

# The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries

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## I

Because philogyny is not a feature of scriptural Buddhism<sup>1</sup> it is preferable to look in sources other than *sutra* or scripture literature to try to discover the significance of Buddhism for women. The subject of this paper is the Chinese Buddhist monastic order for women and is a preliminary sketch for a more detailed study developing out of investigations based primarily upon, but not restricted to a collection of biographies edited in A.D. 516, called the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* (*Lives of the Nuns*, hereafter abbreviated *PCNC*).<sup>2</sup> The complexity of the early history of Chinese Buddhist practice, and difficulties inherent in the sources, require that many topics be noted only briefly, but the general purpose

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1. Certain texts have been cited as exceptions to the general Buddhist rule that women are inferior to men. Alex and Hideko Wayman, for example, in the introduction to their translation of the *Srimaladevi Sutra* (*The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*, [New York, 1974]), pp. 35-36, suggest that the *Srimala* gave women a much more elevated position than elsewhere in the Buddhist canon, even more so than in the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa*. The *Vimalakirti* may be used to claim equality for women on the basis of the doctrine of emptiness, especially as argued by the goddess who defeated Sariputra the Wise in debate, but that either of these texts advocated an elevated position for women is questionable. Queen Srimala and the goddess in *Vimalakirti* are two of the many varieties of the eloquent female found in Buddhist texts who is often identified as the daughter of a king—sometimes a human king, sometimes a dragon king. The eloquent female is actually a great (male) bodhisattva. Neither Queen Srimala nor the goddess is related to or is an exemplar for women. [The editors regret it was not feasible to reproduce the appropriate diacritical marks in romanized Sanskrit and Japanese words used in this article, nor to reproduce in full the very rich documentation submitted.]

2. *PCNC* in *Taisho shinshu daizokyo*, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe (hereafter abbreviated as T.), 50:2063. Arthur Waley in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, ed. Edward Conze (Oxford, 1954), pp. 291-295, has translated parts of three biographies from the *PCNC*: I.1, II.14, IV.4. Arthur Wright has trans. I.2 in "The Biography of An Ling-shou," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952):193-196.

is to show the importance of the Buddhist monastic institution for Chinese women in the Six Dynasties period (265-589) and to give some glimpses of their life within it.

Buddhist goals were never forbidden the female sex. The conservative Pali Canon, the sacred collection of the Theravada school, a sect of the Disciples' Vehicle, preserves the *Therigatha*, or *Psalms of the Sisters*,<sup>3</sup> an early text clearly indicating that women, too, attained enlightenment and nirvana. The Great Vehicle (Mahayana) rather than the Disciples' Vehicle flourished in China, however, and certain developments in Mahayana doctrine seem at first glance to impede the path of women seeking the Way.

The "five obstacles for women," an early, pre-Mahayana doctrine, says that a woman cannot become 1) Brahma, 2) Sakra, 3) Mara, 4) a Cakravartin or 5) Buddha, (without first becoming a man).<sup>4</sup> This doctrine could safely be ignored until Mahayana thought changed the goal of Buddhist practice from arhatship to buddhahood. Far from being a plot to deny women enlightenment, this change was instead a development sparked by sectarian rivalries. Here, again, the consequence was not severe. Attaining buddhahood required aeons of striving along the bodhisattva path, and once beyond a certain stage on that path a bodhisattva is never again reborn as a woman through the force of karmic process.<sup>5</sup> If that is still too difficult, the Mahayana Amitabha cult further simplifies the situation, allowing that a woman concentrating upon Amitabha Buddha may be reborn in his paradise as a male.<sup>6</sup>

These Mahayana developments represent the type of Buddhism eventually embraced by many Chinese women.<sup>7</sup> Theoretically, there-

3. Translated by Carolyn Rhys Davids, *Pali Text Society Translation Series*, vol. 1 (London, 1948).

4. See e.g., *The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-nikaya)*, III.65-66; *Chung-a-han ching*, T.I.26.28 (607.b.10-15); *Tseng-i-a-han ching*, T.II.125.56 (757.c.24-29), etc. In the *Tseng-i* the Buddha says the woman will eventually attain supreme, perfect enlightenment (758.a.1). See also the *Lotus Sutra*, 12 (ch. 4, 35.c.9-19—Kumarajiva's translation and ch. 6, 106.a.14-25—Dharmaraksa's translation), and Leon N. Hurvitz, *The Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York, 1976), pp. 199-201.

5. Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi, 1970), pp. 223-225 and passim.

6. This is not the place for a detailed comparison of the *Sukhavativyuha Sutras* and the vows. The two versions of the *Smaller Sukhavati* (T.XII.366, 367) do not specify that a female takes a male body upon entering the Pure Land. The several versions of the *Larger Sukhavati* (T.XII.360, 361, 362, 363, 364) with one exception (361) contain the vow guaranteeing a male body to female petitioners.

7. Buddhist texts arrived in China after a long history of development, and the doctrinal variety and inconsistency posed major problems worked out eventually in the Chinese Buddhist schools. See Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1959); Richard H. Robinson, *Early Madhyamika in India and China* (Madison, 1967); Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, 1964); Leon N. Hurvitz,

fore, no real doctrinal obstacles faced a Chinese female Buddhist. Organizationally, the Buddhist monastic order for women depended upon the order for men,<sup>8</sup> while the reverse was not the case. This fact alone more than any doctrine could deny women an opportunity to engage in full-time practice because the members of the order for men may be either unable or unwilling to take on the responsibility for the order for women.

One of the three categories of Buddhist texts, the vinaya (monastic rules), codified monastic structure. In China, far more than any doctrinal consideration, a lack of vinaya texts, consequent inferior monastic organisation and the general Chinese antipathy towards a deliberate celibate life such as that required by Buddhist monasticism, all hindered the establishment and development of the Chinese Buddhist monastic order for women.

## II

Compared to the *Kao-seng chuan* (*Lives of Eminent Monks*)<sup>9</sup> the *PCNC* is a thin document indeed. Nevertheless, it preserves, in the fashion of its time, a record of the origins and early growth of the Chinese Buddhist order for women.

We must first realise the limitations of the *PCNC* as a historical document. The author of the preface says it well:

the years go by and the pure rules are gradually forsaken, but [the nuns'] fine manner will be a model for a millenium. The achievement of their aspirations is not yet collected into books and writings, and I have frequently deplored this. It is a long time since I first began extensively to gather epitaph eulogies, widely searching in notes and collections. Sometimes I interviewed those who had heard a lot about it; sometimes I inquired from old people. Explaining and ordering

*Chih-i: An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Buddhist Monk* in *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, vol. 12 (Bruges, 1963).

8. E.g., *Cullavagga*, X, I.4, 6; *Dharmaguptaka-karman*, T.XXII, 1434, et al.

9. T.L.2059 by Hui-chiao of the Liang Dynasty (502-557) covering the period 67-519. He completed the work "about 530" (see Arthur Wright, "Hui-chiao's *Lives of Eminent Monks*," *Silver Jubilee Volume of Jimbunkagakukenyusho* [Zinbunkagakukenyusyo] (Kyoto, 1954), p. 400). Hui-chiao depended in part upon the *Ming-seng chuan*, a collection of monks' biographies edited by Pao-ch'ang, the presumed editor of the *PCNC*. The complete *Ming-seng chuan* is no longer extant. The table of contents and short passages were copied by a Japanese Buddhist monk in A.D. 1235, and these are referred to as the *Mei-so-den-sho*, which has been discussed in Wright, and in Kasuga Reichi, "Jodokyo-shiryō to shite no Meisoden-shishicho Meisoden-yobuncho narabi ni Morukunyorai kannochō dai-shi shoin no Meisoden ni tsuite," *Zoku-zokyo*, ser. 2 (Tokyo, 1905-1912), part 2z, case 7, vol. 1. The late Arthur E. Link, of the University of British Columbia, has translated the entire *Kao-seng chuan* into English, although his translation, alas, is still in manuscript.

[the material] from beginning to end, I wrote down their biographies. Beginning with the *sheng-p'ing* period [357-361] of the [Eastern] Chin Dynasty and ending with the *t'ien-chien* period [502-519] of the Liang Dynasty, there are altogether sixty-five persons. I did not add elaborate embellishments; I worked to preserve the essential facts hoping that those who seek liberation will exert the wish to emulate [the nuns'] virtue...(934.b-c)

The nuns of the biographies were, in other words, intended to be exemplary models, and therefore we shall find, on the whole, ideal types, "proofs" of the efficacy of Buddhism. Despite a variety of sources, the collection is a unit. Though the ostensive theme is at odds with our own purposes, within that work it is possible to discover something of the facts.

The *PCNC* as a collection can be no earlier than A.D. 516, the latest death date recorded in the text. Editorship is attributed to Shih Pao-ch'ang (fl. 495-516)<sup>10</sup> of Chuang-yen Monastery in Chien-k'ang, capital city of the Liang Dynasty (502-554). His name is not connected with the *PCNC* until the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). In the catalogue of scriptures, the *K'ai-yüan shih-chiao lu* compiled in A.D. 730, the *PCNC* was first admitted to the canon of Chinese Buddhist scripture.<sup>11</sup> According to this catalogue, in the year A.D. 516 Pao-ch'ang was ordered by imperial command to compile the *Ching-lü i-hsiang* and in the same year (most likely) he also edited the *PCNC*.<sup>12</sup>

The greater number of extant sources for the *PCNC* is to be found among fragments from the now-lost work, the *Ming-hsiang-chi* by Wang Yen (late fifth century) compiled after 479.<sup>13</sup> This book indicates the type of tale we are dealing with. The earlier biographies in the *PCNC* (from Chin and Sung Dynasties, i.e., *chuan* 1 and 2) are mostly tales of the marvellous. The closer one approaches the Liang Dynasty, the more

10. Biography in *Hsü kao-seng chuan*, T.L.2060. 1, 426.b-c.

11. T.55.2155, compiled by the monk Shih Chih-sheng, whose biography is in *Sung kao-seng chuan*, T.L.2061. 733.c.26. See ch. 6, 538.a.1, 3-9.

12. Extant. T.L.III.2121. A curious detail is that the *PCNC* is not quoted in major encyclopedic collections. Those collections, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, from which are taken the surveying fragments of lost works such as the *Ming-hsiang-chi*, do not quote the *PCNC* although they quote sources of the *PCNC*. These major collections were compiled in the north, and perhaps the *PCNC* circulated only in a limited area in the south for some time.

13. Wright, "Lives," p. 418, n.6. T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han wei liang-chin nan-pei ch'ao fo-chiao shih* [History of Buddhism in the Han, Wei Chin and Northern and Southern Dynasties] (Peking, 1955), p. 579, says it was compiled at the beginning of the *chien-yüan* period (479-482) of Ch'i. These fragments have been brought together by Lu Hsün in *Ku hsiao-shuo kou-ch'en* [A Study of Ancient Fiction], 2 vols. (Hong Kong, 1967).

relatively sober the accounts become. It is possible that certain of the biographies, especially those found in several extant versions or fragments, e.g. Tao-jung or the Nun Ch'ung (II.7), have their origins in legends sprung up around Taoist or even shamanist women, and as the new faith, Buddhism, filtered in, the affiliation of the subject was adapted to serve a new audience. Comparison reveals that all the biographies having more than one extant version are abbreviated from a longer original.<sup>14</sup> We have only one complete original source, the biography of the nun Ching-hsiu (IV.1) written by Shen Yüeh, a Buddhist writer of the Six Dynasties period.<sup>15</sup> This, too, Pao-ch'ang abbreviated.

In short, Pao-ch'ang used what material he could find, wherever he could find it, and his purpose being didactic and laudatory, the criteria for selection follow more closely our own tradition of hagiography.

### III

There may have been foreign nuns in China prior to the arrival of Singhalese nuns in A.D. 429, perhaps as early as late first century A.D.<sup>16</sup> The first recorded Chinese nun, however, received ordination in 317. Chung Ling-i of P'eng-ch'eng<sup>17</sup> whose religious name was Ching-chien (I.1) took only the ten vows of a novice (*sramaneriika*) at that time, not receiving full ordination until 357, a few years at most before her death at age 70; other Chinese women were fully ordained nuns prior to that year, but Ching-chien is called first because of her novice vows.<sup>18</sup> She received her ordination in Lo-yang using a now lost rule book for nuns.

14. The *Ming-hsiang chi* fragments are themselves probably abbreviated.

15. 441-513 A.D. *tzu*, *Hsiu-wen*, poet and author of the *Sung-shu*, *Ssu-sheng-p'u* and other secular works. Also author of essays dealing with Buddhist topics. See especially the *Kuang-hung-ming chi*, T.LII.2103. He served in various official posts during the Liu Sung and Ch'i Dynasties. The biography of Ching-hsiu is found in *Kuang-hung-ming chi*, 23, and also in *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng, ts'e* (Shanghai, 1934), 506, pp. 10b-11a, with slight variations.

16. In late collections such as the *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi*, T.XLIX.2035., we read that Emperor Ming of Han (r.58-75) decreed that ten monasteries were to be built in Lo-yang, seven outside the city wall to house monks and three within the city wall to house nuns (329.c.23). This statement is repeated in other collections as well and derives from the now-lost work, the *Han ming-ti fa-pen-wei-chuan*, believed to have been compiled around A.D. 520. The legends surrounding Emperor Ming obscure all fact. It is known that there were foreign monks in China in the first century A.D., and that is all that can be said. There may or may not have been some foreign nuns. Henri Maspéro, "Le songe et L'ambassade de l'Empereur Ming," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême orient* 10 (1910):95-130; Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 28-29; and, in general, K.A. Cissel (K.A. Tsai), "The Legacy of the Singhalese Nuns in China," *World Buddhism* (1972).

17. P'eng-ch'eng was an important early centre of Buddhism in China. Henri Maspéro, "Les origines de la communauté bouddhiste de Loyang," *Journal Asiatique* (1934):87-107.

18. I have elsewhere discussed the matter of the first Chinese nun in detail. K.A. Cissel (K.A. Tsai), "The *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan*: Biographies of Famous Chinese Nuns from 317-516 C.E." (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1972).

From the first, not only Chinese resistance to supposed unfilial consequences but also inadequate representation of the vinaya texts hampered the establishment and spread of Buddhist monastic institutions. Chinese interest in Buddhism centered first on magical practices and then on philosophy and metaphysics. Despite the efforts of Tao-an (312-385), the great disciple of Fo-t'u-teng, and Tao-an's own disciple Hui-yüan, to establish and regulate monastic life, it was the early fifth century before vinaya collections were being fully translated.<sup>19</sup> This curious deficiency of fundamental institutions within Buddhism delayed the establishment of the Chinese Buddhist female order.

Regulations governing the four basic activities of ordination, instruction, confession of faults and the *paravarana* ceremony following the summer retreat require that the ritual be carried out with participation by monks.

Our present concern is the ordination ceremony. According to the PCNC the first nun, Ching-chien, received merely the precepts of a novice, and she received them from monks only as there were no nuns in China at that time. For an initiation to be fully orthodox, however, the female candidate must receive the rules not only from ten monks of at least ten years seniority as fully ordained monks, but also from ten such nuns.<sup>20</sup>

Ching-chien is said to have been instructed in Dharma by a Chinese monk, and when reading a scripture he had lent her she came across the terms *bhiksu* (monk) and *bhiksuni* (nun). Her teacher explained that the two orders existed in the western regions, but that in China the laws were incomplete. Ching-chien noted that since the books spoke of monks and nuns, two different terms, the two orders probably had different rules. Her Chinese instructor quoted a foreign instructor as saying that the difference is that nuns have five hundred rules (as compared to two hundred fifty for monks).<sup>21</sup> Thus we see that early in

19. Fo-t'u-teng's biography is in *Kao-seng chuan*, T.L.2059. 9, 383.b-387.a. Trans. in Arthur Wright, "Fo-t'u-teng, a Biography," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 11(1948):321-371. Tao-an's biography is in *Kao-seng chuan*, 5, 351.c-354.a, and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi* T.L.V.2145. 15, 108.a-109.b; Trans. in Arthur Link, "Biography of Shih Tao-an," *T'oung Pao*, 46 (1958):1-48; Hui-yüan's biography in *Kao-seng chuan*, 6, 357.c-361.b, and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi*, 15, 109.b-110.c. Trans. in Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 240-253. See also *ibid.*, pp. 188, 229; Ch'en, *Buddhism*, p. 90.

20. E.g., *Mahisasaka-vinaya (Wu-fen lü)* T.XXII.1421. 186.a.27-b.3; 187.c.7-9; 188.c.22ff; 189.a.29ff. *Dharmaguptaka-bhiksuni-karman (Ssu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni chieh-mo fa)*. *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya (Ssu-fen lü)* ch. 48-49. *Dharmaguptaka-karman (T'an-wu-te lü pu tsa chieh-mo)*. *Karman (Chieh-mo)* 1600.a.6ff. These last three works are in T.XXII.1429, 1432, 1434. *Sarvastivada-vinaya (Shih-sung lü)* T.XXIII.1435. 332.c.27.

21. This is the traditional way of saying that the nuns have more rules than the monks. Number of rules for nuns: Dharmaguptaka, 348; Mahisasaka, 373; Sarvastivada, 354; Mahasamghika, 290; Pali Canon, 311; Tibetan Canon, 364; Mulasarvastivada, 309. See Mochizuki Shinkyö, *Bukkyo-daijiten*, 10 vols. (Tokyo, 1955-1963), 5:4292.

the fourth century knowledge of the vinaya, at least as it pertained to nuns, was somewhat hazy among the Chinese who still had to rely on foreign monks for adequate information.

Chien received the precepts of a novice from the foreign instructor, an acquaintance of Fo-t'u-teng. She and twenty-four other women established the Chu-lin Convent at the Western Gate of the Palace District in Lo-yang. Nevertheless, there was no female *acarya* (instructor), so Chien, although newly ordained as a novice only, was consulted in matters of doctrine.

Later, in the years 335-342, a monk of unknown origin obtained a copy of the *Mahasanghika-bhiksuni Rites and Rule Book* (now lost) in Central Asia and translated it in Lo-yang. In 357 a foreign monk, T'an-mo-chieh-to, set up an ordination platform to ordain nuns using this newly translated book. A Chinese monk objected to this action on the basis of another vinaya text (exact text unknown), saying that the rules were deficient, and he left the area, presumably miffed.<sup>22</sup> Chien and three others received full ordination from the order of monks.

The PCNC records that during the Liu Sung Dynasty (420-479) at least two separate groups of Singhalese nuns came to the Chinese capital, one in 429 and one in 433 or 434.<sup>23</sup> The biographies of the two foreign monks, Gunavarman (fl. 431) and Samghavarman (fl. 433/423-442), who were instrumental in establishing the truly orthodox lineage for the Chinese nuns, both mention these visits although neither gives specific dates.<sup>24</sup>

The first group of Singhalese nuns questioned the orthodoxy of the Chinese nuns' lineage, which the Chinese women defended using the Buddha's step-mother as a precedent, for she had received ordination from the Buddha only.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, when the second group of Singhalese nuns arrived in 433 (or 434) providing a quorum of fully ordained nuns to help administer ordination, the Chinese nuns took advantage of the opportunity, and in 433 or 434 the foreign monk Samghavarman administered re-ordination to over 300 persons at Nan-lin Monastery.<sup>26</sup>

22. For slightly differing views of what took place see, Tsukamoto Zenryu, *Chugoku-bukkyo-tsushi* (Tokyo, 1968), p. 438, and Waley, *Buddhist Texts*, p. 292.

23. PCNC, II.14; III.15.

24. *Kao-seng chuan*, T.L.2059. 3, 341.a-b, 342. *Nan-shih* 78 gives 5th and 12th years of the *yüan-chia* period of Liu Sung. *Sung-shu* 97 gives 5 and 12th years; *Sung-shu* 5 gives 7th year; *Liang-shu* 54 gives 6th and 12th years. See Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 152, 371-372, for other details of Sino-Singhalese relations at that time; also Sylvain Lévi, "Les missions de Wang Hiuen Ts'e dans l'Inde," *Journal Asiatique*, 9th ser., 14 (1900):411-429.

25. I.B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (London, 1930), p. 138; *Cullavagga*, X.2.

26. The biography of Pao-hsien in the PCNC (II.21) says 434. The biography of Hui-kuo (II.1) says 432, and her death date is given as 433. See also *Ta-sung seng-shih lüeh*, "Ni te chieh yü" (238.b) which also says 434 and probably got the date from the PCNC; the

Gunavarman, a foreigner, and Fa-hsien, a Chinese, had both been to Ceylon gathering scriptures prior to their arrival in Chien-yeh in the early fifth century.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that Gunavarman, who was in Java just before going to China, joined one of the Singhalese missions en route to China. There are discrepancies in dating, however, that cannot be resolved. Gunavarman is recorded as having arrived in China in 431 and dying there the same year.<sup>28</sup> One *PCNC* biography, however (IV.1), states that he administered re-ordination in 434. In this biography the name Gunavarman is perhaps an error for Samghavarman.<sup>29</sup>

Three features are important: 1) The lineage of the order of nuns in China was made orthodox through transmission from the Singhalese order of nuns which received it from the time of the Buddha (so far as we know), via the Theravada school. The Theravada lineage for the order of nuns has since been broken and at present is not re-established. Theravada "nuns" (in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma) take only the vows of a novice. The Chinese lineage continues to this day without interruption (again, so far as we know) in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and until recently, in Vietnam. This orthodox Chinese lineage has now been introduced into the United States.<sup>30</sup>

2) Vinaya texts did not flood into China as did meditation, *prajna* or Amita texts. Only in the fifth century were complete vinaya texts made widely available through the efforts of Kumarajiva, Fa-hsien, Gunavarman, Samghavarman and others.<sup>31</sup> In the very early years of Buddhism in China there was great confusion in organising monastic life for lack of complete, authoritative rule books.

3) The foreign monks and nuns, rather than Chinese monks, seem, if the *PCNC* is accurate, to have been the key persons in establishing the order of nuns in China. Chih-shan (I.1),<sup>32</sup> Fo-t'u-teng (I.2), Gunavarman, Samghavarman, and the Singhalese nuns ordained Chinese women and showed concern for orthodoxy of lineage.

biography of Seng-kuo (II.14), says 433; the biography of Te-le (III.15) says 434. See also *Ta-sung seng-shih lüeh*, T.LIV.2126. 238.c.1.

27. Fa-hsien biography in T.LI.2085, *Kao-seng fa-hsien chuan*, translated by James Legge in *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1886) and in *Kao-seng chuan*, T.L.2059. 3, 337.b-338.b, and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi*, T.LV.2145. 15, 111.b-112.b. Gunavarman, biography in *Kao-seng chuan*, 3, 340.c and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi*, 14, 104.a.

28. Biography in *Kao-seng chuan* 3.

29. Samghavarman's biography (*Kao-seng chuan*, 3, 342.b-c, and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi*, 14, 104.c) states that Gunavarman was to have administered re-ordination but died, and after his death the Singhalese nun Tessara arrived in China with the second group of nuns.

30. Both monks and nuns of Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco went to Taiwan to receive full ordination. When these individuals have sufficient seniority to administer ordination, the lineage will be fully transplanted to the United States.

31. See *Répertoire du canon bouddhique sino-japonais*, fasc. annexe du Hobogirin, 2d. ed., ed. Paul Demiéville et al (Paris, 1978); also T'ang, *History of Buddhism*, pp. 824-829.

32. He has no biography in the *Kao-seng chuan*. He is listed in the table of contents to the *Ming-seng chuan* 19 under "foreign meditation masters."



IV

Unlike the other Buddhist biographical collections which are arranged by category, the *PCNC* is arranged chronologically. Nevertheless, Pao-ch'ang, in his preface, mentions four categories of nuns whom he highly esteems: the faithful and steadfast (II.11, I.8—who resist and refuse marriage); meditators and contemplatives (II.18, II.14—those who fall into deep trance and seem like wood and rock); the ascetics (II.13, III.11—the fire suicides); and those whose influence was felt far and wide (I.4, III.8—those who were learned and had many disciples). We shall return to each of these categories.

Most of the biographies describe the causes and conditions of a woman's becoming a nun. As expected, faith and religious aspiration are frequently cited, but these often derive from other situations and in themselves tell us little.

Family problems, especially impending marriage, including one case of a widow refusing to remarry, figure in seven biographies (I.2, I.6, I.8, II.11, III.13, IV.3, IV.14). In one case a woman sought divorce because her husband did not behave with propriety during the mourning period for his parents. T'an-hui, in IV.3, "made a serious vow, saying, 'If I cannot follow my religious intentions, but rather am forced [into marriage] then I shall set fire to myself.'" The threat of suicide, though not necessarily by fire, is found also in secular *Lieh-nü* biographies in the dynastic histories. The convent was also a haven for refugees from the frequent and violent political and social disturbances that characterised the Six Dynasties period. Families were uprooted and dispersed; some women had been abandoned or orphaned (I.1, I.11, II.2, II.16, II.22, II.15).

Personal difficulties such as illness or grief at the loss of a parent also led women into the religious life (II.5, II.6, II.21, III.4). Vows taken on one's own or by one's parents—for specified or unspecified reasons—also resulted in a woman taking up the religious life when the condition of the vow was met (II.6, III.3, II.3, II.5).

The list of reasons for joining the order reveals the social as well as personal usefulness of the institution. In addition to other no doubt very positive attractions, the convent was a fairly safe place for an unprotected woman to find protection; women could find a home in the "homeless" life.

Religious aspirations often appeared at a very tender age, and in one biography (II.14) are especially pointed out as the result of good seeds planted in former lives. One nun entered a convent at age eight (III.15), and it is implied that another was placed in a convent by age six (III.3).

Eleven are said to have gone forth when young (*shao*) or as a child (*yu*), though the usual age for leaving the secular life was between seventeen and twenty-two. The vinaya regulations require a minimum age of twenty for full ordination.<sup>33</sup>

For those nuns whose age at death is recorded, thirty-seven out of sixty-five, the average age at death was 73.3 (Chinese) years. The youngest was twenty-five; the next youngest fifty-six. All others were over sixty.<sup>34</sup>

Forty-seven of the sixty-five major figures, about seventy percent, either moved to or originally lived in the Southern capital, Chien-K'ang, or Chien-yeh—the present-day Nanking. The four who lived in Lo-yang, the Northern capital lost to the barbarian dynasties in the early fourth century, all date from the first years of Eastern Chin (317-420). Places of origin given in the biographies may or may not be actual places of origin. These locations may also refer to the ancestral home of the woman's family. While some nuns travelled fairly extensively, records of nuns living in areas far from the capital are, however, very few. Two lived in Ssu-ch'uan (II.13, II.23 [who moved there from Ch'ing-hai]); two sisters were from Kuang-tung (III.1); one nun was from Kao-ch'ang in Central Asia (IV.4). The rest were from central eastern areas: Hu-pei, An-hui, Chiang-su, and Che-chiang.

The two nuns from Ssu-ch'uan were fire suicides; the record from Kuang-tung has little of factual substance and is a tale also found in the *Ming-hsiang chi*.<sup>35</sup> The biography of the nun from Kao-ch'ang is a tale unique in the *PCNC*. It contains a brief biography of a monk, Fa-hui.<sup>36</sup> This tale of the *acarya* Fa-hui, dating from the late fifth or early sixth century, reminds one of the unusual teaching methods that eventually came to prominence in the Ch'an school. Nose tweaks, pushing and yelling, encouraging "profane" actions—in this case drinking wine—became part of the Ch'an master's ritual to lead disciples to enlightenment.

33. E.g., *Karman*, T.XXII.1433. 1061.c.21; *Dharmaguptaka-karman*, T.XXII.1432. 1067.b.13-14. This seems not to be a rigid rule. Elsewhere in the same texts we read of twelve-year-olds receiving full ordination. The emphasis in the vinaya for women lies not so much upon age at ordination, but upon the two-year novitiate training.

34. Nuns who lived to a great age had a long lifetime in which to build a reputation. There may be a connection with the Taoist emphasis upon length of life as an indication of holiness.

35. In *Fa-yüan chu-lin*, T.LIII.2122. ch. 5 and 22; Lu Hsün, p. 506.

36. The biography of Fa-hui is found, at least in part, in the *Mei-so-den-sho* (*Ming-seng chuan*), but is not found in the *Kao-seng chuan* which incorporated portions of the *Ming-seng chuan*. The extant sections of this biography and the portion found in the *PCNC* are identical.

At that time there was a Dharma Master, Fa-hui...he was the *acarya* [instructor] to the nuns for the whole country of Kao-ch'ang. Later, the (nun) Feng suddenly said to Fa-hui, "Acarya, you are not yet perfect. I am a good friend [kalyanamitra]. You, acarya, should go to Kucha, beneath the canopy at Chin-hua Monastery to hear Chih-yüeh, and there you will get the victorious Dharma." Fa-hui listened to and followed her advice. He went to the monastery to see Chih-yüeh, who was delighted (to see him) and offered him a pint of grape wine. Fa-hui was alarmed, "I have come to seek the victorious Dharma, but instead you offer me a drink. I am not willing to drink anything profane." Chih-yüeh pushed him around and immediately ordered him out. Fa-hui retreated and thought, "I have come from afar without reaching my goal. Perhaps I shouldn't refuse." He quickly drank it. Drunk, he vomited, and dazed and confused, passed out. Chih-yüeh himself then went elsewhere. When Fa-hui came to, he realised he had violated the precepts and was very much ashamed. He struck himself, and, remorseful at what he had done, he wanted to take his own life. Because of this thought he attained the third fruit [of non-returner]. Chih-yüeh came back and asked, "Have you got it?" "Yes," he replied. Thereupon he returned to Kao-ch'ang.... [PCNC, IV.4]

Many of the nuns who lived in the southern capital were from the same few convents: the Chien-fu Convent, dating from 344 to at least 492 (I.5, I.7, II.2, II.4, III.4, III.6); Yung-an Convent, dating from 354 to at least 501 (I.6, I.13, II.11, II.7, II.2, IV.9, III.15); Ch'ing-yüan Convent, dating from 425 to at least 505 (II.17, III.8, III.15, IV.1, IV.6); P'u-hsien Convent, dating from at least 465 to at least 492 (II.21, II.22, III.3, III.9, III.11, III.10); Ch'an-lin Convent, dating from 463 to at least 513 (IV.1, IV.2, IV.5, IV.10); and Ching-fu Convent, dating from 422 to the time of the compilation of the biographies, i.e. about 516 (II.1, II.14, II.18). These convents were probably all still flourishing at the time Pao-ch'ang put together the *PCNC*, and he would have had access to convent records and recollections.<sup>37</sup> Individuals listed under more than one convent indicate that several nuns moved from one to another. Most of these major convents were built by a member of the aristocracy, ruling bureaucracy or imperial family.

The secular families from which the nuns came cannot be identified positively with the documented families of the southern capital. In contrast with the *Kao-seng chuan*, however, the *PCNC* provides the secular name and place of origin for fifty-five of the sixty-five individuals, and seven report that a father or male ancestor held an official position of one kind or other.<sup>38</sup> It is perhaps reasonable to conjecture

37. He does indeed make notes to that effect in II.1, II.10, II.13.

upper-class urban background for many nuns recorded in the *PCNC* because of their easy familiarity with famous monks, secular literati, members of the court and the royal family including emperors and their consorts.

A striking feature in the *PCNC* is the recorded high rate of literacy among the nuns. Of the total number of sixty-five, there are only twelve about whom there is no mention of ability to read and write. A literacy rate of at least eighty percent is difficult to explain.

Many nuns are described as being educated in both secular and sacred literature, that is, in both the Confucian classics and the Buddhist scriptures; some are also described as child prodigies, memorizing huge texts after a single reading. This is perhaps in most cases mere pious hagiography. Another fairly common accomplishment is the rapid chanting of scriptures.<sup>39</sup> One nun (III.6) is said to have written several tens of rolls of commentaries to the scriptures, but none has survived. Several nuns engaged in debate with famous monks of the time and could not be confounded (see esp. IV.8). Nuns studied and gave lectures on various scriptures, the most popular being the *Lotus*, the Kuan-yin chapter in the *Lotus*, the *Mahaparinirvana*, the prajnaparamita literature, the *Vimalakirtinirdesa* and the *Srimaladevi*.

The general level of literacy among Chinese women during the Six Dynasties cannot be determined. Confucian attitudes worked against a literary education for women, even though there were some famous literatae such as Pan Chao (d. 116) of the Latter Han (25-220). Pan Chao, in her treatise *Women's Precepts (Nü hsieh)*, advocated at least minimal literary education for girls, but this plea went unheeded, while the other sections of her work instructing women in subservience and

38. See Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 6-9. He says that eighty percent of the monks in the *Kao-seng chuan* came from unknown secular families. In many cases the place of origin is also unknown. This forms part of Zürcher's argument that the Buddhist clergy incorporated members from the lower strata of society and that the rigid class distinctions of China of the Six Dynasties did not appear in Buddhist institutions. The nuns' biographies were drawn from sources within the capital itself while the *Kao-seng chuan* has broader geographical representation, which may in part explain the missing names. This is not to say that Zürcher has misread the "argument *ex silentio*" (p. 7); rather, the much more limited representation of the *PCNC* is underscored.

39. I.3 read through the *Lotus Sutra* once in a day and a night. II.3 chanted the *Lotus*, *Surangama* and others, and in ten days could read them right through. II.5 chanted the *Lotus* 3,000 times. II.9 chanted two rolls of the *Larger Prajnaparamita* in a day. II.11 in five days chanted clear through the *Mahaparinirvana* once. II.15 could chant 450,000 words of scripture (from memory). III.3 read several hundred rolls of sutras. IV.2 chanted the *Lotus Sutra* seven times in a day and night (which is approximately 346 characters/minute; either she spoke truly fast or seven, *ch'i*, is an error for one, *i*). These claims should be compared with the speed of classical Greek oratory: W.B. Stanford, *The Sound of Greek* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 36-37.

obedience were held up as models for feminine behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

Despite biases as flagrant as those found in the *PCNC*, the biographies of imperial consorts (*huāng-hou*) and illustrious women (*lieh-nü*) found in the dynastic histories, more specifically from the *Hou-han-shu* through the *Sui-shu*, present some interesting elements. Given the unrepresentative sample and the different methods and motives of the biographers, conclusions drawn from the material, if any, must be tentative.

Forty of the 260 individuals in the dynastic histories consulted are definitely or possibly literate. The percentage may be higher than this because certain biographers seem not to have recorded whether or not a woman could read and write.<sup>41</sup> Our two highly unrepresentative samples, the secular histories and the *PCNC*, reveal a curious discrepancy: the remarkably high rate of literacy among the nuns. Explanation can be found, for the time being, only among plausible conjectures:

1. It is a cliché or stock motif;
2. Pao-ch'ang admired literacy and scholarship;
3. Literate women joined the order, being already unusual in their literacy;
4. Women received their education after joining the order; and, related to this,
5. Some women joined the order to be able to pursue literary studies—in other words, to become scholars.

If conjectures 4. and 5. have any foundation then we see immediately the values and importance of the Chinese Buddhist convent for women of the time. There were no indigenous institutions providing formal literary education for women.

Another aspect of this record of education and accomplishment that must be mentioned is that the *PCNC*, though filled for the most part with Buddhist content, falls clearly within the venerable tradition of the *Lieh-nü chuan* of Liu Hsiang (77-76 B.C.) and subsequent *Lieh-nü* collections. Just as those Buddhist texts most similar to Chinese literary style and taste became ultimately the most accepted and popular,<sup>42</sup> the very act of recording the lives of Buddhist nuns in the popular *lieh-nü* tradi-

40. Text in *Hou-han-shu*, 84, biography of Pan Chao (vol. 10, p. 2784 of punctuated edition [Peking, 1965]). Translations in Nancy Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (New York, 1932), and Robert Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden, 1961). Van Gulik has called this work "One of the most bigoted books in Chinese literature" (p. 97). Swann's study of Pan Chao has a different evaluation.

41. The *Sung shu* mentions no literary talent among the sixteen women given biographies. The same is true for the *San kuo chih* (with one possible exception), the *Pei ch'i shu* and the *Pei chou shu*. The latter two are not surprising since they concern non-Chinese dynasties.

42. E.g., *Lotus*, *Vimalakirti*, *Prajnaparamita*, *Diamond*, and *Heart Sutras*.

tion served to naturalize the foreign religion and to make the women more attractive models. Throughout the biographies, qualities admired in the *lieh-nü* are ascribed to the Buddhist nuns. The relatively sober tone of the biographies, especially those from the Ch'i and Liang dynasties, fairly free from arcane jargon, conforms closely to the tone of the dynastic histories and the *lieh-nü* writings.<sup>43</sup>

## V

During the Six Dynasties period, Buddhism, in study and discussion, was self-consciously distinguished from Taoism and Confucianism. The stated objective of the collection of the *PCNC* is to demonstrate the efficacy of Buddhist teaching and ideal Buddhist practice. In fact, these Buddhist practices were to a great degree eclectic, fusing not only quite distinct types of Buddhist practice based on different texts and notions, but also incorporating, either wittingly or unwittingly, many indigenous elements.

Descriptions in the *PCNC* of cult practices devoted to Kuan-yin, Amitabha, Maitreya or Pindola reveal both the efficacy of Buddhist teaching and the holiness of the practitioner. The point of these passages seems to be that cultic practice is effective if one is sufficiently sincere in faith and attitude. Kuan-yin responded to a nun in distress (I.7), staying the knives of robbers raised against her, thus confirming both her worth and the promises in the Kuan-yin chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>44</sup> Kuan-yin also rescued women from illness (II.6) and husbands (II.11). Nuns calling upon Amitabha or Maitreya were granted rebirth in the appropriate paradise (II.2), or in heaven (II.12, IV.1).<sup>45</sup> The

43. It is necessary to compare both the secular and Buddhist biographies with the Taoist biographies, a native non-Confucian tradition, to get a more complete picture. This, however, leads to complications beyond the scope of this paper. The flavour of biographies of Taoist women in the *Yün chi ch'i ch'ien* (abbreviated hereafter *YCCC*) (Taipei, 1978), *ch.* 115-116, a Sung Dynasty collection (ca. 1025) of major Taoist writings is quite different from the Buddhist and secular biographies, and the Buddhist ones conform more closely to secular biography. Nevertheless, there are also similarities between the *PCNC* and the Taoist biographies indicating that the Buddhist biographies received Taoist influence. One example is concourse with animals, especially deer and tigers, a feature not particularly associated with *lieh-nü* in the secular tradition. There are also Taoist women who must persuade parents not to marry them off (e.g., *YCCC* p. 1619, 1622). The biography of Hsü Hsien-ku (*YCCC* p. 1614) is very much like the biography of Hui-chan in the *PCNC* (I.7). Both are alone, both are accosted by a group of men (robbers in the Buddhist tale, Buddhist monks in the Taoist tale), both are threatened with a knife, both intimidate the group of men with bold and peculiar action removing an article of clothing. The two tales diverge at this point.

44. 262, 56.c.16ff; 263, 129.a.11ff; 264, 191.c.10ff. See preceding note for a Taoist in the same predicament.

45. Western Paradise of Amitabha Buddha, T.XII. 310(5), 360-364; Maitreya's

Pindola cult likewise “proved” both the promises of the scriptures<sup>46</sup> and the holiness of the nun involved in the cult. Ching-hsiu (IV.1), for example, requested Pindola to bathe and was rewarded by hearing the sound of the water dipper being used, even though no one was visible. Another practice of the Pindola cult was asking him to eat. During the meal a fresh flower was placed under the mat reserved for Pindola, and if he had truly been present, the flower would not be withered.<sup>47</sup> This test was also applied to nuns and monks suspected of being especially holy, as, for example, the nun Tao-jung (I.10).<sup>48</sup>

These practices and features of the career of the Chinese Buddhist nuns cannot be divided into neat, separate categories because they not only shade one into the other, but are added to, and mixed with, indigenous practices, the boundaries of which do not exactly coincide with the Buddhist ones.

Meditation, one of the four categories specifically mentioned by Pao-ch'ang in his preface, was an important part of life in the Chinese Buddhist convents. From our meagre records, however, we simply do not know the nuns' proficiency or attainments in terms of the traditional Buddhist goal of enlightenment.<sup>49</sup>

heaven, Tusita, T.XIV. 452, 456, 457. Paradise is a final release from earthly life. One goes directly to enlightenment from paradise without returning to a life on earth. Tusita Heaven, located in the desire-realm, is the abode of Maitreya, the next Buddha, and one born there may be reborn on earth again. Devotion to Maitreya is clearly rooted in Pre-Mahayana Buddhism, but in China, among the nuns at any rate, there is no evidence that devotees understood the considerable differences between the Tusita Heaven of Maitreya and the Pure Land of Amitabha. See Etienne Lamotte, *Histoire de Bouddhisme indien, des origines à l'ère Saka* (Louvain, 1958), pp. 775-788 and Paul Demiéville, “La Yogacarabhumi de Sangharaksa,” *Bulletin de L'école française d'Extrême Orient* 44 (1954):339-436, esp. pp. 376-395.

46. T.XXXII, 1689. Also Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes, “Les seize arhats protecteurs de la loi,” *Journal Asiatique*, 9th ser., 14 (1900):204-275 and Lamotte, *Histoire*, pp. 354-355. Pindola became an arhat, but he succumbed to his previous shortcomings when a layman held a contest of magic, the prize being a sandalwood bowl suspended in the air. Pindola, using the superpowers acquired from meditation, leaped into the air to retrieve the bowl and then flew around the village thrice. He presented the bowl to the master of ceremonies who filled it with delicacies, which appealed greatly to Pindola, formerly a gourmand. To punish him for having revealed his magic powers to a non-monk, and for his appetite, the Buddha directed Pindola to remain in the world until the end of time, to be a field of merit for all Buddhists.

47. T.XXXII, 784.b.22 and passim.

48. And also e.g., Gunavarman in *Kao-seng chuan*, 341.b.8-9. Tao-jung's “test” occurred during the reign of Ming-ti of Chin (323-326). The practice of placing a fresh flower under a mat, which seems to derive from the Pindola cult, is not in this biography noted in connection with Pindola. The cult of worship and requests to Pindola supposedly originated with Tao-an (312-385), late in his lifetime. See Lévi and Chavannes, “Les seize arhats,” and T'ang, *History of Buddhism*, p. 219.

49. The vinaya forbade making false claims for spiritual power and achievements, and keeping silent on the subject would be the prudent course. Further, it was also forbidden to

Nuns practiced under the tutelage of famous Buddhist meditation masters such as Kalayasas (fl. 424-442/432)<sup>50</sup> who apparently willingly took on female disciples, and one of these, T'an-hui (IV.3) is said to have realised, through her meditation, her Buddha-nature (*fo-hsing*) and also to have learned Mahayana doctrine, none of which she had learned from her teachers.<sup>51</sup>

The meditative trance described in the *PCNC* diverges from the accepted Buddhist norm, and was the kind of trance condemned as Hinayana (Disciples' Vehicle) by Seng-chao (374-414), the illustrious Chinese disciple of the translator Kumarajiva.<sup>52</sup> Another of Kalayasas' female disciples, Fa-pien (II.18) was one of three nuns whose meditative prowess is pictured in terms leading one not to Buddhist sources but to indigenous precedents of somewhat different character. Fa-pien, Seng-kuo (II.14) and Fa-hsiang (II.16) were known for their trances in which they appeared to be dead. Seng-kuo sat in meditation all day and the preceptor of the convent touched her and declared she had died. Her body was cold and her flesh was hard. They wanted to pick her up to take her away, but she then opened her eyes and laughed. It is said that "she stretched her spirit to the pure realm and her body was like dry wood."<sup>53</sup> P'u-chao (II.8) died and then revived, and during her temporary death had a vision of the Western Paradise, her posthumous destiny. These statements lauding the meditative capacities of the nuns bring to mind the Taoist "temporary death."<sup>54</sup>

display one's superpowers (a by-product of meditation) in front of laymen or non-Buddhists. This was Pindola's transgression. *Mahisasaka-bhiksuni-pratimoksa*, T.XXII.1423. 207.a.9-13; *Mahasamghika-bhiksuni-pratimoksa*, T.XXII.1427. 556.c.16-20; *Dharmaguptaka-bhiksuni-pratimoksa*, T.XXII.1431. 1031.b.26-c.1; *Sarvastivada-bhiksuni-pratimoksa*, T.XXIII.1437. 479.c.13-19. It is the fourth of the eight *parajika* offences for women, the punishment for which is expulsion from the community.

50. Biography in *Kao-seng chuan*, 3, 343.c.

51. T'an-hui's learning things directly through meditation and not from her teachers could be a veiled reference to revelation. A surge of Taoist revelations had occurred in the latter half of the fourth century: the Mao Shan revelation of 364-370 (the *Shang ch'ing*) and then the Ling Pao revelations of 397. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* 2 (Cambridge, 1956):157-158; Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching" in *Facets of Taoism*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, 1979), p. 187; Ch'en Kuo-fu, *Tao-tsang yüan-liu K'ao* [Researches on the origin and development of the Taoist canon] (Taipei, 1975). The first catalogue of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures, the *Ch'u-san-tsang chi-chi*, ch. 40, gives a notice that from 499 to 505 a young girl living in Ch'ing-yüan Convent, the same convent housing several of the nuns mentioned in the *PCNC*, chanted texts as they were revealed to her in trance. These texts are listed in the catalogue in the section of *i* or "suspect" texts.

52. Kumarajiva's biography is in *Kao-seng chuan*, 2, 330.a, and *Ch'u san-tsang chi-chi*, 14, 100.a.; Seng-chao's biography, *Kao-seng chuan*, 6, 365.a.

53. Cf. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* (New York, 1968), pp. 36, 116, 237.

54. Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, 2:294-304.



Furthermore, certain deaths recorded in the *PCNC* recall the "otherworldly summons" of the Taoist community.<sup>55</sup> The nuns Ling-tsung (I.11), P'u-chao and Fa-pien, among others, had foreknowledge of their destinies after death, and Fa-pien in particular was summoned to take the position of "lord" of a palace.<sup>56</sup> The nun Tao-jung (I.10) left behind bowl and robe, and in similar manner to the Taoist immortals mysteriously disappeared and was not seen again.<sup>57</sup> Ching-chien (I.1) ascended bodily to the sky, along a rainbow trail.<sup>58</sup> The nun Hui-ch'iuung (II.7) ordered her disciples to cut up her body upon her death to feed the wild animals. They could not bear to chop her up so they left her corpse on a mountain in Chü-jung County.<sup>59</sup> Ten days later they went back. The body was undisturbed by wild animals, and its complexion had not changed. For Taoists, lack of decay was one proof of immortality. Because the biography does not record the nun's diet, we have no way of knowing whether or not she was a pine-eater as were others who underwent some form of mummification.<sup>60</sup>

Apotheosis by fire within the early Buddhist monastic community in China<sup>61</sup> may be compared with certain Taoist notions, and perhaps the underlying stratum was shamanic practice in one of its more spectacular forms. One important feature was diet. The Buddhist tradition in China has always been strongly, even adamantly, vegetarian. This contrasts with both the Southeast Asian and Tibetan traditions. When we read, however, that certain nuns ate pine needles we must look elsewhere than in Buddhist scriptures for the practice. Eating of pine, whether the bark, resin, needles or cones, was one of the Taoist dietary practices designed

55. Strickmann, "On the Alchemy." These deaths were alchemical, and there is no sure evidence of death by drugs in the *PCNC* except perhaps in the poison murder of the nun Tao-hsing (I.9) by a Taoist nun. Nevertheless, certain dietary practices of the nuns indicate more than casual connection with this Taoist search for immortality through use of drugs.

56. Foreknowledge of death is Taoist, but is also Buddhist. The arhat was able to foretell his own death. The Buddha, for example knew when he would die. *Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta* in *Dialogues of the Buddha (Dīgha-nikāya)* ii, 134; E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History* (London, 1949), p. 150.

57. This is perhaps an echo of the Taoist apotheosis in which the sandals, clothing or sword is left behind, but no corpse is found. See Paul Demiéville, "Momies," *Journal des savants* (January, March, 1963), p. 148; Max Kaltenmark, *Le lie-sien-tchouan* (Peking, 1953), pp. 51-52.

58. Ascending bodily to the sky in broad daylight is a Taoist trait. See *ibid.*, p. 112; *Yün chi ch'i ch'ien* (Taipei, 1978), p. 1620.

59. The unspecified mountains could possibly be one of the Mao Shan peaks which are also known as the Chü-jung Mountains, and are a centre of Taoist activity, especially in the late fourth century.

60. See Demiéville, "Momies," pp. 148-149. He suggests that mummification in this manner is very rare among Taoists, but see Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, 5:2:300 where he gives reasons why he believes this process to be of Taoist origin.

61. Jacques Gernet, "Les suicides par le feu chez les bouddhistes chinois du Ve au Xe siècle," *Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des hautes études chinoises*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1960), pp. 527-558, esp. p. 556.

to lead to immortality. The Taoist belief in apotheosis by fire could only reinforce the *Lotus Sutra* description of the bodhisattva who gives himself as a burnt offering to the Three Treasures and is immediately reborn by transformation into a paradise.<sup>62</sup> Transformation by fire and mastery of fire are beliefs well-attested in many shamanic traditions all over the world.<sup>63</sup> This practice of suicide by fire also attests the practitioners' power of meditation. The fire sacrifices in the *PCNC* had Buddhist milieu and motivation. We are told for example that a nun (II.13) as she was burning declared that she had done this very thing in twenty-seven previous lives but only now had she attained the first fruit.<sup>64</sup>

Devotion to the vinaya was closely associated with vegetarianism, and was therefore connected with the dietary practices of the fire sacrificers, and was also associated with the maintenance of sexual integrity by keeping oneself free from proper (see the anti-marriage list) or improper sexual attentions (I.3, I.4, I.5, I.11, III.6). The biographer often stresses the nuns' scrupulous adherence to the vinaya almost as though it were a cult practice in and of itself. Further, he is careful throughout to show that Buddhist practice does not encourage actions fundamentally contrary to established tradition. Even the choosing of celibacy over marriage always received authorisation, whether from parent, magistrate or bodhisattva. Filial piety remained the norm and ideal, and this is shown, for example, in the biography of An Ling-shou (I.2) whose father opposed her desire to become a nun until Fo-t'u-teng interceded and, using standard Buddhist apologetic,<sup>65</sup> said that since her merit earned as a nun would help all living creatures, how much more would it help her two parents! Because Hui-mu (II.9) chewed meat for her toothless old mother, she felt unclean for having had meat in her mouth and refused to receive full ordination as a nun. Her reward was a supernal ordination. She followed to extremes both her duty to her mother and her observance of Buddhist precepts. The nun Fa-sheng (II.10) supported a widow as she would her own mother.

The *PCNC* indicates that Buddhist practice accommodated to Taoist and Confucian traditions. Even the drastic ritual suicides had indigenous counterparts and, in fact, without these counterparts it is unlikely that the *Lotus Sutra's* exhortation would have been taken so literally. Many Confucians sacrificed self rather than principle, and the man of honour protesting government abuse or neglect often chose suicide.<sup>66</sup>

62. Compare the case of the nun Feng (*PCNC* IV.4): "She burned six fingers as an offering—all of them right down to the palm."

63. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1964), p. 5 and passim.

64. *ch'u-kuo*, i.e. *srotapanna-phala*; entering the stream destined for enlightenment and therefore not liable to rebirth in the three lower destinies of animals, hells or ghosts.

65. Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 254-285, esp. p. 284.

66. Ch'ü Yüan (ca 340-278 B.C.), whose biography is in *Shih chi*, ch. 84, is perhaps the

Women protecting honour whether of self or relatives also often chose suicide.<sup>67</sup> Although the motives and expected goals of the Buddhist suicides may have differed from both Confucianism and Taoism, the practice itself was a venerable tradition.

The Buddhist female monastic order in China seems to have become corrupt within the short span of years covered by the *PCNC*. In early biographies we read that especially holy and revered nuns received lavish robes and gifts. By the late Ch'i and Liang dynasties, we read that revered and holy nuns wore only hemp clothing and straw sandals and gave away all donations they received. I-ching of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907) in his work *Nan-hai chi-kuei nei-fa chuan* makes two revealing statements: "The Chinese dress of the nuns is that of ordinary women, and the existing mode of wearing it is much against the proper rules," and "Nuns in India are very different from those of China. They support themselves by begging food, and live a poor and simple life."<sup>68</sup>

## VI

The importance of the Buddhist monastic order in the lives of women in China can be briefly outlined as follows. The order was for many a refuge. Once established, the convent was a respectable institution where a woman might find a home; it was also a place to exercise talents, especially scholarly ones; further, it was a place to practice religion in which the accomplishments of women were not considered inferior to those of men.

The *PCNC* is a Buddhist document within the *lieh-nü* tradition, and, using stock Buddhist apologetic, shows the Buddhist effort in China not to antagonise prevailing Confucian attitudes. Buddhist institutions provided alternatives to Confucian expectations. Taoism also provided opportunities for women, which resulted in intense rivalry between Taoism and Buddhism culminating, in our document, in the murder of a Buddhist nun by a Taoist nun (I.9).<sup>69</sup>

Foreign monks and nuns played an extraordinarily important part in establishing the Buddhist order for Chinese women, and the Chinese monks were almost conspicuously absent in the enterprise.<sup>70</sup>

most famous. He threw himself into a river and drowned. There are very, very few instances of fire suicides outside the Six Dynasties Buddhist milieu. Drowning and starving to death were common.

67. The *lieh-nü* writings contain many examples. There are none so famous as Ch'ü Yüan, however. Many women also committed suicide to make a point, or from grief at death of parent or husband.

68. *Ch.* 2, 216.a.10; b.11-13. (Trans. Takakusu, pp. 78, 80.)

69. The Taoist biographies tell of similar atrocities carried out by Buddhists, e.g. *YCCC*, p. 1615, biography of Wei Hsien-ku [Immortal Maiden Wei].

The lineage established in China by the Singhalese nuns in the fifth century continues to this day, and is now the only orthodox lineage of fully-ordained Buddhist nuns. The Singhalese Theravada tradition died out and was not re-established. Buddhist "nuns" of Tibet and of the present-day Theravada countries take only the precepts of a novice.<sup>71</sup>

Chinese Buddhism developed as it did because of indigenous Taoist and Confucian traditions, and the resulting eclectic Buddhist practice survived as a living religion.<sup>72</sup> The more purely Indian Buddhism was relegated to scholasticism.

While the order of nuns was not especially influential in Chinese life as a whole, it was essential for the survival and well-being of some individual women, providing cultural opportunities that would have otherwise been unobtainable.

70. Cf. Zürcher's comments (*Buddhist Conquest*) in his Introduction about the role of foreign monks in gentry Buddhism in the South.

71. Upon being asked why there were no fully-ordained nuns in the Tibetan tradition, a Rimpoché said it was because women had to take the rules one at a time, and since there were so many rules, (over 350), no women could get through all of them in one lifetime, therefore it was no use even to try. *Caveat lector!*

72. The Pure Land and Ch'an traditions became the two main practices. Pure Land developed from early devotionalism, a trend well-represented in the *PCNC* and the *Kao-seng chuan* as well. Prior to the coming of Buddhism, there were no personal saviour figures granting boons and heaven too. Ch'an is a tradition of obscure origins (see Philip Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Six Patriarchs* [New York, 1967]), and is as much Taoist in inspiration as Buddhist (if not more so), though it explains itself through Buddhist metaphysics. It is a thorough sinification of Buddhism.

## GLOSSARY

acarya (fa-shih)	法師
Chien-k'ang	建康
Chien-yeh	建業
Ching-lü i-hsiang	經律異相
Fo-t'u-teng	佛圖澄
Hui-yüan	慧遠
K'ai-yüan shih-chiao lu	開元釋教錄
Kao-seng chuan	高僧傳
Lieh-nü chuan	列女傳
Liu Hsiang	劉向
Pan Chao	班昭
Pi-ch'iu-ni-chuan (PCNC)	比丘尼傳
Shih Pao-ch'ang	釋寶唱
Tao-an	道安