

The *Gurudharmas* in Buddhist Nunneries of Mainland China

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ABSTRACT

According to tradition, when the Buddha's aunt and stepmother Mahāprajāpatī was allowed to join the Buddhist monastic community, she accepted eight 'fundamental rules' (*gurudharmas*) that made the nuns' order dependent upon the monks' order. This story has given rise to much debate, in the past as well as in the present, and this is no less the case in Mainland China, where nunneries have started to re-emerge in recent decades. This article first presents new insight into Mainland Chinese monastic practitioners' common perspectives and voices regarding the *gurudharmas*, which are rarely touched upon in scholarly work. Next, each of the rules is discussed in detail, allowing us to analyse various issues, until now understudied, regarding the applicability of the *gurudharmas* in Mainland Chinese contexts. This research thus provides a detailed overview of nuns' perceptions of how traditional *vinaya* rules and procedures can be applied in contemporary Mainland Chinese monastic communities based on a cross-regional empirical study.

Keywords

Mainland Chinese nuns, *gurudharma*, *vinaya*, gender

Introduction

The accounts on the founding of the Buddhist order of nuns (*bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha*) explain in detail how, around two and a half millennia ago, the *bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha* was established when the Buddha allowed women to join the Buddhist monastic community. The first nun was Mahāprajāpatī, the Buddha's aunt and stepmother.

She accepted eight 'fundamental rules' (*gurudharmas*) that generally made nunneries dependent upon the monks' order.¹ All female Buddhist monastic members, present and future, were required to follow the *gurudharma* rules, which are thus most frequently mentioned in explorations of the position of women in Buddhism. In theory, the eight rules have had a profound impact on the subordination of the nuns' order to the monks' order, and this has been the subject of considerable debate in the past and down to the present day.² Contemporary Buddhist nuns' perceptions of the applicability of the eight fundamental rules also have come under scrutiny.³ Especially, Buddhist nuns in Taiwan have been the subject of considerable scholarly attention, not only because their numbers and education levels⁴ are quite unparalleled in the history of Chinese Buddhism, but also because of the relative accessibility of Taiwanese society.⁵ Contemporary Mainland Chinese nuns' religious life, in contrast, has scarcely been explored or discussed.⁶ This may be due to the 'closed' nature of the Mainland Chinese political system, especially as regards religion, as well as the lack of ethnographic fieldwork on contemporary Chinese Buddhism more generally. Nevertheless, some prominent nuns in Mainland China (e.g. Shi Longlian 釋隆蓮) have held posts in the official organization of Chinese Buddhism or made important contributions to Buddhist education and *Dharma* teaching.⁷ Significantly, contemporary Mainland Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*' education has evolved greatly over recent decades, with Buddhist nuns' colleges now established throughout the country. This study thus aims to explore present-day Mainland Chinese nuns' religious life, to which scant scholarly attention has hitherto been paid. In doing so, we focus on one of the central issues, namely the eight *gurudharmas* and the discussions they give rise to.

Any discussion of the *gurudharmas* should commence with the hotly debated actions of the Taiwanese nun Shih Chao-hwei 釋昭慧, who openly challenged the eight rules at the second conference on the 'Theory and Practice of Venerable Yin-Shun's Teachings' held by the Buddhist Hongshi Institute (Taoyuan county, Taiwan), of which she is the founder.⁸ During the conference's opening ceremony

1. Major primary sources can be found in the *vinaya* or disciplinary texts, such as the Pāli *vinaya* Vin II 253–256; *Mahīśāsakavinaya* T 1421 185b19–186b3; *Dharmaguptakavinaya* T 1428 922c7–923c12; and *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* T 1451 350b10–351c2. For an overview and discussion of accounts of the founding of the order of nuns, see Heirman 1997, 34–43 and Anālayo 2011.
2. See, among others: Horner 1930, 118–161; Gross 1993, 36–38; Owen 1998, 13–26; Dewaraja 1999, 72–74.
3. See: Cheng 2007, 83–100; Salgado 2008; Qin 2000, 183–186.
4. Li 2000, 3–4; Jones 1990, 154–155.
5. For a general study on Taiwanese Buddhism, see: Jones 1999; Laliberté 2004; Chandler 2006; Madsen 2007; DeVido 2010. For the perception of the *gurudharmas* in the Taiwanese context, see: Cheng 2007, 83–100; Schak 2008, 156–157; Heirman and Chiu 2012.
6. Not many studies have been conducted on Mainland Chinese nuns. There are, however, a few exceptions, such as Levering 1994; Yü 1992, 190–245; Qin 2000; Bianchi, 2001.
7. Ven. Longlian (1909–2006) is considered one of the most outstanding nuns in contemporary China. Among other engagements, she has been a member of the National Council of the China Buddhist Association (see note 11), as well as President and Honorary President of the China Buddhist Association of Sichuan. For details, see: Qiu 1997; Bianchi 2001, 23–55; Bianchi, forthcoming.
8. As a rule, most books and articles today use the *pinyin* system to transcribe Chinese names and terms. We have done the same throughout this article. Nevertheless, when referring to

on 31 March 2001, Chao-hwei publicly announced the abolition of the eight rules, tearing up pieces of paper on which they were individually written, one by one. Her straightforward actions provoked quite some reaction in Taiwanese monastic communities, and many nuns, regardless of whether or not they accept the *gurudharmas*, remain very critical — perhaps, according to Wei-Yi Cheng, because of her sharp language (Cheng 2007, 87–88).⁹ In Mainland China, when we discussed the issue of *gurudharma* with our informant nuns, some of them spontaneously mentioned Chao-hwei and her ‘advanced’ ideas. Additionally, she was recently invited to attend some conferences in Mainland China and to give lectures in Buddhist institutions to advocate her viewpoint, which has influenced contemporary nuns’ perceptions of the eight fundamental rules to varying degrees.¹⁰ Specifically, Chao-hwei has criticized the overall tendency to observe these rules, claiming that some monks, together with ‘slavish *bhikṣuṇīs*’, continuously adopt the custom of discriminating against nuns. She particularly noted this custom in Mainland China. In her view, ordination ceremonies and Buddhist colleges pressurize young nuns to strictly observe the eight *gurudharmas* (Chao-hwei 2007, B9–B10, B21–22). While it is uncertain what sources Chao-hwei drew on to make such a claim, Wenjie Qin’s study may shed some light on the picture. Qin’s fieldwork, conducted in the late 1990s on Mt. Emei in Mainland China, explores the role of Buddhist nuns and laywomen in the revival of Buddhism in that area; her results (2000, 216–277) show that at least in the case of Mt. Emei, Buddhist nuns expressed some difficulties in their religious practice due to the administrative structure of local Buddhist communities. According to Qin, some monks in the most powerful administrative unit, the China Buddhist Association, adopt various strategies to demean nuns’ living and religious conditions.¹¹ She also regrets that the Chinese government does not impose any ‘gender equality’ on the male-dominated Buddhist Association, and thus supports the monks’ *saṅgha* superiority. She comments that:

in practice the nuns are accorded a distinctly secondary status, which gives them a marginal position within the Buddhist Association, and little influence over its policy decisions that affect the distribution of financial, political and cultural resources within Buddhist communities on Mt. Emei. (2000, 239–240)

Taiwanese authors, we have opted to use their personal romanization, as they appear on their websites, books or articles. Shih Chao-hwei was born in Myanmar in 1957, and moved to Taiwan in 1965. She was ordained as a Buddhist nun in 1980, and in 1988 became a public figure as a Buddhist radical activist, leading social protests related to various issues such as human rights, animal rights or environmental protection. For further details of her career, see, among others, DeVido 2010, 102–110.

9. For details, see Heirman and Chiu 2012, 280–283.
10. For example, Chao-hwei visited Dingguang Si on 18–19 January 2010 to give lectures on ‘the modern meaning of *Vinaya*’. Two informant nuns in this nunnery told us that they approved of some of her ideas, after listening to her speech.
11. The China Buddhist Association (CBA) was founded in 1953 as the official organization of Buddhism in Mainland China. It temporarily suspended its activities between 1966 and 1980. The CBA cooperates with its branches on provincial, county and sometimes city level. It supports Buddhist educational and research institutions, and assists local efforts to build and maintain temples and safeguard holy sites. See, among others, Birnbaum 2003, 132–133.

As for the eight fundamental rules themselves, Qin points out that ‘on the mainland, no-one has so far openly challenged these rules in official discourses’ (2000, 183–184).¹² Qin notes, however, that every Buddhist nun she saw paid no attention to the practice of the eight rules, and only ‘salute[d]’ to senior monks (2000, 184). When Qin discussed the *gurudharma* rules with nuns, she heard various opinions: some wanted to maintain the rules as set up by the Buddha, and others wanted to abolish them as outmoded. Qin’s study of the application of the *gurudharmas* seems rather generalized, however, and it is unclear how many nuns she consulted. Other major issues surrounding the eight rules – including dual ordination (i.e. an ordination first by the nuns’ order, and then by the monks’ order), instruction practices, and religious ceremonies – are likewise not adequately explored by Qin, who appears to neglect these issues yet reaches a generalized conclusion about the *gurudharmas* that ‘everyone ignores these rules’ (2000, 184). In this article, in contrast, we have attempted to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese nuns’ perceptions of and practices included in all eight fundamental rules, with a particular focus on the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*.¹³ This research also aims to explore the mutual relationship between monks and nuns via the impact of the *gurudharmas* in contemporary Mainland Chinese contexts.¹⁴

Mainland China has a rich monastic scene, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct fieldwork in all monastic institutions. Therefore, this study uses a multiple-case approach. In such an approach, two issues are essential. First, the contexts in which the nunneries function have to be carefully taken into account. As Robert Stake notes, a case study ‘gains credibility ... [when it] concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts’ (2005, 443–444). Second, it is crucial to select purposive samples to provide variety and a balanced overview, based on a typology, a method equally suggested by Stake (2005). The nunneries have thus been carefully selected so as to encompass the major different types in the context of Mainland China, each with their own representative characteristics and attitudes towards disciplinary rules:

1. Vinaya-based institutes, such as Pushou Si¹⁵ (Wutaishan);
2. Buddhist nuns’ colleges, such as Dingguang Si¹⁶ (Guangdong), Chongfu

12. Qin’s fieldwork data echoes our Chinese informant nun’s words in Chongfu Si: ‘Nuns in Taiwan may have different opinions about the eight rules but in Mainland China, nuns who have received full ordination normally obey the *gurudharmas* and have fewer opinions about it, as the Ordination Hall monks repeatedly emphasize that *bhikṣuṇīs* must follow the eight rules.’

13. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律 T 1428) was strongly promoted by master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667 CE) and has become the main reference point for monastic discipline in China. For details, see Heirman 2002b.

14. Our fieldwork has been supported by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), as part of a project on contemporary *vinaya* practices in Mainland China and Taiwan. All fieldwork data have been collected by Tzu-Lung Chiu in 2010 and 2013.

15. Pushou Si 普壽寺, located in Shanxi Province, is a well-known *vinaya*-based monastery and now the largest Buddhist nuns’ college in China (around 1,000 nuns), with a tradition of training *śrāmaṇerīs* (novices), *śikṣamāṇās* (probationers) and *bhikṣuṇīs*, and offering various *vinaya* study programs.

16. Dingguang Si 定光寺, located in Guangdong Province, opened as a Buddhist College with Master Honghui as Dean in 1996. It was then promoted to the status of Guangdong Buddhist

Si¹⁷ (Fuzhou), Zizhulin¹⁸ (Xiamen), and Qifu Si¹⁹ (Chengdu);

3. General institutes, such as Tongjiao Si²⁰ and Tianning Si²¹ (both in Beijing).²²

In this study, evidence was obtained using two methods of data collection: interviews, supplemented by the writings of contemporary monks and nuns, and observation. A total of twenty face-to-face interviews with Buddhist nuns were conducted in selected Mainland Chinese monastic institutions. The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions, which were designed to encourage more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' response, and were not in any systematic sequence. We have chosen to mainly interview senior (teacher) nuns who are responsible for *vinaya* instruction, since senior nuns play a crucial role in the direction a nunnery takes, their teachings providing an institution with some unique ways of interpreting and practising *vinaya* rules. We have thus explored these teachers' views on the eight fundamental rules, and the way how they explain these rules to younger generations.

Nuns' College, the first of its kind in the Buddhist history of Guangdong. The college currently has more than 300 student nuns and 20 teacher nuns. Dingguang Temple provides teaching facilities and has become one of largest colleges for Buddhist nuns in Mainland China.

17. Chongfu Si 崇福寺, located in Fujian Province, is a well-known site for nuns' Buddhist spiritual practice, and Fujian Buddhist College for nuns was established in the nunnery in 1983. Currently, Chongfu nunnery 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. Ca. 300 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.
18. 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 nunnery became Minnan Buddhist College for female monastic members in 1995; currently, more than 200 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.
19. 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 (1909–2006), played a key role in shaping contemporary Chinese nuns' views on, and practice of, monastic rules. She devoted herself to the education of Buddhist nuns for many years. Student nuns in this institute receive the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamānā* precepts and are required to strictly observe Buddhist rules and lawfully follow the Buddhist ceremonies of *poṣadha* (recitation of precepts), *varsā* (summer retreat), and *pravāraṇā* (invitation ceremony held at the end of summer retreat). The college currently has more than 100 female monastic members (including teachers and students nuns).
20. Tongjiao Si 通教寺 is a well-known and highly respected Beijing nunnery, where also Ven. Longlian studied Buddhism. It is now a place for Buddhist nuns' religious practice and study, holding the Seven-day Recitation of the Buddha's Name every month. Ca. 30 nuns live in the nunnery.
21. Tianning Si 天寧寺, also located in Beijing, is one of the earliest nunneries there, and is famous for its twelfth-century Liao Dynasty pagoda. In 1988, Tianning Si became one of the most important national cultural relic protection units. Currently, around 30 Buddhist nuns reside in this nunnery, which focuses on a combined practice of Chan and Pure Land methods.
22. It is difficult to exactly define the nature of the several Buddhist nunneries. We have therefore focused on their main characteristics. In *vinaya*-based nunneries, the emphasis lies on a strict interpretation of the *vinaya* rules. In nunneries that host a Buddhist college, young nuns are trained in several topics for a number of years before returning to their home communities. In what we have called 'general nunneries', the emphasis lies on relatively broad fields of Buddhist studies and practices. We have chosen to put in this category relatively large nunneries that neither particularly focus on *vinaya*, nor host a Buddhist college.

Observation plays an equally important role in this study. According to Michael Quinn Patton, the primary purpose of observational data is ‘to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, [and] the people who participated in those activities’ (2002, 262). Because much of the information about nuns’ views on *gurudharmas* was collected via interviews, the focus of observation was to enhance as much as possible the validity and reliability of the study by assessing whether the nuns’ spoken answers corresponded to their actual behaviour in the day-to-day context of the monastery.

This article is divided into two parts. First, it offers an overview of Mainland nuns’ general perceptions of the eight fundamental rules, yielding new insight into monastic practitioners’ common perspectives and voices. In the second and main part of the article, based on our fieldwork findings, we discuss and analyse each of the eight fundamental rules in greater detail, to shed light on the wider current practices surrounding the *gurudharmas* in various Mainland Chinese institutions and contexts today.

I. The *gurudharmas*: an overview of mainland Chinese nuns’ perceptions

Before discussing the individual rules, we first asked our interviewees to give their views on the concept of *gurudharma* as a whole. The main issues that concerned them were the authenticity of the rules, the general relationship between nuns and monks, women’s *karma* and the impact of the *gurudharma* rules on their lives. Some of our informants also referred to Shih Chao-hwei’s attempts to abolish the rules.

a. The authenticity of the *gurudharmas*

Our informant nuns all stressed that the *gurudharmas* were established by the Buddha himself, and emphasized the importance of observing them.²³ Nuns at Pushou Si and Tianning Si pointed out that, for them, the eight rules were instrumental in enabling them to become monastic members. One nun at Pushou Si used a metaphor to express how crucial *gurudharmas* are for female monastic members: when drinking water (becoming a nun), nuns need to remember its source (the eight rules). In other words, in our informants’ view, the Buddha consented that women can go forth as nuns, and for them to be able to do so, gave them the *gurudharmas*. Our informant nuns at Pushou Si, Tongjiao Si, Tianning Si and Chongfu Si all stated that women going forth could potentially have caused the *Dharma* to last only five hundred years instead of one thousand,²⁴ and that as such, observing the *gurudharmas* is important for nuns as a way of keeping their promise to the Buddha and protecting the *Dharma*.²⁵

23. Nuns in Tongjiao Si and Tianning Si consistently told us that on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month, nuns worship the monk Ānanda, who intervened with the Buddha on behalf of Mahāprajāpati, to thank him for his help.

24. That the *Dharma* would decline 500 years earlier is a common view, also found in *vinaya* literature. See, among others, Heirman 2001, 281n41; Anālayo 2008, 106 and 2011, 287–307.

25. The idea that observing the *gurudharmas* is necessary in order to safeguard the *Dharma*, is quite traditional and can be found, for instance, in the famous *vinaya* master Daoxuan’s writings (*Sifen lü biqiuni chao* 四分律比丘尼鈔, *Commentary on the [Part for] Bhikṣuṇīs of the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, W 64 113b12–14; see Heirman, forthcoming).

b. The relationship between monks and nuns

When we asked nuns about issues arising from the eight rules, some of them responded that a monastic hierarchy between the monks' and nuns' orders is necessary for the harmony of Buddhist communities. One Tongjiao Si nun said that she thought there must be primary and secondary orders, using the example of a king and his minister, she posed the question — whose command must people follow if the king and the minister have the same power? An 80-year-old minister must still respect the king, even if the king is young and inexperienced. Chaos could ensue if the king and the minister did not follow the proper order of superiority — which also applies in Buddhism. Similarly, a Pushou Si nun used the concept of family order in Buddhism: the Buddha is seen as our father, and a *bhikṣu* is seen as the oldest brother in the family (*saṅgha*). Now that the Buddha is in *nirvāṇa*, just as the father is dead, the oldest brother (*bhikṣu*) becomes the head of the family. It is an unalterable ethical principle for younger sisters (*bhikṣuṇīs*) to respect or show filial obedience to *bhikṣus*. A Tianning Si nun likewise stated that the Buddhist *saṅgha* is like a large family, where harmony is disrupted if nuns complain or compete with monks. In short, it is evident that a number of Chinese nuns accept traditional differences between monks' and nuns' orders for the sake of cooperation and harmony in Buddhist communities.

Furthermore, nuns at Tongjiao Si, Dingguang Si, Chongfu Si and Zizhulin all insisted that there should be boundaries between monks and nuns. A Tongjiao Si nun said she thought it necessary to distinguish between monks and nuns, because men and women may develop feelings of affection for each other. Asking nuns to respect monks reduces the risk of this problem. Also a Dingguang Si nun pointed to respect as a safeguard against mutual attraction. A Chongfu Si nun stressed that too much contact with the opposite sex can cause vexation, and that the *gurudharmas* therefore offer nuns the best protection against this problem. A Zizhulin nun pointed out that where there was no such clear boundary — as in some past cases where a nun and a monk were a couple, or mother and son — it led to criticism from outside the community.²⁶ One nun, she went on, had the habit of serving water to and fanning a particular monk whenever she saw him. The nun did this because the monk was formerly her husband. In fact, our Zizhulin informant refers to the introductory story of a *pācittika* rule that says: 'If a *bhikṣuṇī*, at mealtime, gives water to a *bhikṣu* who is not sick and fans him with a fan, she [commits] a *pācittika*' (*Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T 1428 739a15–17, translated in Heirman 2002a, 603).²⁷ According to the same informant nun, the Buddha set up the eight rules so that monks and nuns would have only a teacher-student relationship in the Buddhist community, and no worldly relations. It is detrimental for monastics' own spiritual cultivation if there are no clear boundaries between monks and nuns, and the *gurudharmas* are thus regarded as a means of protection for nuns. Since monks are respected by nuns as their teachers and elder brothers, monks are also deemed to have responsibilities to teach and take care of nuns, who are seen as students and younger sisters, as stressed by our informant nuns at Pushou Si, Dingguang Si and Zizhulin.

26. The nun refers to such cases mentioned in *vinaya* texts. For a detailed study on family matters, see Clarke 2013.

27. A *pācittika* is a minor offence that needs to be expiated. See Heirman 2002a, 141–147.

c. Women's *karma* and female characteristics

Another common theme regarding the *gurudharmas* pointed out by our informant nuns in various nunneries is what may be referred to as innate female weakness:

Pushou Si: 'The Buddha preached Buddhism to reflect people's different characteristics, so the eight rules reflect *bhikṣuṇīs*' character and physical constitution.'

Tongjiao Si (A): 'I think the *gurudharmas* are fine. Nuns need to pay homage to monks by kneeling down because nuns have more [bad] *karma*, and as women we have *karma* and bad habits from previous lives. So the Buddha set up the eight rules to discourage nuns from arrogance.'

Tongjiao Si (B): 'I tell them (laity) that nuns are different from monks because we have more *karma*. I sincerely respect all *bhikṣus*, regardless of their conduct.'

Tianning Si: '*Bhikṣuṇīs* kneel down to *bhikṣus* but *bhikṣus* do not bow to us. Nuns have more *karma* than monks, and sometimes have less knowledge than monks.'

Dingguang Si: 'The Buddha established rules as medicine for our physical and mental ills. ... [T]he eight rules curbed early upper-class nuns' arrogance[.]'

Zizhulin: 'One of the important reasons why the Buddha set up the *gurudharmas* through Mahāprajāpatī was to cure the arrogance of 500 high-class (*Sākya*) women who decided to go forth. He laid down the eight rules to improve their character.'

As is clear from the above examples, our informant nuns at various nunneries share a similar viewpoint on women's karmic obstacles or characteristic weaknesses (including arrogance). Monks have more good *karma* so nuns respect them and pay homage to them. Some nuns emphasise, further, that the *gurudharmas* set up by the Buddha are an appropriate remedy for women's above-mentioned negative nature. It is also noteworthy that in the context of our *gurudharma* discussions, not a single interviewee made positive reference to female gender. Wei-Yi Cheng found in her fieldwork that some of her Taiwanese interviewees had a similar attitude, having been influenced by some of the Chinese Buddhist *sūtras*, which explicitly mention women's inferiority and karmic obstacles (2007, 62–68).²⁸ To illustrate her viewpoint, one nun at Tongjiao Si explicitly referred to the *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*), and explained that certain deeds that people have committed cause them to be reborn as women.²⁹

28. A good example of such a *sūtra*, is the *Yaoshi liuli guang Rulai benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經 T 450 ('*Sūtra of the Medicine Buddha*'), translated in the seventh century by the monk Xuanzang 玄奘. In the eighth of twelve vows made by the Medicine Buddha (T 450 405b5–8), it says: 'I vow that in a future life, when I have attained Supreme Enlightenment, those women who are extremely disgusted with the "hundred afflictions that befall women" and wish to abandon their female form, will upon hearing my name, all be reborn as men. They will be endowed with noble features and eventually realize Unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment' (translated by Thành and Leigh 2001, 21–22). Another example is, for instance, the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 T 412 ('*Sūtra on the Original Vows and the Attainment of Merits of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*'), translated by Śikṣānanda (652–710). It says (T 412 782c14–19): 'If women dislike their female body, they have to honour images of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva with their whole heart. [...] For thousands of years, they will not be reborn in a world with women.' These brief excerpts from the two scriptures show some negative views on the female body. Texts like these can potentially have influenced our and Wei-Yi Cheng's interviewees.

29. The nun might be referring to (Mahāyāna) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* passages such as T 375

From this, we can see that womanhood is explicitly demeaned in some Chinese Buddhist scriptures, which may partly explain why some Chinese Buddhist nuns have a negative view of being born in a female body (i.e. with more bad *karma* than if they were monks).

In addition, the concept of women's inferior *karma* commonly held by Chinese female monastic members has also been influenced by key masters' teachings and attitudes toward womanhood. For example, Ven. Longlian says that the Buddha forbade women to go forth because they have five obstacles. She does not explain these in detail, but considers that traditionally women are weaker and should therefore pay attention to these obstacles (Qiu 1997, 285–286).³⁰ Other masters besides Ven. Longlian have held similar views regarding women's weak characteristics or women having inferior *karma*, such as Master Guang Qin³¹ 廣欽 and Master Tianyi 天乙.³² Ven. Guang Qin believed that to have been born a woman was a result of karmic obstacles; as such, all his nun followers are said to first have to complete seven years' work in the kitchen as the basis of their spiritual practice (Shi Huilü 1994, 79, 105, 196; Li 1999, 286, 300). Ven. Tianyi expressed a similar viewpoint when she taught *bhikṣuṇī* precepts in the ordination hall: 'Generally speaking, *bhikṣuṇī* precepts are more than *bhikṣu* precepts because nuns have heavy, deep *karma*. In my opinion, *bhikṣuṇīs'* *karma* is heavier than *bhikṣus'*.' She further encourages younger generations to make efforts and contribute to Buddhism as nuns (Shi Jianye 1999, 140–141).

As we have seen, some Chinese Buddhist nuns explicitly state that women's *karma* is inferior. They seem to be influenced by scriptural statements or by their masters' teachings. It is worth noting, however, that these Buddhist nuns do not see their status as something to just passively undergo; rather, they consider their weakness as pivotal to religious practice. With study and training, one can overcome one's hindrances and make progress on the Buddhist path. For example, one nun from Pushou Si said:

852b2–3 (translated in the fifth century), where it is said that women turn into men as the result of good *karma*. Other *sūtras* are more explicit, such as the *Da cheng zao xiang gongde jing* 大乘造像功德經 ('Mahāyāna Sūtra on the Merit of Image-Making'), the translation of which is attributed to the seventh-century Khotanese monk Devaprajñā (T 694 795c3–17), where an enumeration is given of eight bad attitudes, the karmic effect of which makes one be reborn as a woman. Furthermore, four bad actions that will make a man turn into a woman are listed. For a discussion on both negative and positive descriptions of womanhood in the (Mahāyāna) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtras* (T 374 and T 375), see Shi Ru-Nian, 2013.

30. Women's five hindrances have been explained in different ways. Quite common is the list of the *Lotus Sūtra* (T 262 35c10–11, as at *Majjhima-nikāya* III 65–6) that says that one who is currently female cannot be a: 1) Brahmā, 2) Śakra devendra, 3) Māra, 4) *Cakravartin* Sovereign of the world, 5) Buddha. For further details, see Kamens 1993, 394–440.
31. Ven. Guang Qin (1892–1986), a well-known Buddhist monk in Taiwan, was an ascetic who is said to never have lain down to sleep. Many stories are told about his supernatural powers: people called him the 'fruit-eating monk' (果子師) because he ate fruit, and no other food, when he practised meditation and spiritual cultivation in the wild mountains. For detailed information, see Shi Huilü 1994.
32. Ven. Tianyi (1924–1980) was especially influential around 1960–1980 in Taiwan. She taught *bhikṣuṇī* monastic rules professionally and Buddhist *Dharma* as an ordination master, strongly promoting independence and formal ordination of Buddhist nuns. Ven. Wu Yin, abbess of Luminary Nunnery, was Ven. Tianyi's former student. For a detailed introduction to Tianyi, see Shi Jianye 1999.

According to Buddhist scripture, Buddhist nuns need to pay homage to monks as our characteristics and habits are weaker than monks'. By understanding our negative characteristics, we can promote ourselves[.]

Her statement indicates that an acceptance of women's weaknesses and karmic obstacles may be combined with a positive attitude to facing the challenges of being a woman, and striving along the spiritual path. As we will further discuss in this article, the general feeling of weakness does not stop monastic women from studying and practising. On the contrary, as expressed by the Pushou Si nun, it is an incentive to work hard, and to strive for promotion on the Buddhist path.

d. The impact of *gurudharmas* on nuns

Nuns at Tianning Si told us that whenever they met monks, they were greeted in a friendly manner without any show of superiority. Teacher nuns in Zizhulin nunnery often discuss various matters with monks from Nanputuo Temple, because like Nanputuo, Zizhulin is affiliated with Minnan Buddhist College. One informant nun further told us that nuns and monks get along well together in this environment. She pointed out that monks from Nanputuo follow the principle of gender equality, encourage competent nuns to develop their abilities, and are tolerant of female monastic members' mistakes. The informant nun also said that the monks do not regard them as inferior. This data illustrates how nuns express their ideas on a respectful relationship between the two communities.

However, one *bhikṣuṇī* mentioned that she felt restricted from teaching *bhikṣus*. A Zizhulin nun, for example, told us that, one day, 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, said in private discussions that they could not accept being taught by nuns. The nun expressed confusion about the fact that female professors could lecture monks but nuns could not. She considered this to be an example of the impact of the eight rules.

Likewise, our Mainland informant nuns criticized some 'bumptious' monks for abusing the *gurudharmas*. For example, one nun at Dingguang Si said she had heard of cases where less-cultivated monks with *bhikṣu* status treated nuns badly, forcing them to practise the eight rules. Another nun, at Zizhulin, accompanied some colleagues on a visit to see a senior monk, in the context of a Buddhist meeting held in a temple in Mainland China. The nuns needed to walk fast to meet the monk, as they were a bit late:

Another monk, annoyed at seeing nuns walking ahead of him, asked us whether we knew the *gurudharmas*. I looked at him carefully and noticed he was just a novice. He didn't say anything after I told him, '*bhikṣuṇīs* are your teachers as you are a *śrāmaṇera*.'

These cases show that, in the context of impact of *gurudharmas*, some informants refer to a respectful relationship, while others point to less harmonious encounters.

e. Nuns' remarks on Shih Chao-hwei³³

Although Shih Chao-hwei was not generally known to our informant nuns, some of them had a clear idea of what she stands for. They all disapproved of Shih Chao-hwei abolishing the eight fundamental rules. For example, one nun from Tongjiao Si considered that Chao-hwei's words and deeds were not in accord with her *bhikṣuṇī* status: as a nun she should observe the Buddhist precepts, yet she refuses to accept the *gurudharmas*. A Tianning Si nun disputed the need to abolish the *gurudharmas* on the grounds that, in her own experience, monks do not disrespect nuns. This nun also mentioned that numerous virtuous monks and nuns in the past, who were both enlightened and senior to Chao-hwei, did not consider abolishing the *gurudharmas*. From the nun's opinion, it is impossible for junior monastics such as Chao-hwei to even think to suspend or abolish the eight rules. A Zizhulin nun called it meaningless for Chao-hwei to, as she saw it, compete with the monks — and further stated that the abolition of the eight rules would not necessarily improve nuns' status. The most important thing, she concluded, is to practise Buddhist doctrine as nuns should, so that monks do not look down on nuns. Also, hardly any of the Chinese nuns we interviewed in Dingguang Si agreed with Chao-hwei's arguments. Two Dingguang nuns, however, stated that they agreed with some of Shih Chao-hwei's suggestions after listening to her speech: men should not use chauvinist or 'feudal' (i.e. patriarchal) ideology to oppress women, and monks and nuns should respect each other in accordance with the spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism. But such support was rare, and the great majority of our Mainland informants disagreed with Chao-hwei's announcement of the abolition of the eight rules.

II. Nuns as practitioners of the *gurudharmas*

This second section of the article represents a more detailed analysis of how Mainland nuns' attitudes toward the individual eight rules affect their religious life. In this context, it is important to point out that some of our informant nuns are generally aware of potentially critical remarks uttered by outsiders on the position of women in Buddhism (albeit they can often not provide any details, and might never have personally read or encountered such criticism). This potential criticism can provoke some dismissive, defensive, or even negative reaction, scholars being considered as outsiders who should not get involved in monastic affairs.

A Pushou Si nun stated that only those who practise the *gurudharmas* will understand their true content and benefit: outsiders (i.e. non-practitioners) may perceive only the superficial messages and meanings of spoken or written words and not their deep meanings. Another Pushou Si nun told us that it is commonly, albeit incorrectly, believed by non-monastic members that *gurudharma* rules discriminate against Buddhist nuns. Nuns at Dingguang Si echoed these Pushou Si nuns' statements, stressing that scholars have misinterpreted the *gurudharmas* as unfair guidelines set by the Buddha, and expressed a certain discomfort with any secular people criticizing the Buddha for doing so. A nun at Zizhulin explicitly indicated that Buddhist nuns do not have to abolish the *gurudharmas* just because feminist scholars dislike or do not understand the eight rules.

33. Some informant nuns clearly stated that they had heard of Shih Chao-hwei prior to our interviews.

The above may relate to a wider suspicion, whether justified or not, of any assessment of the Buddha's precepts from a secular perspective. Such comments serve as an important reminder that observers of monastic communities, such as Buddhist nunneries, are indeed commonly confronted with some major issues: how does one avoid being seen as an intruder? How can one adequately describe and analyse what is happening within a community, without being a member of it? And how can one try not to impose any framework upon institutions or upon the lives of the nuns? The approach we have taken in this article is to focus on the narratives and the practices of Chinese Buddhist nuns without attempting to place them in larger theoretical frameworks or categories. As Nirmala Salgado points out (2013, 4), categories or distinctions used by scholars, such as 'Theravāda' or 'Mahāyāna', or 'gender equality' and 'female subordination', 'are generally based on understandings of religion that neglect the particularities that give rise to debates about such categories in the first place'. In our research, we have therefore attempted to understand what is actually debated within the nunneries, and what the various particularities of these debates are in, what Salgado calls, 'the lived lives of religious practitioners'.³⁴ As Salgado rightly explains, it is essential not to understand any practice one notices as a 'problem' that requires a 'solution' according to the researchers' understanding of categories such as 'gender equality'. Such an approach also implies that one has to adopt a very cautious attitude towards textual traditions. While these traditions are often referred to by our informant nuns, how they each interpret them can very well differ, and can certainly also differ from what historians of Buddhist traditions have found in their historical analyses. In our present research, it is therefore important never to become a participant in any debate, but instead to try to grasp what the issues and particularities are that preoccupy our informants nuns. As Jens-Uwe Hartmann aptly pointed out at a conference on the full ordination of nuns held in Hamburg in 2007, 'arguing from an academic standpoint against a Buddhist view or vice versa may lead to a futile dispute'.³⁵ Such a futile dispute is certainly to be avoided if we want to have any access to the everyday lives and preoccupations of the nuns.

Fieldwork research on the eight *gurudharma* rules

So far, we have tried to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese nuns' general perceptions of the eight fundamental rules. In this section, we go on to analyse the fieldwork data in greater detail by presenting and analysing informant nuns' voices regarding each of the rules, one by one. Whenever relevant, we will also juxtapose Taiwanese nuns' practices regarding the rules, to identify similarities as well as differences between the Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese contexts, and/or between the various institutions involved.

- 1) Even when a nun has been ordained for one hundred years, she must rise up from her seat when seeing a newly ordained monk, and she must pay obeisance and offer him a place to sit.

The first rule is actually one of the most debated *gurudharma* rules in monastic institutions and involves many intermingled issues. In this context, before pre-

34. Salgado 2013, 4 and throughout.

35. Hartmann 2010, 25.

senting our fieldwork findings, it is worth recounting a story told by the secretary of the provincial Buddhist Association of Sichuan, of how Ven. Longlian was accorded a courteous reception that allowed her to avoid observing the first *gurudharma* rule:

Long Lian is the most revered nun in China. It has always been a problem for us men to treat her properly in public. The ‘Eight Rules of Respect’ require that a nun must bow to a monk in public regardless of their age difference. In Chinese culture this rule is not practical because of our emphasis on the seniority of age over gender difference. There is no way this eighty-year old prominent nun is going to bow to a nineteen year old monk. But as a strong advocate of the *vinaya* rules, Long Lian cannot openly violate the rules that she teaches. We know her dilemma and the reason why she is reluctant to attend our meetings where monks from other monasteries are present.³⁶ When she does attend a meeting, we wait at the door for her arrival. As soon as she comes in, we rush over to escort her to her seat so she will not even have a chance to say hello to the monks in the room first! This way we save face for her and for the monks sitting here. This is how we deal with social embarrassment. (Qin 2000, 184–185)

This passage illustrates Ven. Longlian’s practical dilemma when negotiating the Chinese custom of prioritizing age-based seniority. We should also consider that Longlian’s social and religious status distinguished her from other nuns, such that she was given unusual special privileges. Qin comments, ‘This is indeed a typical Chinese way of handling doctrinal problems — just avoid discussing the rules and go around them, knowing that there are no absolute rules out there anyway’ (2000, 185). The anecdote, however, should continue to be seen as an exceptional case, rather than a typical Chinese way of dealing with the rules, as Qin did not explain in any detail how the other nuns dealt with the same rules.

From our fieldwork results, Mainland Buddhist nuns appear to observe the first rule by paying homage to monks more rigidly than many of their Taiwanese counterparts.³⁷ While what is exactly understood by ‘paying obeisance’ is not clearly explained in the *vinaya* texts, from the reactions of our informants nuns, it is clear that they generally see it as a kind of bowing, usually interpreted as kneeling down. However, the practice cannot be categorised simply, as a question of whether to bow to a monk or not. On the contrary, the practice of bowing contains complex implications. Most significantly, our informant nuns do not indiscriminately bow to every monk they meet and do not in all circumstances bow in the same way, but instead often point out that they consider the appropriateness of the timing as well as the setting.

Bowing to monks in appropriate circumstances

Before asking Mainland nuns’ views on the first *gurudharma* rule, we had assumed that many nuns might possibly express some willingness to pay homage to every

36. According to her biography, Ven. Longlian was reluctant to attend meetings as she got older, partly because of her physical condition, and also because of money: she wanted to avoid extra expenses, because she needed someone to accompany her whenever she went out (Qiu 1997, 271).

37. Kneeling down to monks is not generally practised by nuns in Taiwanese monasteries. For details, see Heirman and Chiu 2012, 275–276, 283–284.

monk they met — largely because Buddhists in Mainland China tend to be more traditional, or, in the words of Stuart Chandler, tend to utilize ‘traditionalist rhetoric’ (2006, 180). In fact, all our interviewees emphasized that they bow down to monks only on appropriate occasions, such as inside the monastery or when seeking instruction. When on the road, nuns normally join their palms and greet monks by saying *Amitufo*, a common way to say hello in a monastic environment.³⁸

Pushou Si: ‘In Pushou Si we generally pay homage to monks by kneeling. Sometimes we just join our palms and lower our heads to monks when we meet on the road, where it is not convenient to pay homage.’

Tongjiao Si: ‘I will bow down to monks when I see them inside the temple but may just join my palms if I see monks on the street or at a meeting.’

Tianning Si: ‘When we meet monks, we usually pay homage to them by kneeling. However, if we meet a monk on the street, or in circumstances where kneeling is not appropriate, we may just first join our palms and say *Amitufo* without bowing. We should always choose the proper time and place to pay homage to monks. Bowing may distract a master if he is busy, or in hurry, or eating, or giving a Buddhist lecture.’

Dingguang Si: ‘Normally we join our palms to monks as a sign of respect. According to Buddhist texts, nuns must choose the appropriate time and place to do this.’

Chongfu Si: ‘We choose the appropriate circumstances for this, because some people may find it strange to see us bowing down to monks in the street. We don’t kneel when male masters are meditating, eating, walking or chanting *sūtras*. Then we just join our palms, showing our sincere respect in accordance with modern manners.’

Zizhulin (A): ‘Nuns must choose the appropriate circumstances in which to bow down to monks in accordance with Buddhist doctrine. This also applies to *śrāmaṇerīs*. One cannot pay homage to monks by kneeling down when the ground is dirty or when the master is busy. Here we don’t bow down to monks every time we see them. Monks accept nuns’ joining their palms in respect.’

Zizhulin (B): ‘Normally we join our palms when we see a monk. It depends where we are, whether we bow down to monks. For example, when I go to visit my master monk in Nanputuo and seek instructions from the monks.’

It is important, however, as reported by nuns at Tianning Si, Dingguang Si, Chongfu Si and Zizhulin, that, when they see male monastic members on the road, monks or novices, they would be first to greet them, before the monks or the novices would greet the nuns.³⁹ Our informant nuns at Tianning Si and Dingguang Si further pointed out that nuns will indeed pay homage to monks if situations allow, but just join their palms to a *śrāmaṇera*. When the *śrāmaṇera* later receives the full precepts as a new ordained monk, it is allowed that he be bowed to by nuns.⁴⁰

38. *Amitufo* is the Chinese for *Amitābha Buddha*. Uttering the name of this Buddha has become a common way of saying hello in Buddhist circles in both Taiwan and Mainland China.

39. Informant nuns at Tianning Si, Dingguan Si, Chongfu Si and Zhizhulin also told me that they would equally make sure to first greet senior female masters before those masters would greet them.

40. Our informant nun at Tianning Si explicitly stated that male novices usually do not dare to

While the first *gurudharma* rule is automatically linked to the practice of greeting and bowing by our informant nuns, respectful attitudes towards monks are also placed in a broader context. A nun at Chongfu Si, for instance, regarded greeting monks as a general Buddhist etiquette, instead of being influenced by the eight rules. In her opinion, *bhikṣus* are to be regarded as masters and teachers and should thus always be respectfully greeted. A nun at Tianning Si considered that, regardless of the eight rules, all males can be seen as her father. She greeted male monastic members respectfully for this reason.

Socio-cultural contexts in China

As seen above, circumstances play a major role in the practices of greeting and bowing. In this context, our informant nuns often refer to socio-cultural factors that crucially affect their way to behave. One nun expressed it as such:

Zizhulin: 'Buddhism exists in a social context. In the past, people needed to bow down both to the emperor and to their parents. Nowadays, we no longer do this. In this social context where people no longer kneel down, it may feel strange to see a nun bow down to monks in the street. It is impossible for us to pay homage to monks by kneeling everywhere, so we normally formally kneel down to monks in the Main Hall.'

According to our informant nuns' statements, people may thus feel strange when seeing nuns bowing down to monks in the street, or even criticize the nuns, since bowing is not normal practice in current modern Chinese contexts. Such criticism might even be detrimental to Buddhism. In this sense, many nuns expressed some caution:

Tongjiao Si: 'However, many [lay]people do not understand why nuns and other Buddhists bow down to monks.'

Dingguang Si: 'And both [lay]people and monastics who do not fully understand Buddhism may either praise you or criticize you for kneeling. In Pushou Si, where the focus is on *vinaya*, the better you practise this rule, the more people will respect you[.]'

Chongfu Si: 'We choose the appropriate circumstances for this, because some people may find it strange to see us bowing down to monks in the street.'

Additional exceptions to the rule of bowing to monks

Apart from the social context, our interviewees repeatedly mentioned that they do not want to kneel down unquestioningly before monks of poor virtue. Many nuns insisted on their right to choose appropriate monks when practising the first *gurudharma* rule:

Dingguang Si (A): 'My attitude to this rule is selective, because I will not bow down to badly behaved monks. I would rather worship the Buddha than bow to (bad) monks.'

Dingguang Si (B): 'I will not even join my palms for a notoriously bad monk, I just pretend not to see him.'

let *bhikṣuṇīs* pay homage to them.

Chongfu Si: 'Normally we would like to bow to a monk who does not violate important precepts ... However, we may not join our palms or bow down to a monk who repeatedly ignores his mistakes[.]'

Zizhulin: 'If a monk who likes to say something related to sexual activity comes to this temple, we would announce that such-and-such monk is coming and we will not pay attention to him and not pay homage to him ... The Buddha taught nuns this way [of treating this bad monk] by not bowing or regarding him as a teacher.'

The Zizhulin nun indicates that the refusal to greet some bad monks is in accordance with Buddhist literature, and indeed, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T 1428 940a27–b5), for instance, mentions that monks who are expelled or need to be expelled should not be greeted by other monks. The *Pāli vinaya* (Vin II 262, and V 195) is even more explicit and states that monks who have acted disrespectfully towards nuns should no longer be greeted by the nuns' community. This is similar to our informants' views, when they refer to their right to decide whether or not to kneel down to a particular monk.

The first rule, beyond bowing, and the other rules

Discussions of the first *gurudharma* rule have hitherto mainly focused on the practice of bowing to monks. It is, however, interesting to also note that the first rule includes another element that is often widely ignored. In the first *gurudharma*, nuns are required to stand up from their seats when they see a monk. Our informant nuns at Tianning Si, Dingguang Si and Chongfu Si reported that they would rise up from their seats to greet every male monastic member who enters an office or room, no matter if he is fully ordained or not. If the situation allows, they will bow down to (fully ordained) monks. Additionally, our interviewees told us that they will equally stand up to greet senior nuns or abbesses (without bowing) as part of the etiquette of respect for seniority. Our informant at Tianning Si, however, further pointed out that nuns would not stand up to greet monks in certain situations: for example, when groups of nuns are eating food or reciting *sūtras* together. From the above, we can see that there are various implications of the first *gurudharma* rule and that the practice of bowing should not be interpreted in a reductionist mode, as part of a dichotomy between bowing and not bowing to monks. Instead, the circumstances in which monks and nuns meet will greatly influence the way they greet each other. The nunneries we visited seem to have relatively similar viewpoints on how to interpret these circumstances, paying particular attention to etiquette and respect.

- 2) A nun may not revile a monk, saying that he has broken the precepts, [or gone against] right views or right behaviour.
- 3) A nun may not punish a monk, or prevent him from joining in the ceremonies of the order (such as the *poṣadha*⁴¹ or the *pravāraṇā*⁴²). A nun may not admonish a monk, whereas a monk may admonish a nun.

41. Traditionally, twice a month, at the *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.

42. The *pravāraṇā* or invitation ceremony is held at the end of the summer retreat. On this occasion, every monk and nun is expected to invite his/her fellow monks/nuns to point out their wrongs, if any — whether seen, heard or suspected. On this ceremony, see especially Chung 1998.

When we asked their opinion of the second and third *gurudharma* rules, the majority of our informant nuns — whether they were for or against them — argued from the importance of the concept of seniority:

Tongjiao Si: ‘I think it is reasonable as I am influenced by my family tradition where my father as head of the household decides everything. I could not challenge him, even if I knew he was wrong. I will not admonish the elders and masters.’

Dingguang Si: ‘I disapprove of this rule. Is it reasonable to see a newly-ordained monk inappropriately blame a senior nun? Where is the order between seniors and the young? A junior monk has no reason to admonish a nun just to show his *bhikṣu* status. It would be correct to admonish a nun privately if she made a mistake, but I have never seen a monk admonish senior nuns in public.’

Chongfu Si: ‘This concept is quite simple. It is impossible for students to blame teachers or parents if they make a mistake. We respect monks and treat them as teachers or parents, so we may talk kindly rather than admonish a monk who makes a mistake.’

Zizhulin: ‘The rule that nuns cannot admonish monks relates to respect for seniority: which children would admonish their parents?’

These nuns’ statements are in keeping with a general sense that nuns will not admonish monks who have made a mistake. In Buddhist tradition, *bhikṣus* are the most senior Buddhist members among the seven categories of Buddhist followers.⁴³ As previously noted, our informant nuns tend to regard monks as their teachers or elder brothers, whose duty and responsibility it is to teach and protect nuns, as their students. In Chinese social contexts, moreover, people normally express respect towards the elderly and the wise, and juniors reviling or admonishing their seniors would attract criticism, irrespective of religious context.⁴⁴ In this sense, nuns, as junior Buddhist members, are commonly expected to show filial obedience to monks, as members of the senior *saṅgha*. Emphasis on age-based seniority, however, led to our informant nun at Dingguang Si to see things differently than most, questioning whether it is acceptable for a newly-ordained monk to criticize a senior nun. Even so, the Dingguang Si nun mentioned that she has never seen a monk admonish (senior) nuns in public. Her statement echoes that of a Zizhulin nun who said: ‘Monks may critically admonish a monk’s faults, but if a nun makes a mistake, monks generally do not blame her severely, but treat her gently’. Both of these nuns’ statements are indicative of the aim to achieve a respectful relationship between male and female monastics.

Conversely, it is worth asking about nuns’ reactions to monks’ faults. A Tianning Si nun said that the reason she would choose not to admonish a badly

43. The seven categories of Buddhist followers are *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer nun), *śrāmaṇera* (male novice), *śrāmaṇerī* (female novice), *upāsaka* (male lay follower) and *upāsikā* (female lay follower).

44. In this context, they often refer to traditional Confucian viewpoints, to sustain their opinions. The prime example is from the *Confucian Analects*: ‘The Master [Confucius] said, “In serving his parents, a son may remonstrate with them, but gently; when he sees that they do not incline to follow his advice, he shows an increased degree of reverence, but does not abandon his purpose; and should they punish him, he does not allow himself to murmur”’ (Legge 1960, 170). For further discussion of filial piety in contemporary Chinese society, see, for instance, Rainey 2010, 176–191.

behaved monk was because he ‘has made his bed and he must lie in it’. The monk must accept his bad *karma* arising from his questionable actions, and no-one else’s actions can substitute for his own *karma*. A Dingguang Si nun thought it unnecessary to rebuke a smoking monk: if he did not care about his monastic image, nothing she might have said would have made any difference. A Chongfu Si nun said that normally nuns will gently tell an elderly monk if he is in error, rather than admonishing him more formally. However, they may ignore him altogether if his behaviour is completely contrary to the *Dharma*, since his case would then fall under the jurisdiction of the *bhikṣusaṅgha*, which deals with monks’ serious transgressions; the nun at Chongfu Si considered that it is improper for nuns from the *bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha* to intervene in monks’ affairs in this respect.

In short, our fieldwork data indicates that most of the members of the seven Chinese nunneries we studied thought it reasonable for nuns not to admonish a monk for his faults, in accordance with the fundamental value placed upon seniority (monks generally being seen as their elders, irrespective of biological age). However, in spite of this general tendency to avoid rebuking monks, nuns expressed a wider range of opinions in reaction to monks’ faults.

- 4) After a woman has been trained for two years in the six rules as a probationer (*śikṣamāṇā*), the ordination ceremony must be carried out in both orders (first in the nuns’ order, and then in the monks’ order).

The *śikṣamāṇā* period has, as shown by some, never or only very rarely been implemented in Chinese Buddhism (Shih Sheng Yen 1997 [1965], 227; Shih Guang Hua 2006, 16–17; Heirman 2008a, 133–134).⁴⁵ Still, Hao Chunwen in his work on daily monastic life in medieval Dunhuang refers to *śikṣamāṇā* ordination (2001, 28–40). Our fieldwork data indicates important evolutions in *śikṣamāṇā* practices. A ‘popular’ trend in contemporary Buddhism among Mainland Chinese nuns is that each novice (*śrāmaṇerī*) should receive the probationer (*śikṣamāṇā*) precepts two years before receiving full dual ordination as a *bhikṣuṇī*. Modern Buddhist monastic members in Mainland China thus appear to pay more attention to the *śikṣamāṇā* period as a standard ordination procedure than those from the same region did in the past. Our informants made the following comments about *śikṣamāṇā* practices in Chinese institutions.

Pushou Si: ‘In Pushou Si ... when a new novice still has her hair unshaved, we need to observe whether she is suitable for religious life. After six months to a year, she will become *xingtong śrāmaṇerī*, shaving her hair without observing the ten precepts.⁴⁶ A year later, she will become *fatong śrāmaṇerī*⁴⁷ and will follow the ten

45. Master Sheng Yen, the founder of the Taiwanese Dharma Drum monastery, mentions in his classic book on *vinaya*, *Jielü xue gangyao* 戒律學綱要 (‘Essentials of the Study of Buddhist Discipline’) that he had never seen reliable sources on the implementation of *śikṣamāṇā* in Chinese Buddhist history. Accordingly, he expected nuns with high aspirations to revive the Buddhist *vinaya* and ritual system, because a Buddhist woman cannot receive full ordination until she has been a *śikṣamāṇā* for two years.

46. *Xingtong śrāmaṇerī* 形同沙彌尼 (*śrāmaṇerī* in appearance) is a female novice who has a monastic appearance but has not yet received the ten *śrāmaṇerī* precepts even though she has shaved her hair.

47. *Fatong śrāmaṇerī* 法同沙彌尼 (*śrāmaṇerī* according to the rules) is a female novice who has received the *śrāmaṇerī* precepts.

precepts.⁴⁸ Next, she will update her level as a *śikṣamāṇā* by taking six rules for two years.⁴⁹ Finally, she will become *bhikṣuṇī* by the full ordination ... In modern China, ordination for *śikṣamāṇā* is very popular[.]’

Dingguang Si: ‘Nowadays *śikṣamāṇā* precepts have become the common approach since Master Longlian advocated it. There should be a gradual process of *śrāmaṇerī*, *śikṣamāṇā* and *bhikṣuṇī*. Two-year *śikṣamāṇā* is a foundation for *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and also a period to examine female monastic members’ physical and mental well-being, including whether they are pregnant⁵⁰ and whether they have what it takes to live the monastic life. They will find it easier to observe *bhikṣuṇī* precepts after a two-year period of study and practice of the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts. According to the *vinaya*, *bhikṣuṇīs* cannot receive the full essence of the precepts without a *śikṣamāṇā* period.’

Chongfu Si: ‘Nowadays Buddhist monastic members can lawfully confer ordination after the *śikṣamāṇā* period. I don’t think that in the past no Chinese masters conferred *śikṣamāṇā* precepts, even though *śikṣamāṇā* precepts were not universal when Buddhism spread to China. However, the ordination procedures have gradually become lawful. In the past, Buddhist monastic members did not pay attention to *śikṣamāṇā* precepts, but now more and more people undergo a probationary period and take examinations before they become nuns.’

Zizhulin: ‘I asked a senior monk his opinion of *śikṣamāṇā*. He explained that *śikṣamāṇā* status was not applied in Chinese historical Buddhism because the “*vinaya* rule is in accordance with the region where it is applied”.⁵¹ The monk said that Chinese culture was profoundly influenced by Confucian thought, which emphasizes ethical education. A distinction should be made between male and female in Chinese Confucian teachings. One concern of the *śikṣamāṇā* period is to examine whether or not girls are pregnant. Most educated Chinese girls would have self-control and observe sexual abstinence, so we need not examine them

48. Before they receive full ordination, both male and female novices are required to follow ten precepts. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T 1428 924a2–16) specifies them as such: (1) not to kill a human; (2) not to steal; (3) not to have sexual intercourse; (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 and 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 very similar in the other *vinayas*. For further details, see Heirman 2002a, 66.

49. Probationers occupy a status between novices and nuns, only applicable to women. During her two years of study, the probationer particularly has to take into account a certain number of special rules. In fact, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* indicates that a *śikṣamāṇā* must follow the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇerī* and the six rules of a *śikṣamāṇā*, while she also has to take into account the rules for nuns. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T 1428 924b6–c2) comprises six rules for probationers, the first four of which are compiled in the same style as for *bhikṣuṇīs*: (1) not to have sexual intercourse; (2) not to steal; (3) not to kill a human; (4) not to lie about one’s spiritual achievements; (5) not to eat at improper times (i.e. after noon), and (6) not to drink alcohol. For details, see Heirman 2002a, 67–75 and 2008a, 111–116.

50. Only the *Sarvāstivādavinaya* mentions pregnancy control as a motive to impose a *śikṣamāṇā* period. Still, quite a few monastics refer to it. For details, see Heirman 2008a, 108, 119, 131.

51. 隨方毘尼 *sui fang pini*, ‘*vinaya* in accordance with the region’, is a reference to a concept that at times is used in China to apply *vinaya* rules in particular regional contexts. For details, see Heirman 2008b, 264–265, and 2014.

or worry they might be pregnant.⁵² Nowadays, conferring *śikṣamāṇā* precepts has become quite popular in Mainland China.’

Qifu Si: ‘*Śikṣamāṇā*-precepts ordination started here in the 1980s as our Master Longlian was particularly keen on a two-year probation period. For example, those students who went forth in 1982 were allowed to receive the full precepts in the ordination hall only in 1987, after having received the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* precepts [...].⁵³ Now we have lawful dual ordination for nuns[.]’

As suggested above, it is clear that the *śikṣamāṇā* concept is increasingly familiar in Buddhist circles and that the *śikṣamāṇā* period has been implemented in many of the Mainland Chinese institutions. Some interesting points have further emerged from our fieldwork data. Most importantly, changes are often the result of a leader’s educational influence. Several of our informant nuns mentioned Ven. Longlian’s contribution to the development of *śikṣamāṇā* precepts and dual ordination, and her important role in promoting nuns’ education and *vinaya* practice. Ven. Longlian’s biography records that she advocated conferring dual ordination upon Buddhist nuns, and that student nuns in her institute are expected to strictly observe the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts within the two-year probationary period (Qiu 1997, 215). According to our fieldwork data, most junior monastic members or student nuns must now have a probationary period of at least two years, supervised by senior teacher nuns in Buddhist nuns’ colleges, before the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts are conferred via the dual ordination. Additionally, our informant nun at Zizhulin explicitly stated that those who have not yet received *śikṣamāṇā* precepts are even forbidden to attend the full ordination ceremony by some Ordination Altar Halls. In short, the probationary period — to an unknown but apparently large extent — has now been imposed in contemporary Buddhist nunneries of Mainland China.

While discussing the fourth rule of the *gurudharmas* with our informant nuns, they usually refer to Ven. Longlian’s efforts to promote and implement dual ordination for nuns in Chinese Buddhism in modern times. It is worth noting in this context that dual ordination was rarely conferred in — and indeed, was nearly absent from — the Chinese Buddhist tradition for centuries. Furthermore, most Chinese Buddhist nuns prior to the time of Ven. Longlian received full ordination only in the monks’ order (Qiu 1997, 238–239; Bianchi 2001, 90).⁵⁴

52. Confucian values pervade the societies of Taiwan and Mainland China. For a few decades after the Communist Revolution, Confucianism was sharply criticized in Mainland China, but more recent discourse strongly emphasizes it. Many Buddhist teachers, both in Taiwan and Mainland China, consider Confucian education as a good basic education, supporting behavioural standards. As Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer aptly express it (2011, 345), ‘the increasing practice in the PRC, following earlier attempts during the Republican period and then in Taiwan and Singapore, of recycling Confucian notions into the state moral discourse deprived Confucianism of a place of its own. Confucianism became an orthodox label used by a great variety of different state and other organizations for a wide range of tourism, cultural, and educational projects.’ See also note 44.
53. In 1982, nine *śikṣamāṇās* received full ordination with Ven. Longlian. In 1987, twenty more nuns, who had taken the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts in 1985, were ordained (for details, see Bianchi, forthcoming).
54. The first dual ordination in China was conferred in the fifth century (ca. 433–434 CE) in the presence of an adequate quorum of fully ordained Sinhalese nuns and Chinese monks (for details, see, among others, Heirman 2001, 293–298, and Funayama 2012, 22–27). The ques-

It was thus indeed the endeavours of Ven. Longlian that made it possible to re-establish dual ordination in the twentieth century. In 1949, Master Nenghai, a prominent twentieth-century monk and the main teacher of Longlian, prepared to re-introduce the dual ordination in Tiexiang Si, in which he conferred the *śikṣamānā* precepts. Tiexiang Si is a nunnery in Southwest China, the nuns' college of which has just now been moved to Qifu Si, a newly built nunnery in Pengzhou (and one of the nunneries we visited), near to the modern city of Chengdu. Master Nenghai at first planned to assign Ven. Longlian as a ceremony master (*jieshi* 戒師), but at that time she had only been a nun for eight years, while the minimum qualification for *jieshi* status was twelve years. Master Guanyi, the abbot of Baoguang Si monastery and Nenghai's ordination master, nevertheless nominated Longlian as the ceremony master giving the *śikṣamānā* precepts at Tiexiang Si (Qiu 1997, 239). Those probationers were expected to receive full ordination after two years of study, but this was cut short due to the Communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949. After that date, Ven. Longlian never stopped hoping to accomplish Master Nenghai's plan to re-establish the dual ordination.⁵⁵

The turning point in the revival of dual ordination originated with a Sinhalese request in the 1980s to re-establish *bhikkṣuṇīs'* ordination in the Theravāda tradition with the assistance of Chinese nuns. This request was made because the first lineage of Chinese *bhikkṣuṇīs* was, historically, once transmitted from Sinhalese nuns to China in the fifth century CE. Now, the Chinese nuns could do the same for Sinhalese Buddhist women, since in Sri Lanka a full ordination was no longer available. Longlian's biography, compiled by Qiu (1997, 239–241) explains what happened: Sinhalese Buddhists hoped that Ven. Longlian — in her capacity as ceremony master and the most qualified nun in contemporary China — would confer *bhikkṣuṇī* precepts upon Sinhalese ten-precept women via dual ordination.⁵⁶ Ven. Longlian consented to do this and invited the women to come to China for ordination. In April 1981, Ven. Longlian met the Sinhalese Minister of Culture in Beijing to discuss the matter, and planned to confer dual ordination on a mixed group of Sinhalese and Chinese female monastic members the following year. Although in the end, the Sinhalese women did not make it to China,⁵⁷ Ven. Longlian, with a group of ten Chinese master nuns including herself, still conferred the *bhikkṣuṇī* precepts in the *bhikkṣuṇīsaṅgha* at Tiexiang Si in January 1982. The *bhikkṣuṇī* masters

tion remains, however, whether the practice of dual ordination continued until the present day. *Vinaya* master Hongzan 弘贊 (1611–1685), for instance, comments that the ordination in both orders had been long lost (W 107 186b16). Shih Heng-ching (2000, 533–534), on the other hand, indicates that, at least during the seventeenth century, dual ordination was carefully implemented. Still, as she notices herself, several historical sources point out that there might very well have been recorded breaks in the practice of dual ordination in the course of Chinese Buddhism (for details, see Shih Heng-Ching 2000, 529–534; see also Shih Hui-min 1999, 334–335).

55. Qiu 1997, 239; Bianchi 2001, 32 and forthcoming.

56. Ten-precept women, or ten-precept mothers (*dasa sil mātās*) are Buddhist religious women, who, without having received a *bhikkṣuṇī* ordination, follow ten precepts. For a detailed study on Buddhist women in Sri Lanka, including the ten-precept women, see a newly published book (2013) by Nirmala Salgado.

57. Qiu Shanshan does not explain why the Sinhalese ten-precept women were absent at this dual-ordination ceremony in China. Ester Bianchi (forthcoming) points out that political and diplomatic issues probably prevented them from coming.

and nine candidates then went to the *bhikṣusaṅgha*, at Wenshu Yuan in Chengdu, in order to receive dual ordination. This was regarded as a milestone for the revival of dual ordination in Mainland China. Since that time, the ceremony of dual ordination has been regularly held for Chinese Buddhist nuns (Qiu 1997, 241–242). Ven. Longlian clearly has thus greatly influenced the practice of Buddhist precepts and ordination procedure in contemporary Chinese Buddhism, and many of our informant nuns continuously refer to her.

According to our informants' statements, dual ordination is now regularly conferred in contemporary Mainland China. Still, Jin-Yu Wen discovered problems in recent ordination activities when he did a case-study of a ceremony held in 2005 at Shaolin Temple. He comments that more and more women have been going forth and request dual ordination, but that the ordination is at times difficult to implement since many places lack the right conditions for conferring it (Wen 2010, 16). He remarks that, although there are now more Buddhist nunneries in Mainland China than ever before, only a few Buddhist institutions can confer *bhikṣuṇī* ordination because nuns' institutes are still not fully developed (2010, 16).⁵⁸ While Wen's case study offers a different perspective from our study on dual ordination, research findings about the practice in different regions will inevitably vary; and we should bear this in mind when evaluating any fieldwork data.

- 5) When a nun has committed a *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offence, she has to undergo the *mānatva* in both orders for half a month.⁵⁹

One informant nun told us that ceremonies for *saṅghāvaśeṣa* were held at Pushou Si and Dacheng Si in 2010, followed by *mānatva* periods of two weeks in both orders, as described in the *vinaya* texts. However, collecting detailed information regarding which *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offences monastic members had committed under the fifth *gurudharma* rule proved quite difficult in Mainland China (as indeed it had in Taiwan). In an empirical study such as this, it would not be easy to ask for detailed information about serious violations which may have occurred in certain Buddhist monasteries. To protect Buddhism's reputation, monastic institutions are understandably wary of making such disclosures. The experienced researcher Holmes Welch, for example, was unable to obtain information from Chinese monks about cases of expulsion (1967, 119). In our fieldwork experience in Taiwanese nunneries and monasteries – where the monastic atmosphere and context is usually more open than that in Mainland China – we found that informant nuns, intentionally or unintentionally, offered some information

58. Wen carried out an analysis of monastic members participating in ordination, concluding that 57% had completed junior high school, and only 7% were higher education graduates (2010, 11–12). The average age of female monastic members in Wen's sample was 46, while the average for men was 35 (Wen 2010, 8–9).

59. *Saṅghāvaśeṣa* offence is an offence that leads to a temporary exclusion from the main activities of the community. A *mānatva* (probable meaning 'condition of (paying) respect') punishment of two weeks is imposed on female offenders. *Vinaya* literature indicates that this penance consisted in, or at least involved, some kind of ceremonial homage paid by the offender to the monastic community (see Heirman 2002a, 128–138). The above *gurudharma* rule has led to discussion, caused by the fact that some *vinayas* do not explicitly mention the term *saṅghāvaśeṣa*. Still, in most *vinayas*, including the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, the rule indeed refers to a *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offence (for details, see: Hüsken 1997, 103–105, 350–352, 356–357; Heirman 1998; Chung 1999, 230–231).

of this type; however, it lacked detail, and tended to include only minor transgressions.⁶⁰ The very nature of *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offences probably makes it more difficult for researchers to obtain information about them, certainly as a lay person intending to publish.⁶¹ During our fieldwork in Mainland China and Taiwan, various nuns were at first reluctant or cautious about discussing the issues of *vinaya* with us because we did not belong to their monastic community. Similarly, Master Sheng Yen disapproved of laypeople commenting on monastic affairs, believing that anything relating to Buddhist monastic members should be solved by the *saṅgha* alone. When a Buddhist monk or nun commits a transgression, it is forbidden to make it public knowledge. Master Sheng Yen suggested that monastic members' faults should not even be announced to every *bhikṣu*, let alone discussed by laypeople (2007 [1963], 102–104).

- 6) Every fortnight, nuns have to ask monks for instruction (*avavāda*).⁶²
- 7) Nuns cannot spend the summer retreat (rain retreat, *varṣā*) in a place where there are no monks.
- 8) At the end of the summer retreat, nuns have to carry out the *pravāraṇā* ceremony (also) in the monks' order.⁶³

Holmes Welch researched Chinese Buddhist monasteries from 1900 to 1950, noting that monks seldom had *varṣā* and *poṣadha* (1967, 110). Master Sheng Yen, the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan, similarly thought that the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth *gurudharma* rules were not applied in Chinese Buddhism (2007 [1963], 89). In the course of our fieldwork, however, nearly all our informants in various nunneries reported that they *do* conduct the relevant ceremonies required in the *gurudharmas*, such as *avavāda*, *varṣā*, and *pravāraṇā*. One Dingguang Si nun's statement can serve as an example for the sixth rule: 'Seeking instructions from the monks' order was hardly applied by many *saṅghas* in the Tang Dynasty, during which Buddhism prospered.'⁶⁴ In contemporary Chinese

60. A Taiwanese nun told us that a serious transgression involving sexual conduct had occurred in her institution, where the offending female monastic was about to undergo the *mānatva* in the presence of the *bhikṣu*- and *bhikṣuṇīsaṅghas*. In this case, the research follows strict confidentiality policy, to protect the reputation of all the nunneries and monasteries we visited. Out of respect to the informant, the sensitive material is anonymized, without the name of the monastery.
61. Many *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offences refer to rules on matters of a sexual nature, or deal with serious disruptions in the community.
62. In the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T 1428 649a1–2), the instruction concerns the eight *gurudharmas* (for a comparison with the other *vinayas*, see Heirman and Chiu 2012, 279).
63. See note 42.
64. In fact, *vinaya* master Daoxuan (596–667 CE) remarked on the practice of *bhikṣuṇīs* seeking instruction in the *bhikṣusaṅgha* in the Tang Dynasty. At that time, he says, Buddhist monks used *lüe fa* 略法 (abridged teaching) to lecture nuns, because very few monks were qualified to teach nuns through *guang fa* 廣法 (broad teaching) (T 1804 153a06). *Vinaya* master Huaisu 懷素 (ca. 634–697) explains that broad teaching (albeit he does not explicitly use the word *guang* 'broad') means that *bhikṣuṇīs* approach the *bhikṣus*' order to ask a qualified monk to visit the nunnery and to instruct the *bhikṣuṇīs* (T 1809 517c11–518a11). 'Abridged [*lüe*] teaching', he says, means that the monks' *saṅgha* replies that there is no monk qualified to deliver the lecture to the nuns, so no monk can attend the nunnery. The monks' order just requests that the nuns should work hard, rather than indulging themselves (T 1809 518a12–14). For more details, see Shih Sheng Yen 1997 [1965], 265–266.

Buddhism, however, more and more monastic members know this practice, so that some institutes have gradually come to carry out the rules.’ The nun considered this development quite gratifying.⁶⁵

Our interview data indicates that the procedures of seeking instruction differ significantly in the seven nunneries, depending on each institution’s conditions and local choices. The practice of the sixth *gurudharma* rule can be categorized into four distinct approaches. The first — strict observance of the seeking of teachings from the *bhikṣusaṅgha* fortnightly — is adhered to at Pushou Si, a *vinaya*-based nunnery where the practice is held as required in the *gurudharmas*.⁶⁶ In addition, informant nuns from non-*vinaya* nunneries mentioned that the institutional aim of Pushou Si is to strictly adhere to monastic rules, so that nuns can easily perform the relevant rituals in that *vinaya* context. Furthermore, according to these informants, Pushou Si’s location — on Mount Wutai, alongside more than a hundred Buddhist temples — makes it quite convenient to keep to this practice, because there are so many monks nearby from whom to receive regular teachings.

The second approach — to seek instruction from monks flexibly, rather than bimonthly — is practised at Zizhulin and Qifu Si. These two nunneries conduct the instruction formally during and after the summer retreat. The advent of the telephone has partly contributed to the evolution of the practice; Buddhist nuns can ask for instruction by phone more easily than in person.⁶⁷ Zizhulin nuns at Minnan Buddhist College frequently telephone monks from Nanputuo Temple (as well as meeting with them in person), so the latter are generally aware of the nuns’ activities. Monks also can give nuns advice over the phone if necessary. Nuns at Qifu Si exhibit a similar pattern. However, despite the convenience of conducting the instruction by phone, our informant nuns at Zizhulin and Qifu Si stressed that they personally follow formal procedures to pay homage to monks and seek their teachings in the *bhikṣusaṅgha* both during and at the end of the *varṣā* period. From this, it is evident that some monastic members in Mainland China have re-contextualized the *avavāda* making use of modern means, yet choose to strictly follow the formalized tradition at particular, religiously significant times of year.

The third approach — to practise the sixth *gurudharma* rule by means of paying homage to a monk, without any instruction being received — has been adopted at Dingguang Si and Chongfu Si. Our informant nuns from these two nunneries mentioned that, at present, the conditions for strictly following the instruction rules are not available, so that they instead just go to see a monk and pay homage to him. Nuns at Dingguang Si pointed out that their nunnery has an abbot, and that they bow to him during the summer retreat. In Chongfu Si, on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month, all student and teacher nuns participate in a similar ritual and pay homage to their senior male master.

The fourth and final option we identified with regard to the sixth *gurudharma* rule is not to practise it at all, as is currently the case at Tongjiao Si. At the time

65. Personal email correspondence, 2013.

66. In Taiwan, Nanlin Nunnery as a *vinaya*-based institution also strictly practises the sixth rule every fortnight. For details, see Heirman and Chiu 2012, 286–287.

67. In Taiwan, nuns at Luminary Nunnery ask for monks’ instruction over the phone, but practise this formally and in person during and at the end of the summer retreat. For details, see Heirman and Chiu 2012, 293.

of our visit, the institution was unable to conduct the ritual because one of the two former instructor monks died, and the other is too old.

From the above, it can be seen that the requirement to seek instruction from monks has been adapted to each nunnery's conditions and local choices. More significantly, perhaps, some of our informants reported that in other nunneries in Mainland China the conditions allow nuns to follow the instruction practice as the *vinaya* requires. This may point to a tendency to develop ritual traditions in a *vinaya* way.

We return now to the seventh and eighth *gurudharma* rules. According to Welch, Chinese Buddhist monks in the period 1900–1950 did not pay attention to the three-month summer retreat: in most institutions, 'life continued much as usual' (1967, 110). Our fieldwork data indicates that Mainland Buddhist nuns in some nunneries now hold the *varṣā* period at the end of spring and the beginning of summer (between the sixteenth day of the fourth lunar month and the fifteenth day of the seventh month), to strengthen their Buddhist practice. For example, nuns at Tongjiao Si have busier schedules during this period. After rising at 3 a.m. for Buddhist morning chanting, they breakfast, then recite Mahāyāna *sūtras*, listen to *vinaya* lectures, and so on. Group practice is the focus for nuns in the summer retreat, after which they can plan their own religious schedules individually. Nuns at Tianning Si arrange a series of Buddhist lessons for group practice during the retreat period, when all of them will chant Mahāyāna *sūtras* and worship the Buddha together at fixed times. They are, however, still allowed time for self-cultivation, such as meditation or individual recitation of the Buddha's name. Nuns seldom go outside during the *varṣā* unless assigned to do important Buddhist business.⁶⁸ On the whole, it appears that some contemporary Buddhist nuns we met in both Mainland China and Taiwan focus on advanced monastic practice during the *varṣā* period: a striking contrast to Welch's research findings regarding the early twentieth century.

The eighth *gurudharma* rule discusses the invitation ceremony (*pravāraṇā*). According to textual tradition, the ceremonies of *pravāraṇā* and *kāṭhina* are held following the end of the *varṣā* period.⁶⁹ Today, many monastic institutions in both Mainland China and Taiwan do not organize a *kāṭhina* ceremony, although as pointed out by Ester Bianchi, some elements still refer to it, at least in Tiexiang Si at the time of her visit (2001, 89).⁷⁰ The *pravāraṇā* ceremony, also held at the

68. The increased focus on religious practice during the *varṣā* period was also evident in the Taiwanese nunneries we visited: Nanlin and Luminary Nunnery. In Nanlin, we noticed a public bulletin listing a schedule of Buddhist classes, including a review of different *sūtras* and *vinaya* rules. In Luminary Nunnery, Master Wu Yin requires every nun to set a target as religious homework during the summer retreat, and to participate in group discussions about Buddhist practice and study (2001, 288).

69. The term *kāṭhina* traditionally refers to a ceremonial piece of cloth that was spread out near the monastery to inform the laity that the period of donation of robes and robe material had come (i.e. after the rain retreat). This period is called the *kāṭhina* period, and is formally introduced by means of a ceremony. For details, see Heirman 2002a 2002, 221–226 and Chung 2004.

70. See also Wu Yin 2001, 291. An in-depth study of the exact implementation of, or reference to, ritual procedures such as *kāṭhina* in Mainland China is beyond the scope of this article. These issues can certainly be further explored in future empirical research. Today the *kāṭhina* ceremony seems to have been replaced by the *Ullambana* festival, which is performed in many Buddhist institutions all over Mainland China. At the closure of the summer retreat, this is an important celebration for both monastic members and laypeople, during which the latter

end of the summer retreat, and usually replacing the retreat's final *poṣadha* ceremony, is strictly reserved to monastic members only.⁷¹ As in the case of the above-described rule on the *mānatva* period, our interviewees did not share much information on *pravāraṇā*, since it equally involves offences and potential punishments. However, as for the relation with the monks' community in the context of this ritual, our interviewees at Chongfu Si, Zizhulin and Qifu Si remarked that similar arrangements to the *avavāda* (instruction) practice are followed.

The above findings, which show a tendency to implement (as far as practically possible) *vinaya*-related guidelines in the contemporary organization of monastic life, can productively be compared with the development of Buddhist institutions in the first half of the twentieth century. Daniela Campo (2014) has shown that Buddhist institutions of Republican China, partially in a search for religious legitimation by the civil government, and partially as the result of internal development, began to re-emphasize the *vinaya*, taking into account modern commodities and needs. In this way, the institutions maintained the standard of religious orthodoxy, and, at the same time, strengthened their religious authority. It is worth bearing this development in mind when considering the broad evolution of the present-day societies of Mainland China and Taiwan. While a comprehensive treatment of this theme is beyond the scope of the present article, our interview data suggest that a modern development similar to that of the early twentieth century can be discerned. Indeed, in a number of contemporary Buddhist nunneries, there seems to be an even *more* focused concern to implement *vinaya*-based organizational practices than Holmes Welch found in early-twentieth-century China.

Conclusion

From the start of the *bhikṣuṇīsaṅgha*, *gurudharmas* have often been a debated topic, and this continues to be the case today. In this article, we have first shown how contemporary Mainland Chinese nuns commonly perceive the eight fundamental rules. Their views can be summarized as follows. First, the majority of our interviewees stress the authenticity of the *gurudharmas* and express how crucial they are for the protection of the *Dharma*, a promise they made to the Buddha. Not one of our interviewees would support a general abolition of the rules, and all disapprove of Shih Chao-hwei's actions, although a few of our informants did agree with some of her points, after listening to her speech. Second, hierarchical differences between the monks' and nuns' orders seem to be commonly accepted by our informant nuns for the sake of cooperation and harmony in Buddhist communities. A clear boundary between the orders is seen as a protection for both nuns and monks. Interestingly, many of our interviewees compare the *saṅgha* to a traditional family, where monks are seen as fathers or elder brothers: deserving of respect, while at the same time required to take care of their daughters or sisters. Third, scriptural texts and/or key masters' teachings seem to exert a

give various offerings to the monastic community in order to gain merit for their ancestors. On the *Ullambana* festival as held in medieval China, see Teiser 1996; for further developments, see Guang 2011, 123–143.

71. See also Bianchi 2001, 89. For scriptural reference to *pravāraṇā* replacing *poṣadha*, see Chung 1998, 40–44.

profound influence on nuns' attitudes toward the concept of women's inferior *karma*, an issue that frequently arose in our interviews. Taken as a whole, our informants' stories represent a plea for a respectful and harmonious relationship between the two orders, and a definite attempt to not problematize the issue of the eight *gurudharmas* unless circumstances force one to do so.

Circumstances and local context are, indeed, the most prominent factors in detailed discussions of the individual rules. According to the circumstances, rules are interpreted in similar, but also sometimes different ways, and the reasons to do so seldom involve criticism (although this is not totally absent), but rather emphasize interpretation depending on the context of the nunnery. Cutting against the grain of this pragmatic approach, we can also discern a growing tendency toward a stricter interpretation of *vinaya* procedures, including those mentioned in the *gurudharmas*, such as the implementation of a *śiṅṣamāṇā* period and of dual ordination. Individual voices can also be heard, especially with regard to paying homage to monks; but in comparison to what we have seen in previous research on Taiwanese contexts, the variety of viewpoints is less diverse and exhibits a stronger emphasis on Buddhist tradition.

The voices of Mainland Chinese nuns are rarely heard in the many discussions of the twentieth and twenty-first century on the position of women in the Buddhist community, and, more particularly, in the debate on the validity and (re-)establishment of a full ordination for nuns in other Buddhist regions.⁷² Still, contrary to Wenjie Qin's study conducted in 2000, our fieldwork research shows that Mainland Chinese nuns have clear viewpoints on how a Buddhist community can be organized and generally have the means to realize it. As for the dual ordination debate, at least one of their main leaders, the nun Shi Longlian, was very much aware of ordination discussions and tried, in difficult circumstances, to play her role both on the national and the international scene. Shi Longlian's actions show that the idea of a transnational 'sisterhood of Buddhist nuns' was not only a product of Western society, as suggested by Nirmala Salgado in her recent work on female renunciants in Sri Lanka (2013, 211), but also existed among some senior nuns in Mainland China. Still, Shi Longlian's endeavours were much less global than the issues debated today, and her attempt to introduce a *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in Sri Lanka fits well in the historical framework of the Chinese female Buddhist community, that strove to enhance validity when in the fifth century a group of Sinhalese nun witnesses introduced the first dual ordination in China. Also, as we have pointed out, the focus of Mainland Chinese nuns lies, not surprisingly, on their own local contexts, as it is the case in many Buddhist communities. In these local settings, nuns have established practices, that, although fuelled by *vinaya* issues and *vinaya* masters, are, most importantly, a reflection of what Nirmala Salgado has aptly called 'the lived life of renunciants'.⁷³ Everyday life, in a particular context, is indeed a major issue mentioned by all our nun informants. It triggers a search for a balance between a textual tradition, in this case the *gurudharmas*, and everyday life. It is thus most important for the observer/researcher not to essentialize an ideal created on textual sources, generalizing it as a normative goal for all Chinese Buddhists, thus effectively erasing the everyday lived

72. For an overview of these discussions, see, among others, Heirman 2011.

73. See note 34.

lives of the nuns. On the contrary, this research has tried to show how, in the different contexts of their nunneries, nuns have established their constantly and naturally evolving communities. For many of the Mainland Chinese communities, generally more than in Taiwan, the *gurudharmas* serve as background guidelines of the Buddha, against which practices have developed. As we have mentioned, these practices seldom involve criticism, but rather testify of the growing confidence and stability which the nuns' communities acquired after decades of hard times in the twentieth century.

In Mainland China, there is indeed a sharp revival of communal religious activities starting from the later twentieth century.⁷⁴ It has allowed Buddhist nunneries to grow and to establish their own practices, as meaningful social actors. Yet, many elements, such as rituals traditions, had disappeared and, as described by Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011, 247), 'a sense of loss permeates large tracts of contemporary Chinese communal religion'. In this context, as the same authors further show (2011, 247-249), clerics are sent by Taoist as well as Buddhist associations (such as the China Buddhist Association and its local sub-branches) to staff newly re-opened temples, in this way also replacing local traditions with more standard and central practices. A role is also played by the Buddhist colleges (*Foxue yuan* 佛學院) where many young monks and nuns follow a kind of academic programme before returning to their home communities.⁷⁵ In the context of the Buddhist nunneries we visited, it seems plausible that this phenomenon explains, at least partially, the similarities we noticed among the responses of teacher nuns on *gurudharma* issues. In addition, a re-establishment of large nunneries also requires a firm basis to rely on. Such a basis is found in textual sources and teachings of senior monks and nuns, as well as in surviving local traditions. It again influences the constant search for a balance between textual traditions and everyday contexts, and further helps to explain why there is a tendency among Mainland Chinese nunneries, all still quite new compared to most of the Taiwanese institutions, to follow a relatively strict interpretation of traditional institutional guidelines. Consequently, the more centralized approach to religious practices, the Buddhist colleges and the search for a firm and traditional basis for newly established nunneries, are all important regularizing factors, that explain the relative lack of diversity among the prevailing attitudes in Mainland Chinese nunneries. Still, as we have seen, also more locally contextualized discussions appear, based on events in the everyday life of a community, a tendency that is likely to grow when more and more nunneries open their doors to welcome newcomers.

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74. For a detailed discussion on the revival of communal religious activities in Mainland China and Taiwan, see Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 240-269.

75. On this regularizing influence, see Birnbaum 2003, 132-139.

Abbreviations

- T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, J. Takakusu, K. Watanabe (eds.), Tōkyō
- Vin *The Vinaya Piṭakam*, H. Oldenberg (ed.), London, Pali Text Society
- W *Wan xuzang jing* 卍續藏經. 150 vols., ed. Xinwenfeng Bianshenbu 新文豐編審部. Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chuban.

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