinshun, Hsing Yun and Sheng Yen's viewpoints on the *bodhisattva* precepts, which have become greatly valued in Humanistic Buddhism (2006: 113–127). In practice, the nuns from DDM, Luminary Nunnery, Foguangshan and other institutions whom I

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<sup>50</sup> Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan – such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) – have advocated Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection. For overviews and discussions of Humanistic Buddhism, see especially Long (2000: 53–84) and Pittman (2001).

met during my fieldwork have engaged in a variety of forms of public service: some have preached Buddhist Dharma to laypeople; some have been engaged in education, running Buddhist monastic colleges and presses or teaching in universities; some have devoted their time to philanthropic activities; and some have worked in palliative care in hospitals, hospices, and so on. These Taiwanese nuns' commitment to serving society, with the wider aim of liberating and benefiting all sentient beings, undoubtedly embodies the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.<sup>51</sup>

In sharp contrast to this, my fieldwork observations in Mainland China indicated that some nuns focused mainly on individual spiritual cultivation in their own rooms,<sup>52</sup> and/or on their teaching inside Buddhist colleges, and seldom left their nunneries to make contact with people in the local community, except as part of a monastic travel group. The main exceptions to this pattern of behaviour were high-ranking administrative nuns or famous nuns.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the influence of Humanistic Buddhism – so strong in Taiwan – appears to be quite weak there. Raoul Birnbaum points out that monks in Nanputuo Monastery 南普陀 (whose former abbot, Taixu, was a founding figure of Humanistic Buddhism) and *Shishi chanyuan* 石室禪院 have engaged in charity work for the elderly, ill and infirm, as well as in children's education (2003: 444); but while these two Chinese monasteries are currently serving their community, “reflect[ing] a modernist understanding of the process necessary to establish a pure land in the human realm,” this is “an exception to the general conservative trend”

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<sup>51</sup> While DeVido notes that many Buddhist organisations and individual monastics in Taiwan contribute to the promulgation of Humanistic Buddhism (2010: 93), this socially-engaged work appears to inevitably affect monastic members religious practice. For example, Stuart Chandler points out that some monks and nuns decided to leave Foguangshan order and join other monasteries since the Humanistic Buddhism has diverted themselves from their personal spiritual cultivation (2004: 209).

<sup>52</sup> Some of my Mainland informant nuns also specifically confirmed my general observations regarding their religious schedule and practice. It is, however, worth noting that some nuns in Taiwan before the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan also engaged in similar religious cultivation via chanting and ritual – until the arrival of Mainland Chinese monks, who taught the nuns Buddhist *dharma* and education (Shih Heng-Ching, 1995: 174-177).

<sup>53</sup> The nunneries I visited, however, are not representative of all Buddhist institutions in Mainland China and Taiwan, since the fieldwork results may be affected by the selection process, and by the fact that researchers are not admitted by a number of them. As such, findings about the socially engaged practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path in Chinese Buddhist institutions at different institutional or school types (e.g., pure land, Chan, *Vinaya* schools, and so on) and/or in different regions will inevitably vary. Other researchers should bear this in mind when evaluating their own fieldwork data.



(Chandler, 2006: 192). Unlike those in the two above-mentioned monasteries, the majority of current monastics in Mainland China hold a “consciousness-only pure land” view, with a traditional focus on *sūtra* reading rather than on the translation of *renjian fojiao* into social action that was remarked upon by Chandler (ibid). Wen-jie Qin’s findings likewise resonate with Chandler’s:

The social movement inspired by these contemporary teachings [i.e., Humanistic Buddhism] is taking place mostly in Taiwan and the overseas Chinese Buddhist communities. In Mainland China, due to the political restraints on religion, this notion has so far remained largely a guide for meditation rather than for social campaigns (2000: 405).

In other words, the PRC’s government appears to be the key obstacle to the emergence of Buddhist social services there. Similarly, recent research on Buddhist charities in contemporary Mainland China by Zhe Ji and André Laliberté more or less echoes Qin’s above-quoted remarks. On the one hand, the PRC government has allowed, and even encouraged, certain Buddhist institutions to become involved with some philanthropic activities and social services.<sup>54</sup> However, these religious groups still lack autonomy, as political restraints on religion still exist in Mainland China today. Laliberté nevertheless comments optimistically on the charitable works engaged in by some Mainland Buddhist institutions that Laliberté deems a “new development” in China (2012: 113). On the other, Ji calls these philanthropic services “mere monetary donations” rather than direct assistance to people (2013: 20). In short, no Buddhist charitable activities in Mainland China can escape governmental surveillance, to the point that “Chinese Buddhism not only cannot function as a source of civil religion, but actually becomes a conservative force in politics” (Ji, 2013: 21). My fieldwork data resonate somewhat with Ji’s comments on monetary donations. Some of my Mainland Chinese informants told me about their charity work during discussions focused on the issue of whether it is acceptable for monastics to touch money.<sup>55</sup> Just like their counterparts in Luminary nunnery, many were said to spend their money helping people, (re)printing Buddhist books and *sūtras* to aid the spread of Buddhism,

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of recent Buddhist charities in Mainland China, see Laliberté (2012: 101-112).

<sup>55</sup> For detailed discussion of money-handling precept, see Chiu (2014: 9–56).

and supporting Buddhist education projects (Wu Yin, 2001: 237). While Mainland China does not frown upon charitable activities, potential monastic philanthropists there may nevertheless encounter restrictions -- notably, that they keep such activities within their own monasteries. In other words, it is not possible for them to provide help in public places such as hospitals or accident sites, due to various civil regulations and restrictions. Monetary donations thus appear to be an important, yet safe and uncontroversial, way for them to engage in charity work.<sup>56</sup> From the above, we can see that the sociopolitical context of Mainland China is not an entirely free or open environment for monastic members' development of relevant charitable work in public. This factor would tend inevitably to influence the mode of practising the *bodhisattva* path in the contexts of Mainland Mahāyāna Buddhism.

It is clear that monastics' socially engaged practices are manifested differently in Taiwan and Mainland China, and that this may be partly due to the closed nature of the Mainland Chinese political system, especially as regards religion. Moreover, monastic practitioners' perceptions of the applicability of the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mainland China should not be dealt with out of context, but seen as closely related to that country's socio-political development and present-day conditions. It would seem that a variety of factors, also including differential levels of Humanistic Buddhism's popularity and sociopolitical contexts have influenced these two regions' divergent modes of practising the *bodhisattva* precepts and path. Certainly it would be inaccurate to assert that all Chinese Buddhist monastics in Taiwan and Mainland China practise the *bodhisattva* path similarly.

### 3. Conclusions

Since the medieval period, the steady development of *bodhisattva* ideas has seen them emerge as key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. My fieldwork data reveal a strong general consensus among my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China regarding the nature of the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal, but sharp differences in the details of such views. These findings can be summarised as follows. First, most of the respondents in both regions regarded *bodhisattva* precepts as more advanced and/or difficult to follow than

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<sup>56</sup>My fieldwork observations correspond closely to those of Amandine Péronnet, to whom I am grateful for sharing her insights.

*vinaya* rules, since the former must be policed within the mind rather than in the sphere of external behaviour. Second, while Taiwan and Mainland China share similar traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhist practices connected to the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal are manifested differently across the Straits. For example, the practice of burning an incense ball on a preceptee's head during the ordination ceremony has customarily been performed in Taiwan for the past half century, but was officially abolished in Mainland China in 1983. Also, owing partly to the divergent historico-political development and distinct socio-economic situations of these two regions, the various Buddhist institutions I visited in Mainland China and Taiwan as part of the present research differed markedly in the amount of socially engaged work they performed for the sake of *bodhisattva* practice. Finally, a comparison of the rhetoric used by my Taiwanese and Mainland interviewees revealed nuanced but important differences in their analyses of and feelings about conflicts or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *vinaya* rules. Specifically, the Mainland nuns tended to speak of these two sets of precepts as fundamentally consistent, albeit perhaps defensively; whereas two of the Taiwanese nuns referred explicitly to mismatches between them.

To sum up, while Taiwanese nuns' and Chinese nuns' religious practices differ to a perhaps unexpected extent, nearly all of my informants shared a broadly similar way of reciting *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts at their *poṣadha* ceremonies. In any case, the rich and complex relationship between *vinaya* rules and *bodhisattva* precepts is a conspicuous feature of monastic practice in contemporary Chinese Buddhism and is ripe for further investigation.

### Abbreviations

- T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 100 vols., edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.
- X. *Shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經. 90 vols., edited by Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989.

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