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Stages in the Religious Life of lay Buddhists in Taiwan*

I. Introduction

Scholars working within the academic study of Buddhism have long known and studied the practice of conferring and receiving various sets of precepts. From its very inception, the Buddhist community has formulated and commented upon various sets of vows that the individual may take, from the Three Refuges which mark one's formal entrance into the "stream" of Buddhism to lists of specific vows, numbering up to 500 in all in certain literary traditions, that regulate the lives of fully ordained monks and nuns.

However, most of the scholarly activity that has gone into documenting the content and practice of precepts-conferral has been very one-sided, focusing exclusively upon texts: the canonical vinayas of various Buddhist lineages, the commentaries that flesh out the meaning of these texts, and the ritual texts used in the ceremonies themselves. Virtually no scholar has given attention to the meanings expressed by the concrete performance of the precept-conferral ritual in Buddhist groups and societies (The notable exception in Chinese Buddhism is Holmes WELCH's superb *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*).

As Gregory SCHOPEN has pointed out, textual studies constitute only one kind of evidence in the study of any religion or religious phenomenon. Texts, he says, show scholars ideals enunciated by a religious elite.¹ This is valuable in its own right, especially insofar as the religious community at large regards (or at one time regarded) these texts and

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1. Gregory SCHOPEN. "Archeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism", in *History of Religions* 31/1 (1991), 1-4.

commentaries as authoritative, but it does not, and indeed cannot, reveal the concrete ways in which the religion is conceived and practiced in the real lives of real followers.

In the case of Chinese Buddhism, most of the attention paid to precepts by scholars in the past has focused on the various vinayas and pratimokshas used by lay and clerical Buddhists, along with the commentaries of such eminent vinaya masters as Daoxuan and Hongyi. Through such studies, we know much about the Indian provenance of the Four-Part Vinaya 四分律 *sifenlü* followed by all Chinese Buddhist clerics, their dissemination and acceptance in Chinese Buddhist history, and the highly-developed ideas which great vinaya-masters developed on the meaning of the precepts, the conditions of violation and exoneration, and the methods and meanings of confession of faults.

I propose to look at precepts from another angle. Following SCHOPEN's suggestion, I plan here to look at the conferral and reception of precepts by Buddhist laypeople in Taiwan from a sociological perspective. The primary method that I used for gathering information was not textual study, but field observation, and as a result of having used this method, my observations and conclusions will offer insight into the actual ritual symbolism of the precepts ceremony, as well as the changes of status that the ceremony effects for the recipient. From these observations, I plan to offer conclusions about the place of canonical ideas about the categories of Buddhist believers with respect to the actual practices of living Buddhists.

Before I go into the actual description and analysis of the various stages of lay Buddhist life in Taiwan, there is one more piece of ground to clear. Because the observations and interpretations offered here are phenomenological and sociological in nature, I have adopted a set of stages that do not reflect the divisions of Buddhists one normally finds in texts, whether into the four groups of laymen, laywomen, monks, and nuns; the sevenfold scheme of monk, nun, male novice, female novice, female probationer, layman, and laywoman; or the ninefold scheme which adds to the seven already listed male and female laypersons who have taken on the Eight Upavastha Vows for a limited time.

Instead, for purposes of this study I have set three criteria for distinguishing a separate stage of the Buddhist life. First, there must be a rite of passage leading into it, marking a clear transition from one status to the next. The only exception to this rule is the status of the neophyte, which in the nature of things cannot have a rite of passage.

Second, the rite of passage must lead to a status that is potentially permanent. Thus, I have chosen not to follow the traditional ninefold scheme because it mixes temporary and permanent statuses: the Eight Upavastha Vows only apply for the 24-hour period during which the vows are in effect.

Third, each stage must constitute a step in a progression as well as a level on a hierarchy. The traditional scheme does not represent a potential life-progression for devotees. After all, an individual believer cannot progress from laywoman to layman, or from nun to monk. Gender distinctions do play a role in setting precedence when participating in rituals and other religious activities, but I have observed that the rite of passage into each stage and the status markers that people at that stage may appropriate do not vary with gender. Thus, I have decided to regard gender distinctions as subdivisions within each stage and not as separate stages.

Using these criteria, I distinguish the following four stages in the lives of lay Buddhists:

1. Neophyte.
2. Three Refuges Disciple.
3. Five Lay Precepts Recipient.
4. Lay Bodhisattva Precepts Recipient.

In the pages that follow, I will take the reader through each of these levels one by one in a continuous narrative, in which we will follow the life of a hypothetical layperson. The guiding metaphor will be the seating arrangements employed at the Xilian Temple 西蓮淨苑, one of my fieldwork sites, during large Dharma-meetings. At each Dharma-meeting, the temple puts up posters stating that, when processing into the Great Shrine Hall and taking positions, the clergy enter first, followed by the Lay Bodhisattvas, the Five-Precept Recipients, with the Refuge Disciples and Neophytes bringing up the rear. If we regard the Buddha-altar as the ritual center, then each of these groups occupies a place progressively farther from that center. Thus, as our metaphor goes, advancement from one group to the next represents a step closer to the center, earned by the expression of a deeper and more exclusive commitment to Buddhism demonstrated by a more thorough amendment of one's life in accordance with Buddhist principles (see diagram p. 114).

We will begin at the beginning with the beginners.

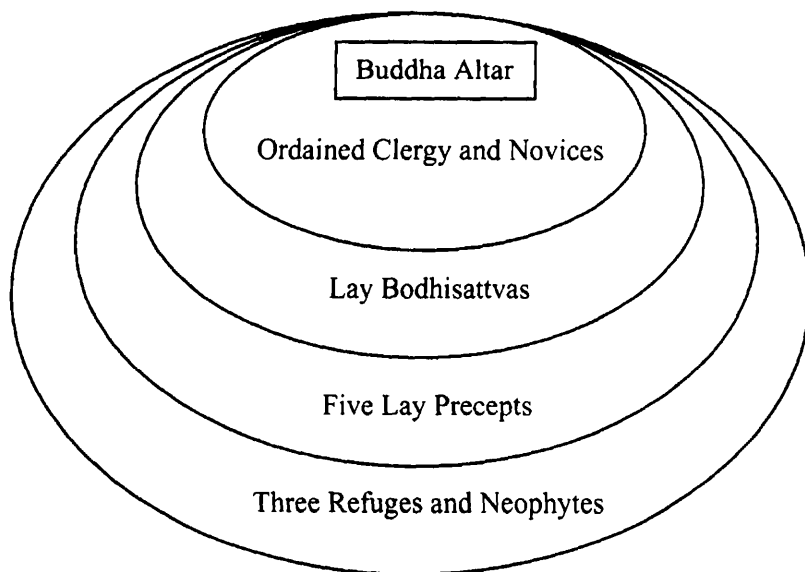


Diagram: Arrangement of Participants in Main Shrine Hall
According to Their Level of Precepts

II. The neophyte.

One might question whether the status of neophyte can legitimately be considered a stage within the Buddhist life. There is no rite of passage into it; indeed, it refers to the status of the unwashed masses who have yet to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. However, I employ the term as the first stage of the Buddhist life because most of the people of Taiwan who identify themselves as Buddhist have not taken the Three Refuges, and indeed may never take them as long as they live. I should also point out that the word “neophyte” is my own term for these people; there is no word in Chinese Buddhism that it translates. I use it specifically to refer to people who are interested in Buddhism or participate in its rituals and activities, and who may one day move to the stage of taking refuge. I do not mean people of other faiths or no faith for whom Buddhism is irrelevant or who would never go to a Buddhist temple for any reason.

It is at this level that we encounter the problem that has vexed many sociological studies of religion in Taiwan: who is the real Buddhist? Professor CHU Hai-Yüan 瞿海源, a researcher at the Ethnology Institute of the Academia Sinica, undertook a survey of religious beliefs and

attitudes in Taiwan at the request of the central government in 1984, and published his findings in 1988. As far as identifying Buddhists is concerned, he found that, if you ask people between the ages of 20 and 65 their religion, 47% of them will respond that they are Buddhists. However, he goes on to say that most people will respond in this way simply out of habit. If you try to refine the question by asking whether they do any specifically Buddhist things such as maintaining a vegetarian diet, reciting scriptures, or attending Dharma-meetings at temples to the exclusion of non-Buddhist activities, the number quickly drops to only 6%. If you add to these “pure” Buddhists the people who do Buddhist things but also go and worship Daoist or folk divinities, then the number rises to only 15%. Thus, of all the people who call themselves Buddhist, only about one-third actually are in any meaningful sense.²

One problem with Prof. CHU’s survey, as he himself points out, is that his questionnaire did not ask respondents whether or not they had formally taken refuge in Buddhism; this is why he had to extrapolate from concrete religious behavior in order to test his figures. A few years later, however, one of his students, Xu Jiaqiang, replicated the survey on a smaller scale, and did include this question. Out of the 41 respondents who identified themselves as Buddhist, only a scant four had actually taken refuge.³ In a further clarifying question, Mr. Xu asked his respondents whether their objects of worship included figures other than buddhas and bodhisattvas, and only three said no. One other replied, “only ancestors.” The rest responded that they also worshipped non-Buddhist divinities such as Mazu, Wangye, the Three Princes, and so on.⁴ Although Mr. Xu does not say so, we may speculate that the four who did not worship non-Buddhist divinities other than ancestors were the ones who had taken refuge.

These findings tally with my own observations at the Xilian Temple. Out of all the activities that the temple hosts during the course of one

2. CHU Hai-yuan 瞿海源 “Taiwan Diqu Minzhong de Zongjiao Xinyang yu Zongjiao Taidu”, 台灣地區民眾的宗教信仰與宗教態度 in *Bianqianzhong de Taiwan Shehui* 變遷中的台灣社會 (*Taiwan Society in Transition*). 2 vols., ed. Chu Hai-yuan and Yang Kuo-shu (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1988), p. 241.
3. XU Jiaqiang 徐嘉樞, *Taiwan Zongjiao Xinyang de Rentong yu Shenfen: yi ge Chutan* 台灣宗教信仰的認同與身份:一個初探 (*Self-Identification of Religious Belief and Status in Taiwan: a Preliminary Study*). M.A. thesis, Donghai University, 1991. p. 57.
4. XU Jiaqiang, p. 44.

calendar year, the two longest and most well-attended are those directly related with the cult of the ancestors: the Qingming Fahui 清明法會 (“Tomb-Sweeping Day Dharma Meeting”), and the Zhongyuan Fahui 中元法會 (“Ghost Festival Dharma Meeting”). These meetings last for three days each, and will draw up to 2000 participants on peak days. Of these participants, only a few hundred will actually participate in the primary activity of the Dharma meeting, which in both cases is a group recitation of the *Sūtra on the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha's Original Vow* 地藏菩薩本願經 *Dizang Pusa Benyuan Jing*, T. 412]. The great majority of participants come for only a few minutes in order to have one or more paper *paiwei* (ancestral tablets) put up in the New Great Shrine Hall: yellow ones to the left of the altar for deceased ancestors, red ones to the right to bring health and longevity to living relatives.

At the end of the Dharma meeting, those who have recited the sūtra dedicate the merit accruing from their recitation to the people represented by the *paiwei*, which are then taken outside and burned. In return for this service, those who requested the inscription of the *paiwei* will make a donation to the temple, usually in the amount of NT\$200 (about US\$8.00). I have also been told, but could not verify, that many of those who participate only at this low level have not formally taken refuge in Buddhism.

At this point we can make some observations with regard to the status of the neophyte. First, it is the least threatening to a person's sense of place within Chinese society on Taiwan. Retaining this status allows one the freedom to participate at one's pleasure in Buddhist activities, without demanding changes in any of the factors by which the individual structures his or her life or locates him or herself within family and society.

Second, it does not demand that one resolve to change one's lifestyle or habits in any concrete way, nor does it create any conflicts with societal mores and norms. In fact, the relationship of the neophyte to the Buddhist temple and to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas worshipped there appears to be strictly business: for a small donation the resident clergy and participants in the ritual will dedicate the merit of their religious practice to the client's family, living and dead.

Thus, during the time a person remains a neophyte (which can be and usually is for their whole life), they experience no change in societal and familial relations or in their self-identification or self-consciousness. Whether “conversion” happens at any subsequent stage is another matter.

III. Taking refuge.

In his catechism *Zhengxinde Fojiao* 正信的佛教 (“Orthodox Buddhism”), the Ven. Shengyan 聖嚴 writes:

... if one wishes to enter into orthodox Buddhism and become a disciple of the Buddhist religion, then one must undergo the ‘Three Refuges’ ceremony. ... Were it not for this, then even though one believes in the Buddha and worships the Buddha, one still is not a properly-enrolled student, but merely an unregistered auditor. [Taking the Three Refuges] has a great effect upon the firmness of one’s belief.⁵

From this we can see the importance of taking the Three Refuges according to one modern Taiwan Buddhist master.

At the Xilian Temple, there is a Refuges ceremony every Sunday afternoon at three o’clock. People who wish to come and take refuge will begin showing up in the guest-reception room between two o’clock and two-thirty in order to register and have their Refuges Certificates 皈依證 *guiyizheng* inscribed. The Certificate is a handsomely-printed card that folds in half; the certificate is on the inside, and the text of the ceremony is written on the back so that the recipients will know their parts.

The text of the certificate reads as follows:

Insofar as the devotee N.N., of [Taiwan] Province, [blank] City/County, has developed the intention of taking refuge in the Three Jewels [namely] the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, and has respectfully requested that the Ven. Zhiyu be his/her preceptor (親教師 *qinjiaoshi*, Skt. *upādhyāya*), grant the Dharma-name N.N., and issue this certificate, all of the above is granted to the *upāsaka/upāsikā*.

Develop the mind of wisdom,
to save both yourself and others!
Transform and guide all beings,
to shun evil and to do good!

Given this Nth day of Nth month in the Nth year of the Republic, and the Nth year of the Buddha.

Preceptor Zhiyu (seal affixed here)

While one nun is busy inscribing the certificates, the participants may choose to ask for advice and counsel from other resident clergy while

5. SHENGYAN 聖嚴. *Zhengxinde Fojiao* 正信的佛教 (“Orthodox Buddhism”) (Taipei: Dongchu Chubanshe 東初出版社, 1965), p. 24-25.

waiting for the ceremony to begin. Finally, with their certificates in hand, the participants proceed upstairs to a small shrine hall dedicated to the bodhisattva Guanyin, with an image of her in her thousand-armed, thousand-eyed manifestation on the altar in front. As they enter, the nun administering the refuges in the Master's stead directs them to stand in lines according to gender and age: men on the right and women on the left as they face the altar, eldest in front and youngest in back. After some brief instructions on the procedures for the ceremony, such as when to prostrate and when to insert their own names, she began the ceremony proper.

This ceremony is very short and consists of four parts:

I. Confession 懺悔 *chanhui*:

All of the evil karma that I have built up from the distant past stems from beginningless desire, hatred, and ignorance. Whatever has been done by thought, word, or deed, I now confess and repent of it.

II. Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels 皈依三寶 *guiyi sanbao*:

I, the disciple N.N. [here one uses one's secular name], do from now on take refuge in the Buddha, will rely on the Buddha as my teacher, and, preferring instead to give up my own life, will never resort to the masters of other teachings. (Repeat twice, substituting "Dharma" and "Saṅgha" for "Buddha.") The people repeat the above three times, with a prostration at the end of each repetition.

III. Binding the Refuges 結皈 *jiegui*:

I, the disciple N.N. [here one uses one's Dharma-name, or *faming* 法名], have now without reservation, completely taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

IV. The Four Universal Vows 四弘誓願 *sihong shiyuan*:

I vow to save all living beings without limit;
 I vow to cut off all disturbances of mind;
 I vow to study all Buddhist teachings without measure;
 I vow to achieve the unexcelled Buddha-way.

With this, the ceremony ended, and the recipients went home. It was very short and simple, and did not include any formal instruction from the abbot of the temple, whose name and seal appeared on the certificates (perhaps due to his poor health, which precluded him from participating in many of the temple's activities).

I did have the opportunity to see the Three Refuges given in a more elaborate ceremony at the Nongchan Temple in the north of Taipei during the summer of 1993, with Ven. Shengyan presiding. The cere-

mony took place in the evening, after the Master had just finished a lecture on the Lotus Sūtra. After all of the seats had been removed and the floor of the hall cleared, all of the participants in the Refuges ceremony came and stood in lines, again separated by gender (whether also by age I do not know). Before the ceremony began, one of that temple's resident clergy took the microphone and, with the help of other clergy circulating among the people, gave instructions on the basics of temple etiquette. She taught the people how to do such essential motions as the simple bow 問訊 *wenxun* and the full prostration. As the people practiced, the assisting clergy checked their form and gave corrections and pointers.

After this training session, the Master came out and arranged himself on the dais. He then gave a short exposition on the meaning of the ritual text that the people were to employ in order to ensure full understanding of everything that was to be repeated. During this entire time, recipients remained kneeling on straw cushions with their palms joined in front of their chests. After the explanations, the Master then led the people in reciting the ritual text of the Three Refuges. When this was completed, they came forward one by one to receive their pre-inscribed Refuges Certificates 皈依證 *guiyi zheng*, along with a book by the Master and a Buddha-recitation rosary in bracelet form 念珠 *nianzhu*.

This rosary was more than just a gift or a souvenir. The Master instructed them to wear it at all times from that moment on, except when they were bathing. A monk at another temple told me on a different occasion that one should also remove it and slip it into one's pocket when going to the toilet. The reason for these restrictions is that the rosary (or at least the one gourd-shaped bead on it) represents the Buddha, present in one's life at all times. It is not fitting that the Buddha see one in an indecent or undignified state. From this one can see that the rosary has great symbolic value, equivalent to a Christian wearing a cross or a Jew wearing a Star of David. It is an identifying mark that announces publicly one's commitment to Buddhism.

After all these items had been distributed, the people returned to their straw cushions and listened while the Master spoke about the style of life to which they had committed themselves, and about the nature of their relationship to him and his temple. As to the nature of the life, he admonished and exhorted them to live a pure life, and to come to the temple and participate in its self-cultivation activities often. However, lest they feel overwhelmed by the efforts to lead a pure life, he

reminded them that the power of buddhas and bodhisattvas was always available to help them; they had but to ask for it.

Next, he emphasized the personal nature of their relationship to him. He was their 皈依師 *guiyishi*, the teacher under whom they had taken refuge. The temple was the site at which they had taken refuge. They needed to come back often, therefore, for two reasons. First, to tap the power of the place; second, because there were so many of them, he said he had no way of remembering all of their names and faces. They also had a special responsibility to him and to the temple to give both material and personal support by donating their time and money.

They also had a duty to come to him for teaching. He specifically advised them to read his books, listen to his tapes, come to hear him lecture on the scriptures, and participate in all temple activities whenever possible. However, lest this sound as if he were claiming some sort of exclusive hold on them, he reminded them in very strong terms that they had not taken refuge in him personally; they had taken refuge in the Three Jewels. Thus, they were to have respect for all Buddhas, all Buddhist teachings, and, most of all, they were to respect all monks and nuns, calling them all 師父 *shifu* (“master”).

He then told them that they should resist the urge to go for refuge multiple times. Once was definitely enough, and to go around taking refuge before multiple teachers was a form of grasping. Finally, he taught them a few points of decorum pertinent to the Buddhist life. From now on, they were to replace “Hello, goodbye, thank you, excuse me,” and all other social niceties with the invocation of Amitābha Buddha. They were also to address all monks and nuns as *shifu* (repeating this point again).

Because I had observed the Three Refuges ceremony at this temple prior to the one at the Xilian Temple, I was able to ask some questions at the latter based on some of the points of this lecture. I asked a nun there if people taking refuge at the Xilian Temple had the same sorts of responsibilities to it as those outlined by the Master of this other temple. She responded that they did not in any formal sense, nor did they have any kind of “special relationship” with the Xilian Temple based on having taken the Three Refuges there. Thus, conceptions about the relationship of a Refuges Disciple to an individual master or temple vary.

I stated in the first section that, at the stage of the neophyte, Buddhism makes no demands on the commitment of the devotee and imposes no

changes on his or her way of life. However, we have now seen that taking the Three Refuges can, potentially at least, entail the following:

1. The imposition of a new Dharma-name 法名 or 法號. While a new name is given at the time of taking the Three Refuges, it is important to note that the subsequent usage of this name is not as extensive as it will be in later stages should the devotee decide to become a monk or nun. According to lay informants at the Xilian Temple, one will not adopt the Dharma-name in everyday life as a replacement for one's given name. Rather, one will use it when participating in specifically Buddhist events, such as a Buddha-Recitation Retreat or some other Dharma-meeting. If the person is visiting a temple, they will probably introduce themselves to the resident clergy by their Dharma-names.

2. The call to forsake other religions. As we have seen, the text of the Three Refuges itself includes the vow to forsake anything in other religions that might correspond to the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Saṅgha. As Ven. Shengyan explains it, based these Three Vows, or 三誓 *sanshi*:

The purpose of these Three Vows is to prevent people who have already entered the true path from going again in error on the paths of discrimination. After one has received the Three Refuges, if in order to preserve one's family, property, nation, its citizens, or life and safety, one goes to make offerings to ghosts or worship gods, one will not have lost the Refuges as long as one does not harbor the intention of taking [the new religion as] a Refuge, but if one does have this mind, then one will lose one's Refuges.⁶

It is apparent from this quotation that, in theory at least, taking the Three Refuges does impact on the often-noted broad tolerance of Chinese religion. However, the exceptions that Ven. Shengyan draws are very significant in terms of the extent of this impact. According to his exposition, the Three Vows do not entail a renunciation of all non-Buddhist religious rites and practices. If Chinese Buddhism really did demand this, then, as the experience of Christianity in China shows, they would have very few followers indeed. The fact that the Christian Church's sweeping proscriptions of ancestor worship and other forms of "idolatry" has proven a major impediment to gaining converts is well documented, and Buddhism would be very foolish to follow its example. Shengyan appears to be saying that it is all right to make offerings to spirits and worship at the temples of non-Buddhist gods as long as one does not commit oneself to following any of the "outer paths" as systems

6. SHENGYAN, p. 43-44.

of salvation. One's ultimate commitment must be to Buddhism and one's ultimate goal must be liberation as conceived by Buddhism. Thus, although we see here the beginnings of a more exclusive commitment to Buddhism, it is not drawn so sharply as to cut the devotee off from participating fully in funerals, local temple worship, and other rituals that serve to reinforce the individual's place within family and Chinese society.

3. The use of new forms of address for fellow-Buddhists. We saw in the lecture given at the Nongchan Temple following the conferral of the Three Refuges that henceforth the new disciples were to dispense with the usual ways of saying "hello," "good-bye," "excuse me," and other social exchanges and replace them all with the name of Amitābha-buddha 阿彌陀佛. It is important to bear in mind, however, that this only holds when two Buddhists are talking to each other, or when the person is in a specifically Buddhist setting such as a temple or lecture-hall.

It seems to me that this new way of speaking has two effects. First, for the individual concerned, it reinforces a specifically Pure Land form of belief and practice. Since Pure Land Buddhism is the most dominant form of Buddhism in Taiwan, this is not surprising. The use of this phrase, repetition of which is the most basic form of Pure Land practice, in a wide variety of settings both religious and otherwise, brings Buddhist teachings and practices to the forefront of consciousness and helps to inculcate them as habits of thought.

Second, it gives rise to a sense of group solidarity with other Buddhists. This transformation in ordinary social language gives the devotee a jargon that makes him or her feel united with co-believers.

4. The training in temple protocol constitutes another way of promoting a sense of belonging. The person who has undergone this sort of training can from then on enter a temple with a sense of confidence that they might not have had before. This assurance that one knows the etiquette of the group and the proper way to perform ritual gestures also gives rise to a sense of in-group solidarity.

5. The adoption of the 念珠 *nianzhu* as a way of identification, like the adoption of Amitābha-buddha's name as a form of greeting, also coopts a form of Pure Land practice as a means of self-identification. The original purpose of *nianzhu* is to count the number of times one has recited the Buddha's name. Having a rosary on one's wrist at all times can encourage one to engage in this practice when riding a bus, waiting

for an appointment, or at other free moments. At the very least, it reminds one of the practice and perhaps reproaches one for being lax in it. One lay Buddhist told me that she wore it "for comfort."

However, as a means of public self-identification it is quite effective. Unlike the new greeting or the training in temple protocols which are effective only when spoken or enacted, the rosary on one's wrist is visible at all times and sends its message constantly. Thus, in order to wear it, one must be willing to broadcast the message to everyone one encounters that one has made a commitment to Buddhism that precludes commitments to other systems of salvation.

It must be stressed that the last three of these five changes in one's mode of social relations and lifestyle are not necessarily concomitants of taking the Three Refuges. Any neophyte can and usually does greet people with Amitābha's name while in a temple or speaking to a monk or nun, and not everyone who takes the Three Refuges learns to do the ritual gestures and other matters of decorum appropriate to a temple (for instance, this kind of training does not come with the Three Refuges at the Xilian Temple, but at a later stage of lay life).

Nevertheless, when the whole package is considered, an interesting pattern emerges in the deepening commitment to Buddhism that we are tracing. Taking the Three Refuges and its concomitant changes, as we have seen, has the cumulative effect of encouraging one's self-identification as a Buddhist and a sense of belonging to an in-group with other Buddhists. However, this commitment is not yet completely exclusive. While one will probably not forsake Buddhism and convert to Christianity or Islam, one may still participate in the normal rituals that mark Chinese social and family life. So the circle has been drawn, but it only serves to keep the non-Buddhists out; it does not keep the Buddhists within it from wandering out from time to time to worship their ancestors or set out a table of offerings in front of their shop.

Taking the Three Refuges also does not yet entail any lifestyle changes that might require some sacrifice on the devotee's part. They are an affirmation that Buddhism is the true way to liberation, but not yet a commitment to tread that way. Since the Refuges disciple has not yet taken on any precepts, they can still eat meat, drink wine, and visit piano bars, karaokes, and other places of sometimes dubious entertainment. Thus, a businessman would not find the Three Refuges seriously crippling to his ability to entertain clients. So while the Refuges disciple

unquestionably has a deeper and more exclusive commitment to Buddhism than the neophyte, it is still at a low level.

All this assumes, of course, that the Refugees disciple understands the purposes and effects of the ceremony in an orthodox way. However, when one actually asks people why they are taking refuge, some interesting responses emerge. One man told me that he himself had taken the Refugees long ago, but that on the day I spoke with him he was doing it again on behalf of his deceased father. He got a Dharma-name assigned for him and went through the ceremony as his father's proxy, using his father's given name and Dharma-name in the appropriate places. At the Xilian Temple, parents regularly bring in their children and babies to take the refugees, partly to put down "good roots" for their future spiritual progress (a very orthodox Buddhist reason), but also so that they would be good children, do well in school, and other more this-worldly reasons. I never saw this myself, but one nun told me that pregnant women would come in and take the Refugees on behalf of their unborn children in the belief that it would ensure a smooth delivery and guarantee a well-behaved and filial child.

The question of going for Refuge more than once came up several times in the course of my research. The concensus appears to be that, while it is not strictly necessary and not to be encouraged in too profligate a manner, it is certainly permissible and may help to reinforce the impact of one's original Refugees ceremony. In this sense multiple Refugees are a kind of maintenance, keeping the disciple on track.

IV. The Five Lay Precepts.

In the section on the Three Refugees, I explained the importance of taking the Three Refugees. In Buddhism, taking refuge in the Three Jewels is like registering for classes. However, registering for school is not the same thing as actually attending class; taking on the Buddhist precepts after taking the Three Refugees is the point where one begins marching forward in the Buddha Way.⁷

In this way Ven. Shengyan summarizes the difference between taking the Three Refugees and moving on to take the Five Lay Precepts 在家五戒 *zaijia wujie*. The Three Refugees are merely the means by which one expresses one's commitment to Buddhism and one's belief

7. SHENGYAN 聖嚴, *Jielüxue Gangyao* 戒律學綱要 ("An Outline of Precepts"). Dongchu Zhihuihai Congkan 東初智慧海叢刊, 4. (Taipei: Dongchu Chubanshe 東初出版社, 1965), p. 54.

that it alone provides the ultimate answers to life's vexations. Taking the Three Refuges, however, does not constitute a promise or an obligation to change one's day-to-day behavior in any concrete way.

The Five Lay Precepts, on the other hand, do constitute a set of obligations to amend one's life in fairly specific ways. These five obligations (not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in illicit sexual activity, not to lie, and not to drink intoxicating beverages) are part of the legacy of lay Buddhism from the earliest period and their contents have been adequately studied elsewhere. What will concern us here is the manner in which these precepts are transmitted and interpreted in Taiwan.

The Xilian Temple held a Ceremony for the Conferral of the Five Lay Precepts 在家五戒授戒儀式 *zaijia wujie shoujie yishi* on November 13, 1993. At that time, over 100 people came to take the precepts, and this number, along with the complexity of the retreat and ceremony, necessitated the mobilization of about a quarter of the resident clergy for activities directly connected with the event. In addition, many of the ongoing subunits within the temple's organization experienced an increase in their workload as a result of the conferring of precepts. For instance, the Great Shrine Hall Committee 大殿組 *dadianzu* took on the responsibility for decorating the Great Shrine Hall for the event, and the Dormitory Supervisory Committee 監察組 *jianliao zu* had responsibility for looking after accommodations for all the participants.

While the planning begins some months in advance for the temple's resident clergy, the laity who will receive the precepts become involved at the point when the temple begins circulating notices advertising the event. However, these notices contain more than just the details of time and place. They also set out certain qualifications that prospective participants must meet if they wish to receive the precepts. First, they must have formally received the Three Refuges at least one year in advance, and they must produce a copy of their Refuges Certificate when they register.

Second, they must have their family's permission, since the precepts may alter some aspects of the family's life or the devotee's livelihood. For example, while the third precept does not call for chastity, its interpretation as given during the course of the retreat does set restrictions of time and place on the sexual relations of legitimate partners. Thus, the recipient's spouse does have an interest in the matter.

Finally, the advertisement discourages participation by people who wish to use the ceremony in a “magical” way to increase wealth, get children, or to pursue other this-worldly ends.

From the above remarks, one can see that the aspirant who sincerely intends to keep the precepts strictly must make some alterations in his or her lifestyle, although how extensive these alterations are depends upon the quality of one’s lifestyle prior to taking them. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the ritual and ceremony, as well as the level of instruction and exhortation, are correspondingly more complex and impressive. As one can see from the section of the liturgy entitled “inquiry into impediments,” it is also the first level at which it is possible to be disqualified. Let us now look at the ritual which caps this two-day retreat and serves to bind the candidate to the precepts.

The liturgy proceeds in three stages, the first of which simply consists of gathering the assembly together 集中 *jizhong*. This is followed by a stage called “welcoming and petitioning the preceptor” 迎請和尚 *yingqing heshang*, during which a few candidates come forward and formally request the Preceptor to grant the precepts.

The final and longest part of the ceremony is the “formal conferral [of the precepts]” 正授 *zheng shou*, and it begins with the “inquiry into impediments” 問遮難 *wen zhenan*. The preceptor here asks the candidates to declare whether or not they have ever committed any offenses that might constitute an obstacle to their receiving the Five Lay Precepts. These include four specific offenses: having stolen from any Buddhist clergy, having practiced incest, having had sexual relations with a Buddhist monk or nun, having abandoned parents or teachers in times of illness, or having killed someone who had developed the mind to seek enlightenment out of compassion for others.

After this follows the confession and the Three Refuges, which in structure replicate the first three parts of the Refuges ceremony translated in the last section, although altered somewhat to fit the occasion better.

One thing worth noting about these liturgical texts is the candidates’ affirmation that they will live out their days as a “Five-Precept *Upāsaka* or *Upāsikā*.” As Holmes WELCH pointed out, Chinese Buddhists in the past had the option of picking and choosing from among the Five Lay Precepts:

When one or two were taken, it was called a “minor ordination” 少分戒 *shaofen jie*. When three or four were taken, it was called a “major ordination” 多分戒

duofen jie. When all five were taken, it was called a “plenary ordination” 滿戒 *man jie*.⁸

While canonical sources disagree on the permissibility of partial precepts,⁹ the Xilian Temple followed the usual custom of permitting the practice, noting that the karmic consequences of taking a vow and then breaking it are more severe than those of simply performing unskilful moral actions.

With these preliminaries out of the way, the ceremony then moves on to the formal conferral of the precepts. The preceptor continues by delivering the admonitions 教戒 *jiaojie*, saying:

You *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*, listen. The Tathāgata, the Enlightened One, the Fully Enlightened, set forth the Five Precepts for the sake of *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*. Now hear and receive [them].

To refrain from killing living beings until the end of your life, can these *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* keep or not? (Answer: We can.)

To refrain from stealing until the end of your life, can these *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* keep or not? (Answer: We can.)

To refrain from illicit sexual activity until the end of your life, can these *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* keep or not? (Answer: We can.)

To refrain from lying until the end of your life, can these *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* keep or not? (Answer: We can.)

To refrain from drinking intoxicating beverages until the end of your life, can these *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* keep or not? (Answer: We can.)

What follows at this point is a section called “Generating the Aspiration” 發願 *fayuan*. The preceptor, after a short explanation, leads the candidates in vowing to dedicate the merit of the precepts to all sentient beings, that all may come eventually to the Pure Land of Amitābha-buddha.

At this point in the ceremony, the main business is over, the Precepts have been conferred and accepted. After this comes a short hortatory talk in which the preceptor enjoins the recipients to order their lives according to the precepts they have just received and gives practical advice on how to do so.

After this, there is only one item left in the liturgy, and that is the “conferring of robes” while all of the new recipients chant homage to Śākyamuni Buddha. The robe in question is the 纓衣 *manyi* or the outer

8. Holmes WELCH. *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950*. Harvard East Asian Studies, 26 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 361. Romanization adapted for consistency.

9. See SHENGYAN, *Jieluxüe Gangyao*, p. 80-81.

monastic robe, although it is not exactly the same as that worn by clergy. The monastic version consists of strips sewn together, while the lay version is solid. The newly-created Five-Precept *Upāsakas/ikās* will, from this time forward, have the right to wear the *manyi* during all future Dharma-meetings, and will have places between ordinary devotees and those who have received the bodhisattva precepts.

Not only that, but they will know more about the decorum and customs of the Xilian Temple, having spent two days living there receiving training. There is a 70-minute period set aside on the first day especially for learning how to manage and take care of ceremonial robes, not only the *manyi* but the 海青 *haiqing*, or black cassock, as well. For example, the clergy instruct the participants in how to fold, unfold, put on, take off, and store these robes with proper ceremony. In addition, my own observation is that people living at the temple receive much informal training in etiquette specific to this temple, such as learning that they may turn the lazy susans on the refectory tables clockwise only. In this way, participants at this event come to feel more a part of this temple, and will deepen their sense of identification with it.

However, there is another option open for lay devotees that does not entail such a deep sense of attachment to a particular temple, and that is to wait until the annual monastic ordination administered by the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) to receive the Five Lay Precepts. As Holmes WELCH reported thirty years ago about past practices on the mainland, this avenue for receiving precepts is still longer and more impressive than transmissions at local temples. According to a report in the BAROC magazine *Chinese Buddhist Monthly*, those receiving the Five Lay Precepts at the 1993 ordination session at the Guangde Temple near Kaohsiung spent four days living at the temple, and at the end received the precepts from three of the most eminent and well-known monks in Taiwan, including the president of the BAROC, Jingxin Zhanglao 淨心長老.¹⁰ As WELCH observed, those undergoing a lengthier session in such impressive surroundings side-by-side with the monks- and nuns-to-be must have felt much more “fully initiated” than those who received the precepts elsewhere.¹¹

10. “Guangde Si Chuanshou Zaijia Wujie, Pusajie” 光德寺募授在家五戒菩薩戒 (“The Guangde Temple Transmits the Five Lay Precepts and Bodhisattva Precepts”), in *Zhongguo Fojiao Yuekan* 中國佛教月刊 37/12 (Dec. 1993), p. 15-17.

11. WELCH, p. 364.

Thus, in summary, we may observe that recipients of the Five Lay Precepts move another step closer to the center of Buddhism in several ways. They move closer to the ideal of liberation by undertaking to change their lifestyle and behavior in specific ways. They move closer to the ritual center by gaining access to places closer to the Buddha-altar during Dharma-meetings and through donning new ceremonial garb. Finally, they move a little bit closer to the center of the Xilian Temple through the “insider” knowledge they gain of this temple's customs and etiquette. However, this is only the second step towards the center. If they choose, they may go on to the next step and take the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts.

V. The Lay Bodhisattva Precepts.

The Lay Bodhisattva Precepts fall outside the traditional Chinese arrangements, as Ven. Shengyan's explains:

The Bodhisattva Vows are a separate *pratimokṣa* outside of the seven groups of *upāsaka*, *upāsikā*, male novice, female novice, *śikṣamāna*, monk, or nun. The status of the [recipient of the] Bodhisattva Vows can either be within or without these seven groups.¹²

Even though Ven. Shengyan is discussing the Bodhisattva Vows in general, we need to be clear that in this section, we shall be discussing only the *Lay* Bodhisattva Vows. There are six canonical sources for the Bodhisattva Vows. The one most familiar to Western scholars is the *Fanwang Jing* 梵網經, which gives a list of Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Vows. However, contemporary Chinese Buddhism reserves these vows for monastics, and they constitute the third of the three “platforms” in the Triple Platform Ordination.

When laypeople receive the Bodhisattva Vows, they receive the Six Major and Twenty-eight Minor Vows contained in the *Youposai Jie Jing* 優婆塞戒經 (T. 1488). The reason is that this sūtra follows a layperson named Shansheng (Skt: Sujāta) as he receives the Three Refuges, the Five Precepts, and the Bodhisattva Precepts directly from the Buddha, at every step receiving in addition the Buddha's instructions on qualifying for and keeping the various sets of precepts. Because Shansheng never becomes a monk, but opts instead to keep his householder's status, the Bodhisattva Precepts as given in this sūtra are appropriate for laypeople, but not for clergy. For example, they include the vow never to receive

12. SHENGYAN, *Jielixue Gangyao*, p. 246.

anything properly belonging to the sangha (minor precept nine); the vow always to have such things as robes, bowls, and staffs on hand to offer to monks (minor precept seventeen); the vow against ignoring a monk's admonitions (minor precept twenty-four); and the vow never to walk in front of a monk or a nun on the road (minor precept twenty-five). In addition, using a different and shorter set of vows for laypeople prevents duplication of vows when and if the recipient decides to seek monastic ordination, and helps to keep the status of clergy and laity distinct.

The rite leading into this stage is more complex and impressive still than those by which one takes the Three Refuges and the Five Lay Precepts. As we saw above, the Three Refuges can be given in a ceremony lasting between one and two hours, and receiving the Five Lay Precepts requires a period of two to four days. The Lay Bodhisattva Precepts, on the other hand, require that the recipient set aside either five or seven days if they are conferred at a special stand-alone meeting, or even longer if the lay recipient receives them in conjunction with the annual BAROC monastic ordinations. Looking at it from the practical angle, one can see that simply setting aside this period of time poses a much more difficult problem for a working person than setting aside an afternoon or a weekend.

I went to the Haiming Chan Temple 海明禪寺 in the town of Shulin south of Taipei to observe a Lay Bodhisattva Precept Retreat that was in progress there, and brought up the matter of qualifications with one of the monks in charge of organizing the event. He told me that there were no formal qualifications at that temple for receiving the precepts except a sound mind and a desire to live a Buddhist life. One need not have even taken the Three Refuges before, since both these and the Five Lay Precepts would be granted on day five of the seven-day retreat. He did go on to say, however, that a candidate could be eliminated in the course of the retreat for a number of reasons: disruptive behavior, refusing to remain on the temple grounds for the duration of the retreat, psychological problems that obstructed understanding of the precepts, falsifying application materials, and so on.

Because so many of the candidates for the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts were still neophytes with only minimal previous exposure to Buddhism, the training given during the retreat began at the most elementary levels. Like the recipients of the Three Refuges that we met earlier in this article, they learned basic temple etiquette and ritual gestures. Like the recipients of the Five Lay Precepts, they learned to handle ceremonial

robes and to behave properly in the refectory and the dormitory. In addition, the daily schedule included 90 minutes of lectures on the precepts.

The conferral ceremony itself is similar in structure to that for the granting of the Five Lay Precepts. One exception to this is that this ceremony requires not one but three officiants: the precept-master 得戒和尚 *dejie heshang*, the *karmācārya* 羯磨阿闍梨 *jiemo asheli*, and the catechist 教授阿闍梨 *jiaoshou asheli*. In this respect it comes still closer in form to a full monastic ordination. We shall look at the ceremony used by the Haiming Chan Temple, which has ten parts.

The first is “purifying the altar and petitioning the preceptor” 淨壇請師 *jingtan qingshi*. The “purification of the altar” actually refers to the purification of the entire ritual space through the chanting of mantras. After this, the verger 維那 *weinuo* leads the candidates in petitioning the master to confer the precepts.

In the second part of the ceremony, called “worshipping the Three Jewels” 禮敬三寶 *lijing sanbao*, the three preceptors and the candidates worship the Three Jewels of the past, present, and future. With palms joined, the candidates recite the following under the verger’s prompting: “With undivided mind I worship (all the buddhas, the Dharma, the sages and holy ones) of the (past, present, future).” They repeat this sentence nine times in all, making the appropriate substitutions.

The third part is called “requesting the master to preach the precepts” 請師示戒 *qing shi shi jie*, in which the candidates again formally request the preceptor to grant them the precepts. After this request, the preceptor questions the petitioners, asking, “Are you a bodhisattva?”

“I am.”

“Have you generated the mind of enlightenment 菩提心 *putixin*, Skt. *bodhicitta*?”

“I have”

There follows a short sermon on the significance of taking the Bodhisattva Precepts that places the candidates in the company of all bodhisattvas of the past, present, and future by emphasizing that “these practices and these precepts” are identical to those that are now, have been, and will be received and practiced by the bodhisattvas of the ten directions. At the end, the preceptor asks the candidates if they can receive these precepts, to which they respond, “We can!”

With this affirmation, the ceremony moves into the fourth part, which is called “asking for divine [attestation]” 請聖 *qing sheng*. The precept-

master rises from his seat and offers incense, while the candidates, standing with palms joined, ask buddhas and bodhisattvas to attest to the conferring and receiving of the precepts. More specifically, they ask Śākyamuni Buddha himself to act as the precept-granting master, Mañjusrī to act as the *karmācārya* 羯磨阿闍梨 *jiemo asheli*, Maitreya to act as the catechist 教授阿闍梨 *jiaoshou asheli*, all buddhas to act as the witnessing masters, and all bodhisattvas to stand in as precept-mates. This identification of Śākyamuni Buddha, Mañjusrī, and Maitreya with the three ordaining masters whose presence is necessary for a full monastic ordination is not accidental, but has roots in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Holmes WELCH points out that, in full monastic ordinations, the preceptor was said to stand in for Śākyamuni, the *karmācārya* for Mañjusrī, and the catechist for Maitreya. It is an interesting reversal that, in this ceremony, these figures are asked to stand in for the ordaining masters instead.

The fifth part is called “receiving the Unshakeable Faiths” 受不懷信法 *shou buhuai xinfu*. First, the precept-master gives a long speech using many scriptural citations on the importance of faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Saṅgha, and the precepts themselves, and explains what each of these terms means. Then the candidates say together, “I, N.N., from this moment until my last incarnation is exhausted, take refuge in the Buddha (the Dharma, the Saṅgha, and the precepts).” They repeat this sequence of sentences three times, with a full prostration after each repetition.

In the sixth part, the recipient confesses all faults of the past, the present, and the future 懺悔三時罪 *chanhui san shi zui*. The precept-master gives a short sermon on the effects of past karma and the importance of confession, and then leads the candidates in saying, “If I, N.N., in the past (present, future) have committed any of the ten evil acts of body, speech, or mind, may they never arise at any time in the future.” The recipients repeat this sequence three times, again with a full prostration after each repetition.

The seventh part is called “teaching the generation of the Great Vows” 教發大願 *jiao fa dayuan*. As the preceptor explains, these are a series of 14 vows designed to help the candidates in their future practice, and include things such as vowing to recite [Amitābha] Buddha’s name, seek out good friends, avoid vicious friends, recite sūtras, save suffering sentient beings, and so on. This part appears to be unique to the Haiming Chan Temple’s liturgy.

The eighth part of this ceremony is where the main business begins, the “formal conferring of the precept-substance” 正授戒體 *zhengshou jieti*. In this part, the preceptor makes three requests that all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sentient beings in the universe attend and witness to the reception of the precepts by the candidates. Before he does this, however, the *karmācārya* instructs the candidates in a series of visualizations. During the first request, they are to imagine the “fine, subtle precept-Dharma” of the universe vibrating from the power of mental karma “like a covering of clouds.” During the second request, they are to imagine it settling like a cloud on their heads. During the third request, they are to take it in through the tops of their heads and bring it into their bodies and minds.

The ninth part is the “declaration of the precepts” 秉宣戒相 *bingxuan jiexiang*. At this stage, the preceptor-master declares the six major precepts of the *Youposai Jie Jing* one by one, followed by the question, “Can you keep this precept?” To each, the candidates reply, “We can.” There is no place in this ceremony for all 28 of the minor precepts to be individually conferred and received. Instead, the preceptor simply says, “In addition, there are the 28 minor precepts. Can you keep each of them?”, to which the candidates reply once again, “We can.” The tenth and final part is, of course, dedicating the merit of this ceremony to the salvation of all suffering beings.

All of my informants agree that burning incense scars 燃香疤 *ran xiangba* is definitely part of the ceremony. The norm in Taiwan seems to be to receive them in multiples of three on the left inner forearm. If this is indeed the norm, then it represents a standardization of the practice that was absent on the mainland in the past. Holmes WELCH reports that many recipients of the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts received scars on the head, while others received them on the arm, and others received none at all. WELCH states that scars on the forearm had the advantage of being visible, whereas those on the head would be covered when the hair over them grew back.

As with the receipt of the Buddha-recitation beads 念珠 *nianzhu* in bracelet form after taking the Three Refuges, this scarring with incense is an ambiguous status marker. Anyone can receive scars on the inner forearm at any time for any reason. (Once when the Xilian Temple set up a table for conferring scars during a Dharma-meeting, they invited me to go up and receive some. I declined.) Frequently people elect to receive scars in conjunction with other vows, or as a way of rededicating

themselves to Buddhism, or as an expression of devotion, or in conjunction with a prayer in hopes that it will be granted. For example, in his memoirs, Ven. Chen-hua relates how he once burned twelve additional scars on his arm while praying to the bodhisattva Guanyin for his father's conversion to Buddhism. Thus, the presence of such scars does not definitely indicate receipt of the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts. However, this is one of only two places that I have encountered in Taiwan Buddhism where incense scars are not optional (the other being the scarring on the head upon taking full monastic ordination). One might say, then, that it is a negative marker: the absence of scars on the forearm definitely indicates that one has not received these precepts.

Recipients of the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts, like clergy, are also required to recite their precepts twice a month. One informant told me that he knew of a group of recipients who gathered at a Buddhist lecture hall each day of the full and new moons for a joint recitation. All temples that confer the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts print and distribute copies of the recitation ceremony at the end of the conferral. Recipients of the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts also receive certificates issued directly by the BAROC.

Finally, the Bodhisattva Precepts, whether lay or clerical, have the longest effective period of any set of precepts, including monastic. As is clear from the ceremony itself, as well as from the testimony of my informants, these precepts hold not only for this life but for all subsequent lives. In general terms, they can be lost either by a grave violation of one of the major precepts, which entails "defeat," or by intentionally abandoning them. The *Youposai Jie Jing* 優婆塞戒經 itself, with which we are most concerned here, lists six ways of losing the precepts: by cutting off one's good roots (presumably by violating one of the six major precepts), by rebirth as a hermaphrodite, by committing suicide, by taking on evil precepts (such as vowing to become an assassin), by intentionally abandoning them, or by being reborn on a plane above the Desire Realm (i.e., in the Form or Formless Realms). Ven. Shengyan, however, is more inclined to agree with the *Precious Garland Sūtra* (菩薩瓔珞本業經 *Pusa Yingluo Benye Jing*, T. 1485), which states that one never really loses the Bodhisattva Precepts. One only "covers" them for a time. They remain a part of the recipient forever¹³. On this view,

13. SHENGYAN, *Jielixue Gangyao*, p. 302-303.

the recipient of the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts has entered a stage of the Buddhist life that is arguably more permanent than any other!

VI. Summary observations about the stages of lay life

At this point we have come to the end of the continuum of stages in lay life, and so it is worth stopping for a moment and taking stock of all the changes that have taken place in our hypothetical pilgrims' lives. At the beginning they were neophytes, interested in Buddhism and perhaps beginning to frequent temples, but still "raw material," as yet untempered by Buddhist training or practice.

Then they took the Three Refuges, which put them within the circle of Buddhist followers (although they are not confined there), and put a rosary of Buddha-recitation beads around their wrist as a sign to the world of their commitment. They also received a new name, although they would only use this when at the temple; it would not replace their secular name. Finally, they began to learn a bit about temple decorum, and thus gained some self-confidence when attending temple functions.

By the time they had taken the Five Lay Precepts, they had spent at least one night living in a temple, absorbing its basic orientation and atmosphere and learning some of its etiquette. They made vows to undertake some concrete lifestyle changes, although these were very general and open to interpretation. After the conferral ceremony, they moved a little closer to the altar during Dharma-meetings and gained the privilege of wearing a *manyi* similar to that worn by the clergy, although theirs differed in being made from whole cloth and not from strips.

If our layperson makes it all the way to receiving the Lay Bodhisattva Precepts, then he or she has made a much clearer and firmer commitment to re-arrange their life and conduct in accordance with Buddhist principles. Not only do they wear a robe at Dharma-meetings that resembles that worn by clergy, but they have incense scars (although in a different place), and recite their precepts twice a month (although it is a different set of precepts). They have spent more time at the temple, received more detailed training, and move as close to the altar as it is possible for laypeople to move during Dharma-meetings. In all these cases, the layperson at this level has appropriated practices and status markers that are similar to, but still distinguishable from, those employed by the clergy.

The person who makes it through this process occupies a very high place within Buddhist circles, but this does not translate into recognition within wider society. Some of the status markers, such as the new name and the ceremonial garb, are only used while at a temple. Others are too ambiguous to be read clearly by people in secular society: a set of beads on the wrist or scars on the forearm are recognized generally as having some Buddhist significance, but the average non-Buddhist is not likely to know what they mean specifically in terms of one's status within the world of Buddhism. One may contrast this feature of lay Buddhist status markers with those employed by clergy. Monks and nuns wear their robes, display their scars, and use their new names everywhere they go, and the meaning of these status-markers is recognized by all members of Chinese society, whether within or outside of Buddhist circles.

We must be careful, however, not to attribute all of the effects of following this life-progression as we have traced it thus far solely to going through these rites of passage. In particular, there are many other activities that take place at Buddhist temples during which laypeople may learn temple etiquette, decorum, and customs as well as develop a sense of attachment to the temple. Participants in One- or Seven-day Buddha-Recitation Retreats spend considerable time at the temple and go through very detailed training in such things as table etiquette, processions in the Great Shrine Hall, and handling the haiqing robes.

Conclusions

The implications of the foregoing discussion should make clear to the reader the necessity of heeding Gregory SCHOPEN's argument as stated earlier: in matters of Buddhist practice, one cannot rely solely on textual evidence. In this instance, the observation of rituals for transmitting and receiving lay precepts in modern Taiwan shows that the living Buddhist community organizes itself into a hierarchy that does not correspond to the division of Buddhists found in literary sources. It thus becomes apparent that scholars must revise their view of the status and role of laypeople in the Buddhist community, and be open to further revelations as researchers undertake fieldwork in other parts of the Buddhist world and in different periods of time. Such research will give scholars a more accurate picture of the place of literature in the Buddhist tradition, and also of the practices of living Buddhists.

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