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## *Buddhist Nuns*

Peter SKILLING <i>Eṣā agrā: Images of Nuns in (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin Literature .....</i>	135
Ivette M. VARGAS-O'BRIAN <i>The Life of dGe slong ma dPal mo: The Experience of a Leper, Founder of a Fasting Ritual, a Transmitter of Buddhist Teachings on Suffering and Renunciation in Tibetan Religious History.....</i>	157
Kim GUTSCHOW <i>What Makes a Nun? Apprenticeship and Ritual Passage in Zanskar, North India.....</i>	187
Sarah LEVINE <i>The Finances of a Twentieth Century Buddhist Mission: Building Support for the Theravāda Nuns' Order of Nepal.....</i>	217
Peter SKILLING <i>Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism .....</i>	241
Ann HEIRMAN <i>Chinese Nuns and their Ordination in Fifth Century China .....</i>	275
Notes on the Contributors.....	305

## CHINESE NUNS AND THEIR ORDINATION IN FIFTH CENTURY CHINA

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### *Introduction*

According to the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* (比丘尼傳, T.2063)<sup>1</sup>, a collection of biographies of Buddhist nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*) compiled by Pao-ch'ang between 516 and 519, the first Chinese nun was Chu Ching-chien (竺淨檢, ca.292-361)<sup>2</sup>. When in the beginning of the fourth century, she wanted to become a nun, she was told that in China the rules for nuns were not complete<sup>3</sup>, but that in foreign countries these rules existed. Consequently, Chu Ching-chien, and twenty-four other women with her, at first received only the ten precepts for *śrāmaṇerīs* (novices)<sup>4</sup> from a monk instructor. Later, in the middle of the fourth century, Chu Ching-chien and four other women were ordained before the *bhikṣusaṃgha* (community of monks) on the basis of a *karmavācanā* (list of procedures) and of a *prātimokṣa* (list of rules) of the Mahāsāṃghika School. According to Z. Tsukamoto<sup>5</sup>, however, there is no evidence of the spread of these Mahāsāṃghika works. He hereby points to the fact that also after the ordination of the first nun, the search for disciplinary rules for the *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* (community of nuns) continued. Moreover, the fact that this ordination, contrary to what is imposed in the *vinaya* rules, could not take place before a twofold community (nuns and monks) led to discussion, as also mentioned in the biography of Chu Ching-chien<sup>6</sup>. An important step for the *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* in China was the translation of a Sarvāstivāda *bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣa* in 379-380 in Ch'ang-an. This (lost) text finally provided the *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* with

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Tsai, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> T.2063, pp.934c2-935a5.

<sup>3</sup> On early sets of rules for nuns, see Tsukamoto, 1985: Vol.1, 419, 423-430.

<sup>4</sup> On the ten precepts, see Heirman, 2002: Part I, 66, 100.

<sup>5</sup> Tsukamoto, 1985: Vol.1, 424.

<sup>6</sup> T.2063, p.934c24-25.

a solid basis<sup>7</sup>. The question, however, whether an ordination only held before the *bhikṣusamgha* is valid, remained. This is clear from the biography of the nuns Hui-kuo (慧果, ca.364-433)<sup>8</sup> and Seng-kuo (僧果, 408-???)<sup>9</sup> that contain the story of the re-ordination of more than three hundred nuns ca. 433, this time in the presence of an adequate quorum of (Sinhalese) nuns able to assure a proper transmission of the rules for women from the time of the Buddha. The permission for this ordination was given by the monk Guṇavarman (求那跋摩, 367-431)<sup>10</sup>. Among other things, Guṇavarman is known for his translation of the *Szu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni chieh-mo-fa* (四分比丘尼羯磨法, T.1434), a *karmavācānā* text for nuns of the Dharmaguptaka School. Therefore, S. Lévi and É. Chavannes<sup>11</sup> are of the opinion that Guṇavarman probably advocated an ordination according to the rules of the latter school. A. Hirakawa<sup>12</sup>, however, considers T.1434 to be based on a *karmavācānā* text for monks, entitled *Chieh-mo* (羯磨, T.1433), that is itself a compilation based on the Chinese *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T.1428).

As is evident from the above, the nuns were anxious to be ordained on a correct legal basis, as it was written down in the *vinaya* texts. The discussion reached its peak in the first half of the fifth century. By that time, four *vinayas* had been translated into Chinese: 1) the *Mi-sha-sai pu ho-hsi wu-fen lü* (彌沙塞部和醯五分律, T.1421), *Mahīsāsa-kavinaya*, translated by Buddhajīva, Hui-yen and Chu Tao-sheng between 422 and 423; 2) the *Mo-ho-seng-ch'i lü* (摩訶僧祇律, T.1425), *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, translated by Buddhābhadrā and Fa-hsien between 416 and 418; 3) the *Szu-fen lü* (四分律, T.1428), *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, translated by Buddhayaśas and Chu Fo-nien between 410 and 412; 4) the *Shih-sung lü* (十誦律, T.1435), *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, translated between 404 and 409 by Fu-jo-to-lo (Punyatṛāta/Puṇyatara), Kumārajīva and Dharmaruci, and revised a few

<sup>7</sup> On this text, see Tsukamoto, 1985: Vol.1, 424-426; Heirman, 2000: 9-11.

<sup>8</sup> T.2063, p.937b18-c7.

<sup>9</sup> T.2063, pp.939c6-940a3.

<sup>10</sup> For a biography, see Shih, 1968: 125-137, a translation of *Kao-seng chuan* (高僧傳, T.2059, pp.340a15-342b10).

<sup>11</sup> Lévi and Chavannes, 1916: 46.

<sup>12</sup> Hirakawa, 1970: 202-218.

years later by Vimalākṣa. In addition, a commentary on the *prā-timokṣasūtra* of an unknown school<sup>13</sup> (*P'i-ni-mu ching*, 毘尼母經, *Vinayamāṭṛkā?*, T.1463), translated at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century, is extant.

The present article aims at examining all the ordination possibilities for women that are given in these texts, as well as the reactions upon them, hereby also taking the earliest Chinese commentaries into account. In this way, we can obtain a clear overview of all the data on the admittance of women into the *saṃgha* as they were known in fifth century China. Also the Chinese attitude towards these different procedures can be revealed. This analysis brings all the different versions of the story of Mahāprajāpatī and of the Śākya women to light, gives us some insight in the ordination of extraordinary women, and outlines the final ordination ceremony as it is strictly regulated by the Buddhist jurisprudence.

For comparative reasons, I have also included six more texts: 1) the Pāli *Vinaya*<sup>14</sup>, the Chinese translation of which — made at the end of the fifth century — was never presented to the emperor and was subsequently lost<sup>15</sup>; 2) the *Vinaya* (for nuns) of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins<sup>16</sup>, preserved in an Indian language and never translated into Chinese, but closely related to the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*; 3) the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*<sup>17</sup>, translated by I-ching between 700 and 711; 4) text 116 *Ch'ü-t'an-mi ching*, 瞿曇彌經, *Sūtra on Gautamī*<sup>18</sup> of the

<sup>13</sup> Demiéville et al., 1978: 125; Yuyama, 1979: 44. According to É. Lamotte (1958: 212), this text belongs to the Haimavata School. In the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan*, a *Pi'-ni-mu ching* is linked to the Sarvāstivāda School (T.2063, p.947b29-c1). The story of Mahāprajāpatī itself resembles the one of the Dharmaguptaka School.

<sup>14</sup> Edited by H. Oldenberg, *The Vinaya Piṭakaṃ*, London, 1879-1883.

<sup>15</sup> Still, some ideas of the Pāli *Vinaya* became known to the Chinese when in 488-489 the monk Saṃghabhadra made a partial translation of the Pāli *Samantapāsādikā*, a fourth or fifth century commentary on the Pāli *Vinaya*: *Shan-chien lü p'i-p'o-sha* (善見律毘婆沙, T.1462).

For more details on Pāli *vinaya* influence in China, see Heirman (forthcoming(a)).

<sup>16</sup> Written in a transitional language between Prakrit and Sanskrit (Roth, 1970: lv-lvi). It has been edited by G. Roth, *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya*, Patna, 1970.

<sup>17</sup> *Ken-pen-shuo-i-ch'ieh-yu pu p'i-nai-ye* (根本說一切有部毘奈耶, T.1442-T.1451). Of the latter *vinaya*, a Tibetan translation as well as many Sanskrit fragments are extant.

<sup>18</sup> A nearly identical text is T.60: *Fo-shuo-ch'ü-t'an-mi-chi-kuo ching* (佛說瞿曇彌記果經, *Sūtra on the story of Gautamī*), translated by Hui-chien in the fifth century.

*Madhyamāgama*<sup>19</sup> translated by Gautama Saṃghadeva and Saṃgharakṣa between 397 and 398; 5) the *Pi-nai-yeh* (鼻奈耶), T.1464, a *vinaya* text belonging to the Sarvāstivāda School and translated by Chu Fo-nien in 383<sup>20</sup>, that contains the story of the ordination of an extraordinary woman; 6) the *Ta-ai-tao-pi-ch'iu-ni ching* (大愛道比丘尼經, *Sūtra on the bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī*), T.1478, possibly translated in the first half of the fifth century.<sup>21</sup>

## 1. The ordination of Mahāprajāpatī

### 1.1. The basic story

According to tradition, the first nun ever ordained was the Buddha's stepmother, Mahāprajāpatī. Her story appears in most *vinayas*, as well as in text 116 of the *Madhyamāgama*<sup>22</sup>. In Table 1 below, I have listed the main elements of the story of Mahāprajāpatī in order to point out the differences or similarities between the several texts<sup>23</sup>. The second table gives an overview of the reactions on the ordination, recorded in the same texts.

<sup>19</sup> *Chung-a-han ching* (中阿含經, T.26), containing 222 *sūtras*. The *Chung-a-han ching* has been attributed to the Sarvāstivāda School (Waldschmidt, 1980: 136-139; Bechert, 1985: Vol.1, 48).

<sup>20</sup> Yuyama, 1979: 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Hirakawa, 1970: 273-274; Demiéville et al., 1978: 126.

<sup>22</sup> Although Mahāprajāpatī is traditionally seen as the first Buddhist nun, it is not unlikely that the story of her ordination arose when the community of nuns already existed for some time (Horner, 1930: 102-103; Sponberg, 1992: 32, note 14; Harvey, 2000: 386-387; Williams: 2000).

<sup>23</sup> For a comparison of the story contained in the Pāli *Vinaya* and the one of a Sanskrit *vinaya* text belonging to the Mūlasarvāstivāda School (Schmidt, 1994: 156-162), see Sponberg, 1992: 13-18, 32-35; Hüskén, 1993: 151-165. The Sanskrit text has been edited by C.M. Ridding and L. de La Vallée Poussin in 1919 and was re-edited by M. Schmidt in 1993. In this paper, I have used the latter edition.

**Table 1**

Sources: Pāli *Vinaya*: Vin II, pp.253-258<sup>24</sup>; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, pp.185b19-186b3; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, pp.471a25-476b11<sup>25</sup>; *Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins*, Roth (1970), pp.4-72, §§2-110<sup>26</sup>; *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, pp.922c7-926b3; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435, p.293b29-c9, p.345b29-c22, p.410a10-11<sup>27</sup>; *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1451, pp.350b10-352a25; *Vinayamātrkā?*, T.1463, pp.803a22-b24; *Madhyamāgama*, T.26, text 116: *Ch'ü-t'an-mi ching (Sūtra on Gautamī)*, pp.605a8-607b17.

- a) Mahāprajāpatī<sup>28</sup> asks for the going forth/ordination.
- b) Mahāprajāpatī, her hair cut off and wearing the *kāśāya* (monastic robe), is grieved about the Buddha's denial, and follows him together with many/500 Śākya women.
- c) Ānanda acts as a mediator.
- d) Ānanda asks the Buddha whether or not women who have gone forth can attain the four fruitions: the fruit of stream-entering (*srotaāpattiphala*), of once-returning (*sakṛdāgāmiphala*), of non-returning (*anāgāmiphala*), and of *arhat* (*arhattvaphala*). The Buddha answers in the affirmative<sup>29</sup>.
- e) Ānanda refers to the extensive merit of Mahāprajāpatī towards the Buddha. She nursed and raised him.
- f) Ānanda refers to the fact that all earlier Buddha's had four groups of followers: monks, nuns, lay men and lay women<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Translation: Horner, 1963 [1952]: 352-358.

<sup>25</sup> T.1425 extensively discusses the eight fundamental rules (see note 31), but does not report the story of Mahāprajāpatī's ordination. For this story, the text (p.471a26-27 and p.514b4) refers to a (non extant) *sūtra*, namely the *Sūtra on the going forth of Mahāprajāpatī* (大愛道出家緣經).

Translation: Hirakawa, 1982: 47-98.

<sup>26</sup> Translation: Nolot, 1991: 2-58.

<sup>27</sup> T.1435 only gives an enumeration of the eight fundamental rules (see note 31), and states that Mahāprajāpatī received the ordination by accepting these rules.

<sup>28</sup> Variant: Mahāprajāpatī, accompanied by 500 Śākya women in T.1425, in the *Vinaya of the Mā-L.*, in T.1428, and in T.1451.

<sup>29</sup> In T.1451, also Mahāprajāpatī asks this question, but is given no answer by the Buddha. In T.26, both Mahāprajāpatī and Ānanda ask the same question without receiving an answer.

<sup>30</sup> In T.1421, p.185b26-27, the Buddha says that earlier Buddhas never allowed women to go forth. This is quoted by Tao-hsüan (M. Vol.64, *Szu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni ch'ao*, 四分比丘尼鈔, *Commentary on the [part for] bhikṣuṇīs of the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, p.113a13-16) as the reason why the Buddha refused to ordain women.

- g) The Buddha formulates eight fundamental rules (*gurudharma*)<sup>31</sup>. Their main aim is making the *bhikṣuṅgasaṃgha* dependent upon the (superior) *bhikṣusaṃgha*: 1) even when a nun has been ordained for one hundred years, she must rise up from her seat when seeing a newly ordained monk, and she must pay obeisance, 2) a nun may not revile a monk saying that he has done something wrong, 3) a nun may not punish a monk, nor admonish him, whereas a monk may admonish a nun, 4) after a woman has been trained as a probationer for two years, the ordination ceremony must be carried out in both communities (i.e. first in the nuns' community, and then in the monks' community), 5) when a nun has committed a *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offense (an offense that leads to a temporary exclusion), she has to undergo the penance in both communities, 6) every fortnight, the nuns have to ask the monks for instruction, 7) nuns cannot spend the summer retreat (rainy season) in a place where there are no monks, 8) at the end of the summer retreat, nuns have to carry out the *pravāraṇā* ceremony<sup>32</sup> (also) in the monks' community.
- h) Mahāprajāpatī receives the ordination through the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules<sup>33</sup>.
- i) The (500) Śākya women
- i) are ordained by the monks.
  - ii) are ordained by a chapter of 10 monks, by means of a *jñāpticaturtha karman*<sup>34</sup>, with Mahāprajāpatī as *upādhyāyini* (teacher).
  - iii) receive the ordination through the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules<sup>35</sup>.
- j) Mahāprajāpatī requests that nuns should be greeted by monks according to seniority. She thus asks the Buddha to relent on one of the fundamental rules. This request is denied because:
- i) in heterodox groups<sup>36</sup> men do not greet women.
  - ii) women are inferior to men for various reasons (see below).

<sup>31</sup> The eight rules differ only slightly from *vinaya* to *vinaya*. The rules here enumerated follow the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*. The eight rules were formulated most probably after the community of nuns had already existed for some time. For a discussion see, among others, Horner, 1930: 118-161; Nolot, 1991: 397-405; Hüsken, 1993: 154-164; Heirman, 1997: 34-43; Hüsken, 1997: 345-360; Heirman, 1998; Heirman, 2002: Part I, 63-65.

<sup>32</sup> The *pravāraṇā* (or invitation) ceremony is held at the end of the summer retreat. On this occasion, every monk (and nun) is expected to invite his (her) fellow-monks (nuns) to point out his (her) wrongs, if any, whether seen, or heard, or suspected.

<sup>33</sup> In T.1428 and T.1451, Mahāprajāpatī and the Śākya women accept the rules.

<sup>34</sup> A *jñāpticaturtha karman* is a formal act consisting of one motion and three propositions that concern the acceptance of the motion by the assembly of monks or nuns. Then follows a conclusion.

<sup>35</sup> In T.1428 and T.1463 both Mahāprajāpatī and the 500 women accept the rules; in T.1451 the acceptance by Mahāprajāpatī is valid also for the 500 women.

<sup>36</sup> Here probably a reference to the Jains (Sponberg, 1992: 34-35, note 24).

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Pāli	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8(i)	9(i)
T.1421	1	2	3	5	4		6	7	9(ii)	8(ii) <sup>37</sup>
T.1425	1						2			
Mā-L.	1	2	3	5	6	4	7	8		
T.1428	1	2	3	5	4		6	7	8(iii)	
T.1435							1	2		
T.1451	1	2	3	4	5	x <sup>38</sup>	6	7	8(iii)	9(ii) <sup>39</sup>
T.1463	1	2	3	4			5	6	7(iii)	
T.26	1	2	3	4	5		6	7		8(ii) <sup>40</sup>

Table 2

- a) The Buddhist doctrine will last for only 500 years instead of 1000<sup>41</sup>.  
 b) A Buddhist community with nuns is like a family with many women: it is weak and vulnerable.

<sup>37</sup> Reasons: points a, b, k and l of Table 2.

<sup>38</sup> Although this idea is not included in the story of Mahāprajāpatī, Ānanda uses it as an argument when he is admonished for having helped women to go forth. For his defense, Ānanda in fact uses three arguments: he refers to the extensive merit of Mahāprajāpatī towards the Buddha, to the family ties that link her to the Buddha and to the fact that earlier Buddhas all had four groups of followers. These arguments are rejected because the merit of the Buddha towards Mahāprajāpatī is, given the fact that he brought her the doctrine, much higher than vice versa; because family ties may never play a role in the *saṃgha*; and because at the time of the earlier Buddhas, people were all allowed to go forth because they had less desire than it is the case now (T.1451, pp.404c23-405a13).

<sup>39</sup> Reasons: points a and l of Table 2.

<sup>40</sup> Reasons: points a, k and l of Table 2.

<sup>41</sup> Although, like the other *vinayas*, T.1428 states that due to the presence of women the doctrine will end sooner, it has different figures and says that without women the doctrine would have lasted as long as 500 years (T.1428, p.923c9-11). According to J. Nattier (1991: 30, note 12), this has to be seen as an error in textual transmission. On this prophecy of decline, see further Nattier, 1991: 28-33; Sponberg, 1992: 32-33, note 15. According to J. Nattier, this idea of decline appears only in the Sthavira side of the development of Buddhism, and not in the surviving literature of the Mahāsāṃghika Schools. It seems, however, that she left unnoticed a passage of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda School that does contain a similar message, saying that the doctrine will endure for only five hundred years now that women enter the monastic order (Roth, 1970, p.16, §12). Still, the context is slightly different. In the *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda School, the Buddha allows the ordination of women out of compassion for Ānanda who intervened on the women's behalf. It is then that the Buddha says: "Il vaut mieux que mon Saddharma ne dure que cinq cents ans" (translation, Nolot, 1991: 9).



- c) Women are like mildew in a paddy field.  
 d) Women are like red rust in a sugar-cane field.  
 e) Women are like an illness in a grain field.  
 f) Women are like damaging weeds in a paddy or in a grain field<sup>42</sup>.  
 g) Women are like hail or frost in a paddy field.  
 h) Women are like hail or frost<sup>43</sup> in a grain field.  
 i) The eight fundamental rules are like a dyke around a water tank, or a dam to stop water<sup>44</sup>.  
 j) The eight fundamental rules are like a bridge/a boat to cross water.  
 k) There are five positions women can never attain<sup>45</sup>. Thus women are inferior.  
 l) Lay people show more respect and offer more gifts to a community without women.

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l
Pāli	1	2	3	4					5			
T.1421	2	3									1	4
T.1425												
Mā-L.	3			2	1				4			
T.1428	4	1						2		3		
T.1435												
T.1451	6	1		3			x <sup>46</sup>	2	4			5
T.1463	3	1								2		
T.26	5	1					2		3		6	4

As can be seen from table 1, the story of Mahāprajāpatī, despite many details, is essentially the same in all texts: Mahāprajāpatī is given the ordination after the mediation by Ānanda, who emphasizes the great merit of the Buddha's stepmother, and who refers to the fact that women can attain the four fruitions, just as men can. Each text also contains a very

<sup>42</sup> Although T.26 and T.60 are two very similar texts, they differ on this item. According to T.60, p.856c3-6, women are like hail in a paddy or a grain field.

<sup>43</sup> As well as wind and rain (T.1451).

<sup>44</sup> Just as the ocean is stopped by the shore (Mā-L.).

<sup>45</sup> T.1421: 1) Śakra devendra (天帝釋), 2) Māra (魔王), 3) Brahmā (梵天王), 4) Sovereign of the world (轉輪聖王, Cakravartin), 5) King of the three realms (三界法王): Buddha. T.26: 1) Tathāgata, The one without fetters, The one who is fully enlightened (如來無所著等正學; Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha), 2) Sovereign of the world (轉輪王, Cakravartin), 3) Śakra devendra (天帝釋), 4) Māra (魔王), 5) Brahmā (大梵天). For a discussion, see Harvey, 2000: 371-373.

<sup>46</sup> This item is not included in the story of Mahāprajāpatī, but appears when Ānanda is being admonished for having helped women to go forth (T.1451, p.404c26-27).

similar list of eight fundamental rules to be accepted by Mahāprajāpatī as a condition for her ordination. It is remarkable that four texts also indicate that Mahāprajāpatī later tried to alleviate one of these rules, by requesting that monks and nuns should greet one another according to seniority.

Table 2 further shows that also the reaction to the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī is similar in all the texts examined. Three of the four attitudes distinguished by A. Sponberg (1992) in his article on gender roles in Buddhism, clearly appear. A. Sponberg defines a first attitude as ‘soteriological inclusiveness’: women and men can both attain the highest Buddhist goal. Indeed, none of the above texts denies that women can become *arhats*, just as men can. Also a second attitude, ‘institutional androcentrism,’ is clearly recognizable. All texts enumerate eight fundamental rules that make nuns inferior to and totally dependent upon the monks’ community, just as women were expected to be inferior to and dependent upon men in the Indian society. This is clearly exemplified by the fact that even a very experienced nun still has to pay respect to an only recently ordained monk, even after the explicit request of Mahāprajāpatī to alleviate this rule. This request is denied for three major reasons. First, women are inferior members of the community, as can be seen from the fact that they are excluded from five high positions in the world, open to men (T.1421, T.26). Secondly, lay people show more respect to a community without women (T.1421, T.1451, T.26). Since lay people are the benefactors of the community, the community tries not to offend them<sup>47</sup>. In this sense, it was already a risk or even a mistake to have accepted women. The very least one could still do, was giving them an inferior position. The third reason emphasizes the danger of women. Women weaken the community so that it lasts less long (T.1421, T.1451, T.26). This brings us to the third attitude distinguished by A. Sponberg, ‘ascetic misogyny’. A. Sponberg hereby indicates that this misogynist view is often found in discussions on ascetic purity. In the story of Mahāprajāpatī, however, the danger of

<sup>47</sup> Although this attitude is prominent in the story of Mahāprajāpatī, we should not forget that many patrons of the community were women and that their support was significant. See Sponberg, 1992: 5-7.

women for the community is emphasized, without indicating what this danger exactly is. The only danger mentioned is the one of less income due to the lack of respect lay benefactors have for women. Women are thus not seen as a danger for the ascetic life of monks, but as a potential danger to the community, a danger that can only be guarded off by the eight fundamental rules, that imply the inferiority of nuns towards monks, or, the control of the monks' community over the nuns' community. This is clearly stressed as fundamental, and is illustrated as a dyke around a water tank. Two texts offer a more balanced view: T.1428 and T.26 not only present women as a dangerous, weakening factor in the community, but also picture them as beings who are themselves more vulnerable to danger than men are. In these texts, the eight fundamental rules are not seen as a dyke to protect the community for women, but as a bridge or a boat to help women to overcome the dangers of the world.

In conclusion, the story of Mahāprajāpatī tells us that soteriologically women are not inferior to men. Socially and institutionally, however, they are. This also seems to be the main reason why, according to the story of Mahāprajāpatī, women are to be seen as a danger to the community. They weaken the community, and thus the doctrine, by making it less respected. This danger can only be countered if the monks strictly control the nuns' community. Two texts add a more positive note to the latter theme. Monks do not only fight the danger of a less respected community by supervising the *bhikṣuṇīsamgha*, but they also offer the nuns a way to get across the dangers of the world.

## 1.2. Mahāprajāpatī re-written

Of the three attitudes mentioned above, it is the last one, misogyny, that is emphasized in the *Ta-ai-tao-pi-ch'iu-ni ching* (大愛道比丘尼經, *Sūtra on the bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī*), T.1478, a later *vinaya* text. It is uncertain when and by whom the text has been translated<sup>48</sup>, but it was

<sup>48</sup> Although the text has been classified as a translation by the earliest catalogues (see note 51), A. Hirakawa points out (1970: 273-274) that it cannot be totally excluded that it is a Chinese compilation.

extant in the first half of the fifth century<sup>49</sup>. From several references to and quotations of this text found in early Chinese *vinaya* commentaries<sup>50</sup>, it is further clear that it attained a certain popularity. Although classified among Hīnayāna *vinaya* translations by the earliest catalogues<sup>51</sup>, many elements in the text refer to Mahāyāna ideas: the wish to instaure Mahāyāna (p.950a4-5), the wish of a *śrāmaṇerī* to save her parents and all human beings (p.947a18), the references to *bodhisattvas* (p.945c21, p.948b10, 25), to the three kinds of *prajñā*<sup>52</sup> (p.952c7-17), and to *prajñāpāramitā* as the only relevant study object that nuns can consult monks about (p.946c13). The first part of the text is the story of Mahāprajāpatī's ordination (T.1478, pp.945b25-949c11). Compared to the earlier versions, we see that, although the essential framework is still there, many elements have been significantly changed:

<sup>49</sup> See note 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Szu-fen lü shan-fan pu-ch'üeh hsing-shih ch'ao* (四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, *An abridged and explanatory commentary on the Dharmaguptakavinaya*), compiled by Tao-hsüan (596-667), references: T.1804, p.137a18, p.151b28; quotation: p.153b5-6 (abridged from T.1478, p.952b15-17). The same quotation in *Szu-fen lü shan-pu sui-i chieh-mo* (四分律刪補隨機羯磨, *An abridged and explanatory karmavācānā of the Dharmaguptakavinaya*), T.1808, p.498c21, and in *Szu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni ch'ao* (四分比丘尼鈔, *Commentary on the [part for] bhikṣuṇīs of the Dharmaguptakavinaya*), M. Vol.64, p.114b5-7, both equally compiled by Tao-hsüan. In the latter text also: p.67a13 (although indicated as a quotation, it is not in T.1478), p.114a17-18 (corresponds to T.1478, p.946c9-11), p.158b1-2 (not in T.1478). See further also *Fan-wang ching p'u-sa-chieh pen-shu* (梵網經菩薩戒本疏, *Commentary on the bodhisattva rules of the Brahma's net sūtra*), compiled by Fa-tsang (643-712), quotation: T.1813, p.636b1-9 (corresponds to T.1478, p.947b25-c3).

<sup>51</sup> *Li-tai san-pao chi* (歷代三寶紀), compiled by Fei Ch'ang-fang in 597, T.2034, p.119c4; *Chung-ching mu-lu* (衆經目錄), compiled by Fa-ching et al. in 594, T.2146, p.140b22; *Chung-ching mu-lu* (衆經目錄), compiled by Yen-ts'ung et al. in 602, T.2147, p.155b28; *Chung-ching mu-lu* (衆經目錄), compiled by Ching-t'ai et al. in 664, T.2148, p.188a10; *Ta-t'ang nei-tien lu* (大唐內典錄), compiled by Tao-hsüan in 664, T.2149, p.300b26 et passim; *Ta-chou k'an-ting chung-ching mu-lu* (大周刊定衆經目錄), compiled by Ming-ch'üan et al. in 695, T.2153, p.433b27 et passim; *K'ai-yüan shih-chiao lu* (開元釋教錄), compiled by Chih-sheng in 730, T.2154, p.695a14 et passim; *Chen-yüan hsün-ting shih-chiao mu-lu* (真元新定釋教目錄), compiled by Yüan-chao in 800, p.1042c26 et passim.

<sup>52</sup> This refers to 實相般若, *prajñā* (wisdom) in its essence or reality; 觀照般若, *prajñā* of perceiving the real meaning of the last; 文字般若, *prajñā* of knowing things in their temporary and changing condition (Soothill, 1987 [1937]: 75).

**Table 1'**

- a) Mahāprajāpatī asks for the ordination because she has heard that women can attain the four fruitions.
- b) Mahāprajāpatī follows the Buddha together with several old mothers. She is very sad because women are hindered by so many bad attitudes: women constantly endanger and delude men.
- c) Ānanda acts as a mediator.
- d) Ānanda reminds the Buddha that women (mothers) can attain the four fruitions. He therefore asks for their ordination. This is refused because women endanger high-principled (male) members of the order, just as they weaken a family, like calamities or thorns that destroy a paddy or a grain field.
- e) Ānanda refers to the extensive merit of Mahāprajāpatī towards the Buddha. She nursed and raised him. This is acknowledged by the Buddha.
- f) (Ānanda refers to the fact that all earlier Buddha's had four groups of followers: monks, nuns, lay men and lay women): not in T.1478.
- g) The Buddha formulates eight fundamental rules (*gurudharma*), that are compared to a dyke stopping water. These rules totally deviate from the rules in the above texts. Only the rule that a nun can never be greeted by a monk is preserved. The rules of T.1478 are less technical and generally intend to form a barrier against allegedly feminine bad habits: 1) nuns must receive the doctrine from monks, and they should not ridicule it or make fun of it, 2) a nun must always honour and certainly never detract a young monk, 3) nuns and monks should never stay in each other's company, since this will inevitably enlighten the desires, 4) nuns themselves should check the nuns' community for bad habits (without the help, and thus without the presence, of monks), 5) nuns cannot demand justice of a monk; if a monk accuses a nun, the nuns themselves should examine the case, without shouting or without reviling the monk, 6) if there is any doubt among the nuns, they can ask the monks for help, but only on *prajñāpāramitā*; they should not consult monks on trivial matters, 7) a nun cannot on her own follow the path; if she offends against a rule, she has to confess it at the fortnightly meeting and reject her arrogant and contemptuous attitude, 8) even when a nun has been ordained for one hundred years, she must rise up from her seat when seeing a newly ordained monk, and she must pay obeisance to him.
- h) Mahāprajāpatī receives the going forth through the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules. After this, the Buddha enumerates forty rules to be followed by a novice (pp.947a9-948c25). The first ten rules are partially based on the ten rules for novices of the above *vinaya* texts<sup>53</sup>. The forty rules aim at restraining all kinds of bad behavior, and at promoting a pure and ascetic life, and respect towards the teacher. Mahāprajāpatī then proves that she

<sup>53</sup> See note 4.

is able to strictly keep up all these rules. Thereupon, she receives the full ordination.

- i) (No reference to the (500) Śākya women.)
- j) Mahāprajāpatī requests that nuns should be greeted by monks according to seniority. The answer is negative because:
- \* people show more respect and offer more gifts to a community without women.
  - \* due to women, the doctrine will last for only 500 years instead of 1000.
  - \* women are inferior; proof: there are five positions<sup>54</sup> that women can never attain.
  - \* women are like venomous snakes. People kill them. But even when a snake is dead, people still fear it. In the same way, people still fear women even when they are *śramaṇas*. The venom is still there. Therefore women should pay respect even to a male novice of only eight years old.
  - \* the *arhat*-ship of women is much less valuable than the *arhat*-ship of men.

This ends the story of Mahāprajāpatī's ordination. It is followed by many further rules for women and by further proofs of inferiority:

- \* When Mahāprajāpatī asks whether women can be saved, the Buddha answers that nuns who strictly follow all the rules can, in the present world, first become men and then attain buddhahood (p.949c12-18). He also gives a few examples<sup>55</sup> (pp.949c18-950a15).
- \* The Buddha then adds many other rules that aim at destroying all bad attitudes (pp.950a22-952b7). If a woman strictly follows these rules, she can become a man and attain buddhahood (p.950b3-6, p.951b20-23<sup>56</sup>).
- \* As for the question whether a woman can become a teacher, the Buddha answers that she can, provided all the monks agree. He then gives some details on the career of a nun (p.952b8-c25).
- \* The last part of the texts states that women are a threat to all living beings, including plants. This is because they all have 84.000 bad attitudes. Only if they can get rid of these attitudes, they can become *arhats* (pp.952c25-955a13).

<sup>54</sup> 1) Tathāgata, The one without fetters, The one who is fully enlightened (如來至真等正學; Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha), 2) Sovereign of the world (轉輪聖王, Cakravartin), 3) Brahmā (第七梵天王), 4) 飛行皇帝: according to H. Nakamura (1985 [1981]: 1127), this is an old term for 轉輪聖王, Cakravartin; variant readings of T.1478 instead have Śakra devendra (天帝釋), 5) Māra (魔天王). See also note 45.

<sup>55</sup> He refers to the story of Sumati (see further Paul, 1985 [1979]: 199-211) and to the story of seven royal daughters (see further Paul, 1985 [1979]: 15-25).

<sup>56</sup> This passage also indicates that a woman first has to become a man before she can attain the four fruitions.

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
T.1478	1	2	3	4	5		6	7		8

As we can see from the above, the main framework of the story is still there, but the content has significantly changed. The possibility of women attaining the four fruitions is only briefly hinted at. Also the fact that nuns are institutionally inferior to men only gets little attention. The main emphasis is now on femininity itself, the basic characteristic of women being that they spread destruction among men. Although, just as in the earlier texts, women are still seen as a danger, the reason why has significantly changed. They are no longer seen as a threat to the community because they make it socially less respected, but are now considered as an inevitable threat to the goals of Buddhist men personally. Femininity itself is the cause of failure<sup>57</sup>. This is also the main message quoted from T.1478 by Tao-hsüan (596-667) in his commentaries on *vinaya*<sup>58</sup>: since women only want to be lustful and to take advantage of disciples, and since they do not want to study and only know trivial things, women will never be able to become religious mendicants (*śramaṇa*) without a *bhikṣusaṃgha*. T.1478 further also warns that even as religious mendicants, women remain viciously dangerous, just as snakes are. It is, in this view, only logical to claim that women first have to become men before they can attain the final goal of liberation<sup>59</sup>. In this sense, this story of Mahāprajāpatī shows to be a good example of severe ‘ascetic misogyny’ as distinguished by A. Sponberg<sup>60</sup>. Women are responsible for constantly trying to debauch men<sup>61</sup>. According to A. Sponberg, this kind of misogynist attitude probably gained importance by the fact that some factions

<sup>57</sup> For instance, one of the thoughts women always have to keep in mind is: ‘if one has received a female shape, one is bound to lust and one cannot constrain oneself’ (p.951b14-15); or ‘women impede themselves (on the way to liberation)’ (p.952c24-25), or ‘women cannot straighten their mind, how could they straighten the mind of other people; women cannot save themselves, how could they save other people; women live in sin, how could they free other people’ (p.953c10-12).

<sup>58</sup> Corresponding to T.1478, p.952b15-17. See also note 50.

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion, see Harrison, 1987: 76-79; Harvey, 2000: 373-376, Harvey, 2001: 70-72.

<sup>60</sup> Sponberg, 1992: 18-24.

<sup>61</sup> For instance: ‘they confuse men and detract them from the path, from virtue [...]. There is no man in the world who has not been misled by women’ (p.946a8-10).

in the community were seeing liberation more and more in terms of ascetic purification, an attitude typical of later Mahāyāna texts.

### 1.3. Mahāprajāpatī as an example to the Chinese nuns

Although the reactions on the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī were not positive, in fifth century China, women candidates for ordination still referred to her as the example to follow. When the discussion on the validity of a nun's ordination that was only held before the *bhikṣusaṃgha* reached its peak, the Chinese nun Hui-kuo asked whether Chinese women could receive the ordination in the way that Mahāprajāpatī did<sup>62</sup>. She too did not receive the ordination from the *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha*. As mentioned in the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan*<sup>63</sup>, the central Asian monk Guṇavarman was of the opinion that there was no difference between Mahāprajāpatī and the Chinese women. The *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* is not clear as to why Guṇavarman accepted Mahāprajāpatī's ordination as a precedent, but it seems to suggest that he put the absence of a *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* at the time of the first ordination in China at the same level as the absence of nuns at the time of Mahāprajāpatī's ordination. In both countries, the ordination of the first nun necessarily had to be carried out without a *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha*<sup>64</sup>. However, when the nun Hui-kuo insisted on the case, Guṇavarman added that according to the *vinaya* rules, a candidate must receive the ordination from a minimum quorum of ten fully ordained nuns, except in border areas where five nuns are sufficient. When asked what exactly a border area is, he seems to consider also China as belonging to it, in which case a minimum quorum of five nuns is needed<sup>65</sup>. This explains why Guṇavarman says: "The correct view is that, if there is an established assembly present, one cannot but go along with all the requirements"<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> T.2063, p.937b25-27.

<sup>63</sup> T.2063, p.937b27.

<sup>64</sup> See also T.2063, p.941a18-19: "Guṇavarman said: 'Since China did not have both *saṃghas*, the women were ordained by the *bhikṣusaṃgha* only.'"

<sup>65</sup> T.2063, p.937c3-4: a border area is an area beyond a thousand Chinese miles or where oceans and mountains create a barrier.

<sup>66</sup> T.2063, p.937c2-3, translation by Tsai, 1994: 37.



The consideration of the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī as a precedent and the validity of the nuns' ordination are again discussed in detail in the biography of the nun Seng-kuo. Although she considered the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī and the five hundred Śākya women as a precedent, she too had some doubts and consulted Guṇavarman on the subject. Guṇavarman agreed with her understanding, but still did not object to a second ordination, now in the presence of foreign nuns. Hereby, the first ordination was to remain valid. The second ordination only serves to enhance the prestige of the *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha*<sup>67</sup>.

Although Guṇavarman thus allowed to extend the case of Mahāprajāpatī to the Chinese nuns, such an extension is never permitted by the *vinaya* or by the *vinaya* commentaries<sup>68</sup>. The *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* explicitly says that only one person could ever be ordained as Mahāprajāpatī (T.1435, p.410a23). This statement is repeated in a commentary on the *Sarvāstivādavīnaya*, the *Sa-p'o-to p'i-ni p'i-p'o-sha* (薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙)<sup>69</sup>, T.1440, p.511b3-4. Another commentary on the *Sarvāstivādavīnaya*, the *Sa-p'o-to-pu p'i-ni mo-te-le-ch'ieh* (薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽)<sup>70</sup>, T.1441, p.594b8, says that after the ordination by means of a *jñapticatortha karman*<sup>71</sup> had been set up, an ordination based on the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules was no longer possible.

## 2. The ordination of the five hundred Śākya women

Numerous Śākya women, often said to be five hundred, are recorded to have accompanied Mahāprajāpatī on her way to the Buddha. While for Mahāprajāpatī the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules equals an ordination, this is not always the case for the Śākya women. On this point, the *vinaya* texts differ. The Pāli *Vinaya* (Vin II, pp.256-257) states that the women should be ordained by monks. They could in fact not yet receive the ordination in both communities, since at that time there was no com-

<sup>67</sup> T.2063, p.939c14-21. Also in his biography, Guṇavarman is said to express the same ideas (*Kao-seng chuan*, T.2059, p.341b2-7).

<sup>68</sup> See also Hüsken, 1997: 364-365.

<sup>69</sup> Probably translated after the translation of the *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* and before 431 (Yuyama, 1979: 8-9).

<sup>70</sup> Translated by Saṃghavarman in 435 (Yuyama, 1979: 8).

<sup>71</sup> See note 34.

munity of nuns yet, but only one nun, Mahāprajāpatī. A similar viewpoint is expressed by the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T.1421, p.186a28-b3): the Śākya women have to be ordained before a chapter of ten monks by means of a *jñapticaturtha karman*. Mahāprajāpatī is the *upādhyāyinī* (teacher). A maximum of three women can be ordained at the same time. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T.1428, p.923c8-9; p.926a27-b3) sees it differently and states that the acceptance of the eight fundamental rules is a valid ordination for both Mahāprajāpatī and the Śākya women<sup>72</sup>. The same idea is also put forward by the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (T.1451, p.351c1-27).

In the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan*, the ordination of the five hundred Śākya women is taken as an example for the Chinese women by the nun Seng-kuo. On the question asked by some Sinhalese nuns on how the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* came into being, she answers that they took Mahāprajāpatī and the five hundred Śākya women as a precedent. Just as Mahāprajāpatī received the ordination by accepting the eight fundamental rules, and just as Mahāprajāpatī was then seen as the *upādhyāyinī* for the Śākya women, in the same way can the Chinese women receive ordination<sup>73</sup>. This seems to imply that Seng-kuo considers Mahāprajāpatī to be the prominent teacher, whose example was followed by both the Śākya women and the Chinese women. As seen above, this kind of extension is not allowed by the *vinaya* texts.

### 3. The ordination of an extraordinary woman

The P'i-ni-mu ching (毘尼母經), T.1463, a commentary on the *prātimokṣasūtra* of an unknown school<sup>74</sup> and the *Pi-nai-yeh* (鼻柰耶), T.1464, a *vinaya* text belonging to the Sarvāstivāda School and translated by Chu

<sup>72</sup> This is confirmed by the *karmavācānā* text for nuns *Ni chieh-mo* (尼羯磨) of the Dharmaguptaka School (compiled by Huai-su in 676, see Yuyama, 1979: 35-36), T.1810, p.540c19-20. This also seems to be the viewpoint of the *Sa-p'o-to-pu p'i-ni mo-te-le-ch'ieh* (薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽), T.1441 (see note 70), p.594a22-23 and p.594b3: Mahāprajāpatī and others (等), presumably the Śākya women (compare the same expression in T.1428, p.923c5) receive the ordination by accepting the eight rules. A similar idea also in the *P'i-ni-mu ching* (毘尼母經), T.1463 (see note 13), p.803b12-24: all women present accept the eight rules and consequently become nuns.

<sup>73</sup> T.2063, p.939c17-18.

<sup>74</sup> See note 13.

Fo-nien in 383, both refer to the ordination accorded to an extraordinary woman. The *P'i-ni-mu ching* (T.1463, p.803b26-c4) relates how once, when the Buddha was in Śrāvastī, a *mātaṅgī* woman<sup>75</sup> came to see him. When the Buddha explained the doctrine to her, she immediately understood it and she obtained the fruit of stream-attainment. The Buddha then gave her the ordination by welcoming her into the Buddhist order<sup>76</sup>. In the *Pi-nai-yeh* (T.1464, pp.863b16-864c12), we find a longer version of this story. It is the story of the *caṇḍālā* woman Prakṛti<sup>77</sup> who at first was attracted by the monk Ānanda. In order to get him for herself she bewitched him, but Ānanda was saved by reciting the words of the Buddha. Prakṛti, however, did not give up and followed Ānanda wherever he went. Ānanda then asked the Buddha for help. The Buddha advised him to bring her along. When Prakṛti heard the Buddhist doctrine from the Buddha, she at once obtained the fruit of stream-attainment. Her parents, who accompanied her, became lay followers and obtained the fruit of non-returning. Finally, the Buddha ordered Ānanda to bring Prakṛti to Mahāprajāpatī for ordination. She received the ordination because she had already attained the fruit of stream-attainment. Once ordained, she reached *arhat*-ship<sup>78</sup>.

The above story points out that it is possible for a woman of a low class to be admitted into the Buddhist order on account of an extraordinary capability to understand the Buddhist doctrine, even if before, she was a tricky woman. This goes beyond the story of Mahāprajāpatī who was a

<sup>75</sup> 摩登祇, *mo-teng-ch'i*: a phonetic rendering of *mātaṅgī*, a woman of the lowest class, a *caṇḍālā* woman (Monier-Williams, 1990 [1899]: 806; Nakamura, 1985 [1981]: 1279).

<sup>76</sup> 善來受具: the ordination by welcoming someone into the order.

<sup>77</sup> 旃茶羅, *chan-ch'a-lo*, a phonetic rendering of *caṇḍālā*, a woman of the lowest and most despised of the mixed tribes (Monier-Williams, 1990 [1899]: 383; Nakamura, 1985 [1981]: 838). Further in the text, she is also qualified as a *mātaṅgī* woman (摩鄢伽, *mo-teng-ch'ieh*, see note 75). Her name was 鉢吉蹄, *po-chi-t'i*, Prakṛti (Akanuma, 1979 [1967]: 511-512).

<sup>78</sup> Similar stories are told in T.551, *Fo-shuo-mo-teng-nü ching*, 佛說摩鄢女經 (*Sūtra on the mātaṅgī girl*), the translation of which is attributed to An Shih-kao (second century AD) (Demiéville et al., 1978: 59-60), p.895a6-c13; in T.552, *Fo-shuo-mo-teng-nü-chieh-hsing-chung-liu-shih ching*, 佛說摩鄢女解形中六事經 (*Sūtra on the mātaṅgī girl and the six senses*), translated between 317-420 (Demiéville et al., 1978: 60), pp.895c21-896b25; in T.1300, *Mo-teng-ch'ieh ching*, 摩登伽經 (*Sūtra on the mātaṅgī girl*), translated by Chu Lü-yen and Chih Ch'ien in the third century (Demiéville et al., 1978: 114), pp.399c28-401b9; and in T.1301, *She-t'ou-chien-t'ai-tzu-erh-shih-pa-su ching*, 舍頭諫太子二十八宿經 (*Sūtra on Śardūlakarṇa and the twenty-eight constellations*), translated by Dharmarakṣa (ca. 265-313) (Demiéville et al., 1978: 114), pp.410b28-411b17.

member of one of the highest classes in society, and whose admittance into the order was not based on her exceptional capability. She obtained only the opportunity to attain the four fruitions. On the other hand, Mahāprajāpatī, never seen as a tricky person, opened the way to all women who want to become a nun, while the *mātaṅgi/caṇḍālā* woman is presented as one exceptional case.

#### 4. The ordination in both *saṃghas* through a *jñāpticaturtha karman*

Once a *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha* had been established, the only way to receive an ordination was through an ordination ceremony in both *saṃghas* by means of a *jñāpticaturtha karman*<sup>79</sup>. This obligation is one of the eight fundamental rules accepted by Mahāprajāpatī, and is never to be transgressed. It assures the proper and uninterrupted transmission of the rules for women from the time of the Buddha onward<sup>80</sup>.

As already mentioned above, this obligation created a major problem in China. In the absence of a *bhikṣuṇīsaṃgha*, the first Chinese nun was ordained in the presence of a chapter of monks only. At first, the *vinaya* master Guṇavarman did not seem to consider this a problem, maybe because he thought that China was that far away from India that it was permitted to nuns to follow in Mahāprajāpatī's footsteps and to start all over again. However, pressed by more questions, he agreed to a new ordination, this time in the presence of a chapter of Sinhalese nuns. Doing so, he never said that the first ordination was invalid, he only said that a second ordination would augment the value of the first one<sup>81</sup>. In what follows, I examine all the criteria mentioned by the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* to have a legally valid (second) ceremony:

- a woman candidate must have studied for two years (as a *śikṣamāṇā*, probationer) before she can be ordained (p.937b28-29). This is in accordance with all the *vinayas*<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> For details on this ceremony, see Heirman, 1997; Heirman, 2002: Part I, 75-79.

<sup>80</sup> The survival of a community relies on an uninterrupted ordination tradition (Bechert, 1961: 45; Kieffer-Pülz, 1992: 28; Harvey, 2001: 71).

<sup>81</sup> T.2063, p.939c20-21, p.941a21-22. See also the biography of Guṇavarman, T.2059, p.341b2-5.

<sup>82</sup> All the *vinayas* state that during the two years that precede her ordination, a woman has to undergo a special training (for details see Heirman, 2002: Part I, 67-75).

- a woman candidate must be of sufficient age (p.941a22-b1)<sup>83</sup>, most probably twenty as said in all the *vinayas*<sup>84</sup>.
- a ‘small district’<sup>85</sup> (‘ordination platform’) has to be established (p.939c23).
- a chapter of at least ten (in border regions five) legally ordained nuns must be present (p.937c1-3; p.939c21-22)<sup>86</sup>.

All the *vinayas* indicate a minimum number of monks and nuns to be present at an ordination ceremony. To ordain a male candidate, ten monks are needed in the *bhikṣusamṅha*. In border regions, a group of five monks is sufficient<sup>87</sup>. To ordain a female candidate, most *vinayas* state that ten nuns are required for the first ceremony in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*, and ten monks for the second ceremony in the *bhikṣusamṅha*<sup>88</sup>. In border regions,

<sup>83</sup> After the ordination question of the Chinese nuns had been settled ca. 433, there is only one reason put forward why an ordination can still be declared invalid, and a second ordination can possibly be allowed, namely when at the first ordination the candidate was not of sufficient age. See also the biography of Guṇavarman, T.2059, p.341b3-4.

<sup>84</sup> On the age of a candidate, see Heirman, 2002: Part I, 82-88.

<sup>85</sup> Any formal act has to be carried out within a well delimited district (*sīmā*). In order to have a legally valid formal act, every monk or nun present in that district has to attend the ceremony. In case a formal act can be carried out without the presence of all monks/nuns of the usual *sīmā* (valid, for instance, for the *poṣadha* ceremony, see note 97), a small *sīmā* (in the Pāli *Vinaya*, *khaṇḍasīmā*; in the *Samantapāsādikā*, also *sīmāmāḷaka* and *sīmāmaṇḍala*) can be delimited. This is the case for the ordination ceremony when a chapter of ten monks/nuns is sufficient. See Kieffer-Pülz, 1992: 27-28, 192-194. To all probability, the Chinese term 壇界 (T.2063, p.939c23) corresponds to this small district (cf. Nakamura, 1985 [1981]: 942, s.v. 壇; *maṇḍala*; Heirman, 2002: Part III, 1046, s.v. *sīmā*: 界).

<sup>86</sup> See also the biography of Guṇavarman, T.2059, p.341b5-7.

<sup>87</sup> Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin I, pp.58-59, 197, 319; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, p.144b28-29, p.162c16-18; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.416a19-22, p.422b4-8; *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.846a4-6, p.886a25-27; *Sarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1435, p.219c25-28; *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1447, pp.1052c10-1053a3.

<sup>88</sup> Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin II, pp.271-273 (first ceremony in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*; the number of nuns is not explicitly mentioned), pp.273-274 (second ceremony in the *bhikṣusamṅha*; the number of monks is not explicitly mentioned); *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, p.187c7-8 (10 nuns), p.188b3ff. (the *bhikṣusamṅha* is addressed; the number of monks is not explicitly mentioned); *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.473c24-26 (at least 10 nuns and 10 monks); *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Roth (1970), p.50, §67 (at least 10 nuns and 10 monks); *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.763b24, p.763c28-29 (10 nuns), p.925a27ff., p.926a20 (the *bhikṣusamṅha* is addressed; the required number of nuns (10, see note 89) and monks has to be present; the number of monks is not explicitly mentioned); *Sarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1435, p.331b16-17, p.333a15-16, a29-b1, 8-9, 17 (first ceremony in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*; the number of nuns is not explicitly mentioned), p.331a18-19ff., p.332c28-29ff. (second ceremony in

five nuns and five monks can presumably carry out the ordination. The number of nuns to be present at the ceremony in the *bhikṣusamṅha* is generally also ten.<sup>89</sup> These figures are confirmed by the *Commentary on the [part for] bhikṣuṇīs of the Dharmaguptakavinaya* compiled by Tao-hsüan: for the first ceremony in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*, ten nuns are required. In border areas only five. For the second ceremony in the *bhikṣusamṅha*, there must be ten nuns and ten monks<sup>90</sup>.

In China, the presence of fully ordained nuns became possible when in 429, a foreign boat captain named Nan-t'i (難提) brought several<sup>91</sup> Buddhist nuns from Sri Lanka to Nan-ching, the capital of the Southern Sung dynasty<sup>92</sup>. Although Guṇavarman had agreed to a new ordination in the presence of foreign nuns, the Chinese nuns still had to wait until a sufficient number of Sinhalese nuns had arrived in China<sup>93</sup>. This was the case ca. 433<sup>94</sup>. By that time, however, Guṇavarman had died and the ceremony was guided by another monk, Saṃghavarman<sup>95</sup>. He was well acquainted with *vinaya* and translated a commentary (T.1441) on the *Sarvāstivādavinaya*.

the *bhikṣusamṅha*; both communities have to be present; 10 monks are required); *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, Schmidt (1993), p.256 (at least 12 nuns and 10 monks) (see also T.1451, p.352a26-27: for nuns, there are formal procedures that require four, five, or twelve nuns; in addition, there are formal procedures carried out in both *saṃghas*).

<sup>89</sup> Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin II, pp.273-274 (nuns accompany the candidate; the exact number is not mentioned); *Mahāsāśakavinaya*, T.1421, p.188a23-24 (10 nuns accompany the candidate); *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.473a28 (the *upādhyāyini* (and maybe other nuns, see the *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins) accompanies the candidate); *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Roth (1970), pp.43-44, §57 (the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha* accompanies the candidate); *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.925a25-26 (the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha* accompanies the candidate); *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435, p.332c27 (the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha* accompanies the candidate); *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, Schmidt (1993), p.256 (the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha* accompanies the candidate).

See also Kieffer-Pülz, 2000: 377-380.

<sup>90</sup> M. Vol.64, *Szu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni ch'ao*, 四分比丘尼鈔, p.72a3, p.73a3-4, p.79a1-6.

<sup>91</sup> Maybe eight, see the biography of Guṇavarman, T.2059, p.341a29.

<sup>92</sup> T.2063, p.939c12-14.

<sup>93</sup> See the biography of Guṇavarman, T.2059, p.341b5-7. The latter passage also points out that the first Sinhalese women were not of sufficient age. This possibly refers to the minimum seniority of twelve years that is requested by all the *vinayas* for the *upādhyāyini* (teacher) of the candidate (see Heirman, 2002: Part I, 89 and 110-111, notes 113 and 114).

<sup>94</sup> 432: p.937c4-5; 433: p.939cc21-22; 434: p.941a20-21, p.944c3-5.

<sup>95</sup> *Seng-chia-pa-mo* (僧伽跋摩). For a biography, see Shih, 1968: 138-140, a translation of *Kao-seng chuan* (高僧傳, T.2059, p.342b11-c7).

As can be seen from the above, one certainly tried to avoid any further discussion on the validity of the second ordination. In this context, it is striking that no attention whatsoever went to recording which *vinaya* text was used at the ceremony. This is remarkable since the *vinayas* known to the Chinese in the fifth century all state that a legal procedure (*karman*) has to be carried out by a harmonious *saṃgha* (*samagrasaṃgha*)<sup>96</sup>. The terms *samagra* and *saṃgha* imply that there has to be unity in legal procedures and unity in the recitation of the precepts, this is unity in the recitation of the *prātimokṣa* at the *poṣadha*<sup>97</sup> ceremony<sup>98</sup>; that all monks and nuns who are present in the legal district (*sīmā*)<sup>99</sup> have to attend the ceremony; and that there have to be enough monks or nuns in order to carry out a formal act in a legally valid way. Only then do we have a harmonious *saṃgha*. This implies that this kind of *saṃgha* is only possible within one and the same school (*nikāya*), defined by a common *vinaya*<sup>100</sup>. Consequently, the chapter of nuns or monks and the candidate for ordination naturally have to rely on the same *vinaya*. Was this the case for the first ordinations in China? The texts do not give any hint about the *vinaya* text for this ceremony. We only know that the two monks who

<sup>96</sup> Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin I, p.316; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, p.161c17; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.422b9-14; *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.885c14-15; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435, p.220a13-14, c3-5.

<sup>97</sup> A ceremony held every fortnight and attended by all monks/nuns of the district (*sīmā*), so that the unity of the order is reaffirmed. At this ceremony, the *prātimokṣa* (list of precepts) is recited.

<sup>98</sup> Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin III, p.173 (see also the definition of ‘not to live in the community’ (*asaṃvāsa*) in Vin III, p.28); *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, p.20c6-7; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.282c23-25; *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.595a15-16; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435, p.266c18-24.

See Tiekens, 2000: 2-3, 10-11, 13, 26-27, who points out that ‘unanimous’ is the prominent meaning of ‘*samagra*’. See also Hu-von Hinüber, 1994: 219-226; Heirman, 2002: Part II, 244, 262, 271, 282 (notes 53-55), 327 (notes 290-292).

<sup>99</sup> A district in which the formal acts are carried out by an entire order in a legally valid way (see note 85).

<sup>100</sup> Schools (*nikāya*) are defined by the recognition of a common *vinaya*, and thus of a common *prātimokṣa*. Only then can they commonly perform legal procedures. See Bechert, 1982: 67-68; Bizot, 1988: 13; Bechert, 1993: 54: ‘As a rule, monks belonging to different Nikāyas do not conduct joint Sanghakarmas [formal acts]. Though they may not always dispute the validity of each other’s ordination, they do not recognize it as beyond dispute either. If there were doubts about the validity, the Sanghakarma would be questionable. If the validity of ordinations is called into question, the legitimation of the Sangha is endangered.’”



played an important role in the realization of the ceremony, Guṇavarman and Saṃghavarman, were probably acquainted with respectively the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* and the *Sarvāstivādavinaya*. We also know that in the fifth century, three *vinayas* were popular: in the south mainly the *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, and in the north the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* and to a lesser extent the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*<sup>101</sup>. Since the ordination ceremony was held in the present city of Nan-ching, it is not unlikely that the *Sarvāstivādavinaya* has been used. However, another *vinaya* can certainly not be excluded. In any case, it is highly improbable that the Pāli *Vinaya* was the basic text. Not one ordination based on the latter text is found in the biographies of Chinese monks or nuns. That the Sinhalese nuns were most probably ordained in the Pāli tradition<sup>102</sup> does not seem to have caused a problem to the Chinese. First of all, in the fifth century the question of using only one *vinaya* was not an issue for *vinaya* masters<sup>103</sup>. Secondly, the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* tells us that the first group of Sinhalese nuns had already mastered Chinese before the ordination ceremony was held<sup>104</sup>. The *Kao-seng chuan* adds that Guṇavarman even explicitly asked them to study Chinese<sup>105</sup>. It is therefore possible that they did not only learn Chinese, but that they also studied a Chinese *vinaya*. In that case, even when the Sinhalese nuns had been ordained in a different tradition, the Chinese ordination ceremony itself can have been based on one and the same *vinaya*. Since no *vinaya* explicitly says that all the participants to an ordination ceremony have to be ordained in the same tradition, but only that a *saṃgha* that carries out a formal act has to be unanimous as to the *poṣadha* ceremony, the conditions for a valid ordination ceremony can have been fulfilled: the required number of nuns was present, and the participants all referred to the same legal procedures and the same *prā-timokṣa*.

The second ordination ceremony closed the debate on the validity of the ordination of Chinese nuns. However, in 474, a group of nuns again asked a new ordination after having listened to an exposition on the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* rules by the *vinaya* master Fa-ying. This request was

<sup>101</sup> See Heirman, forthcoming(b).

<sup>102</sup> Tsai, 1981: 8; Bartholomeusz, 1996 [1994]: 20-22.

<sup>103</sup> See Heirman, forthcoming (a) and (b).

<sup>104</sup> T.2063, p.939c22-23.



refused. It is not clear why the nuns wanted another ordination. According to the *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan*, it was because unorthodox practices were widely spread. The text does not say what kind of unorthodox practices these were, but the nuns were told that the only reason to receive another ordination was that a nun was not of sufficient age at the time of the first ordination<sup>106</sup>. After this incident, no further discussions on the validity of the ordination are mentioned.

### 5. The ordination through a messenger

Finally, a particular ordination ceremony is allowed when it is too dangerous for a woman candidate to go to the *bhikṣusamṅha* after her ordination in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*, i.e. when her chastity might be violated. In such cases, the permission to ordain through messengers is given in all *vinayas*<sup>107</sup>:

- Pāli *Vinaya*, Vin II, pp.277-278: first allowed to the courtesan Aḍḍhakāśī. A competent nun goes to the *bhikkhusamṅha* on her behalf. The ordination ceremony takes place in the *bhikkhusamṅha*. Back in the *bhikkhunīsamṅha* some rules are explained to the newly ordained nun<sup>108</sup>.
- *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421, p.189a26-b15: first allowed to the courtesan Ardhakāśī. A group of ten nuns goes to the *bhikṣusamṅha* on her behalf. Back in the *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*, the candidate is told about the ceremony that took place. Finally, some rules are again explained to her.
- *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425, p.474a3-b29: first allowed to a disciple of the nun Dharmadinnā. The *upādhyāyini* of the candidate goes to the *bhikṣusamṅha* and asks for messengers. Two or three monks then go back with her to hear the woman candidate. Thereupon the ordination is carried out in the *bhikṣusamṅha* in the presence of the

<sup>105</sup> T.2059, p.341b6.

<sup>106</sup> T.2063, p.941a22-b1.

<sup>107</sup> Also T.1463 (*P'i-ni-mu ching*, see note 13), p.807a7-11, refers to the possibility of an ordination through a messenger. When the Buddha was still alive, it was allowed once for a very beautiful girl. The same procedure can still be used for an equally beautiful girl.

<sup>108</sup> Translation by Horner, 1963 [1952]: 383-384. See also Hüsken, 1997: 432-433.

*upādhyāyini*. Finally, the *upādhyāyini* and the messengers go back to the newly ordained nun to inform her about the ceremony<sup>109</sup>.

- *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Roth (1970), pp.52-58, §§70-82: similar to the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* except that now two disciples are in danger, and that the ordination ceremony is carried out in the *bhikṣusaṃgha* in the presence of a chapter of at least ten nuns among whom the *upādhyāyini*<sup>110</sup>.
- *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428, p.926b7-c14: first allowed to a group a women candidates from the Śākya and the Koliya clans. A competent nun, accompanied by two or three other nuns, goes to the *bhikṣusaṃgha* on behalf of the candidate(s). Thereupon, the ordination ceremony is then carried out in the *bhikṣusaṃgha*. Finally, the nun messenger informs the newly ordained nun(s) about the ceremony.
- *Sarvāstivādinaya*, T.1435, pp.295b13-296a22: first allowed to the courtesan Ardhakāśī<sup>111</sup>. On her behalf, a nun messenger goes to the *bhikṣusaṃgha* where the ordination ceremony is carried out. Afterwards, the messenger goes back to the newly ordained nun to inform her about the ceremony, and to again explain her a few rules.
- *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, T.1451, pp.368b2-369b16<sup>112</sup>: Dharmadinnā is ordained through a nun messenger both in the *bhikṣuṇīsamgha* and in the *bhikṣusaṃgha* to save her from marriage. Thereupon Dharmadinnā reaches *arhat*-ship.

### Conclusion

Halfway the fifth century, through the translation of many *vinaya* texts, the ordination rules for nuns were well known to the Chinese. As elsewhere in the Buddhist world, the Chinese women wanted to rely on an

<sup>109</sup> Translation by Hirakawa, 1982: 76-81.

<sup>110</sup> Translation by Nolot, 1991: 37-42.

<sup>111</sup> Although qualified as a commentary on the *Sarvāstivādinaya*, *Sa-p'o-to-pu p'i-ni mo-te-le-ch'ieh* (薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽), T.1441, p.594b4, states that the ordination through a messenger was given to a woman called Dharmadinnā (*Ta-mo-t'i-na*; 達摩提那).

<sup>112</sup> Also T.1458 (*Ken-pen-sa-p'o-to-pu lü-she*; 根奔薩婆多部律攝), a commentary on the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* compiled by Jinamitra and translated by I-ching in 700 (Yuyama, 1979: 14), p.599a8, refers to the ordination through a messenger received by Dharmadinnā.

uninterrupted, legally valid ordination tradition. Apart from a few unique cases of ordination, such as the ordination of the first nun Mahāprajāpatī who was ordained through the acceptance of the eight important rules, the ordination of her Śākya followers, and the ordination of an exceptional woman of the lowest class, the *vinaya* texts also prescribe all the rules to be kept for a nun's ordination by means of a *jñapticatortha karman*. The most important one of these is that the ceremony should be held first in the presence of a chapter of nuns and then in the presence of a chapter of monks. Since at the time of the first ordination of a Chinese woman, there were no fully ordained nuns in China, the latter rule could not be applied, and the question was raised whether this invalidated the Chinese nuns' ordination.

In this debate, the first points of reference were Mahāprajāpatī and, to a lesser extent, the Śākya women. In the fifth century, both the basic version of their story as well as the misogynist re-writing of it were well known, and, just as in India, it was pointed out that nuns should always remain in a subordinate position towards monks. But could Mahāprajāpatī and the Śākya women also function as a precedent for the ordination of Chinese women? If we strictly interpret the *vinaya* texts and commentaries, the answer is in the negative: the texts emphasize that the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī and of the Śākya women is a unique case never to be repeated. Still, the *vinaya* master Guṇavarman accepted Mahāprajāpatī's ordination as an example that could be legally followed by the Chinese women. Herefore, he seems to argue that since China is so far away from India, the ordination of Chinese women could start in the same way as the ordination of Indian women had. When asked, however, about distant regions that still have to apply all the *vinaya* rules for ordination, the answer of Guṇavarman clearly implies that also China belongs to these regions. This is probably the reason why he permitted a second ordination. He considered it to be of a higher level in the hope that it would calm down the discussion on the validity of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīsamṅha*.

This second ordination, now in the presence of a chapter of nuns, became possible when more than ten Sinhalese nuns had arrived in the capital of Southern Sung China. The ceremony was prepared very carefully. The participants strictly followed the rules in order to perform a

legally valid ordination that had to become the basis of the Chinese ordination tradition. Given the importance of this moment, it is striking that one issue is not documented: the basic text on which the ceremony relied. In accordance with the *vinaya* rules, all participants to a formal act should refer to the same text so as to establish the unity of the order. Although we do not know what text was used at the ordination ceremony, it seems highly improbable that it was the Pāli *Vinaya*, while it is highly probable that the Sinhalese nuns were ordained in the latter tradition. This does not have to mean that there was a conflict between the Sinhalese and the Chinese nuns. Since the Sinhalese nuns of the first group that was brought to China by the captain Nan-t'i, are said to have learned Chinese, it is not impossible that in the four years that had elapsed between their arrival in China and the ordination of the Chinese nuns, they had also mastered a Chinese *vinaya*. In that case, the participants in the ordination ceremony are likely to have used the same *vinaya* text, so that the ceremony itself was harmonious. Later discussions on the validity of the Chinese nuns' ordination were not accepted, and the debate was closed.

### Abbreviations

- M. *Manji zokuzōkyō*, first edition Kyōto 1905-1912, reproduction Taipei 1968-1970
- Mā-L. Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda/-in
- T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, J. Takakusu, K. Watanabe (eds.), Tōkyō, 1924-1935
- Vin *The Vinaya Piṭakaṃ*, H. Oldenberg (ed.), London, Pali Text Society, 1964<sup>2-3</sup> [1879-1883]

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