

An Inquiry Concerning the Lineage of bhikṣuṇī Ordination

Huimin Bhikṣu

President, Dharma Drum Buddhist College Professor, Taipei National University of the Arts

Abstract

1. Bhikṣuṇī ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha alone, or by both the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī saṅghas.

The bhikṣu ordination originates with the Buddha. This rite evolved from the Buddha's exhortation to "Come hither, bhikṣu" and the triple refuge, to the later form of the "karman by threefold assent." The bhikṣuṇī ordination is formally completed by the bhikṣu saṅgha. Ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha alone may be regarded as a preliminary measure. We may look at the bhikṣuṇī ordination in China and India from a historical perspective. Indian Vinaya master Guṇavarman states, "Bhikṣuṇīs are ordained by the bhikṣu saṅgha. Ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha is to be taken as a preliminary measure." In China, Vinaya master Daoxuan of the Tang dynasty concludes, "The Vinaya-piṭaka does not explicitly state that 'failure to perform the *benfa* 本法 (preliminary ordination by only the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha) invalidates the ordination.'" This is reasonable.

2. Śikṣamāṇā and śrāmaṇerikā ordinations.

Due to the background of Rāhula's ordination, the Buddha required that prior to full bhikṣu ordination, male candidates must first take the śrāmaṇera ordination.

According to the Vinaya, before receiving the full bhikṣuṇī ordination, female candidates must also take the śrāmaṇerikā ordination. The śikṣamāṇā precepts are due to the possibility of pregnancy in female candidates. This training period lasts two years to ensure that the female candidate is not pregnant. Also, this time is used for training in the six dharmas (part of the bhikṣuṇī Vinaya), and for evaluation of the candidate's suitability for full ordination. In the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles, there are records of śrāmaṇerikā and bhikṣuṇī ordinations, but no records of śikṣamāṇā ordination. It is clear that for some early saṅghas, there may have been instances of local adaptations.

According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka Vinayas, the bhikṣuṇī ordination must be preceded by the śrāmaṇerikā and śikṣamāṇā ordinations respectively (the ordination is first done in the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha, and then in the bhikṣu saṅgha).

3. Preceptors, time, location, and procedures for the bhikṣuṇī ordination.

Typically, the śrāmaṇerikā, śikṣamāṇā, and preliminary bhikṣuṇī ordinations are all performed by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha. However, according to Sri Lankan Buddhist

chronicles, there seem to be records of bhikṣus performing the śrāmaṇerikā ordination.

The Chinese version of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya provides guidance on full ordination: a comparatively simple procedure, the preliminary ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha, a “karman by one assent,” is performed in the presence of twelve bhikṣuṇīs with over twelve years in the saṅgha. Subsequently, the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha invites ten bhikṣus with over ten years in the saṅgha to the ordination platform to perform the full ordination with the more complex “karman by threefold assent.” According to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, both procedures require ten preceptors, both procedures require “karman by threefold assent,” and the bhikṣuṇīs bring the candidates for ordination to the bhikṣu saṅgha to receive full ordination by the karman of threefold assent.

Key words:

bhikṣuṇī Ordination, Śikṣamāṇā and śrāmaṇerikā ordinations, preliminary measure (*benfa*, brahmacharyopathana)

§1. Ordination in the bhikṣu Saṅgha and dual Saṅgha ordination

§1.1 Possibility of Ordination by bhikṣu Saṅgha only

According to records in “Ordination Skandha” of the Vinaya-piṭaka, during the time of the Buddha, the first five bhikṣus were ordained by the Buddha’s exhortation of “Come hither, bhikṣu.....”¹, aspiring to follow the Buddha’s steps. Then, there were occasions when those who wished to receive ordination after hearing wandering bhikṣu’s preach failed to do so. Their failure to be ordained by the Buddha in time caused them to regress from the Path. The Buddha therefore authorized bhikṣus to perform ordination by the rite of triple refuge. ² Later on, the Buddha abolished the rite of triple refuge for ordination and substituted it by the “threefold-assent karman” because preceptors need to teach their disciples and also to be looked after by them.³ It is clear that ordination originated from the Buddha and the rite evolved along the time.

It was when Mahāprajāpatī, the Buddha’s aunt on his mother’s side, was granted for ordination at her second request that the Buddha told bhikṣus, "I allow,

¹ “The Buddha said: ‘Come hither, bhikṣu! In my dhārma, enjoy yourself, live the spiritual life and end the suffering.’” (Taisho 22, 788c)

“Come hither, bhikṣu” was what the Buddha said when Kauṇḍinya and the other four bhikṣus first went to him for refuge. In fascicle 7 of the *Sudarśanavinaya Vibhāṣa*, it shows that 1341 bhikṣus were ordained this way in the Buddha’s time. Also in fascicle 15 of the *Ekōttarikāgama* (Taisho 2, 621c), it states: “As a convention in all the Buddhas’ times, the exhortation of ‘come hither, bhikṣu’ denotes the called has been ordained as a bhikṣu. At that time the Blessed One told Mahā-kāśyapa: ‘Come hither, bhikṣu! This dhārma is sublime. Well live the spiritual life.’ Then Mahā-kāśyapa and his 500 followers became dressed with kaṣāyas in a flash and lost their hair like being shaven for seven days”

² “I, named so and so, go for refuge to the Buddha, go for refuge to the Dhārma, go for refuge to the Saṅgha. I now go forth homeless to the Tathāgata, who, being the utmost true, completely enlightened, is the one I venerate.” (Taisho 22, 793a)

³ “The venerable, please allow me to avow: I, named so and so, beg for ordination from the venerable. I, named so and so, now beg for ordination from the saṅgha, with the venerable as my preceptor.” (Taisho 22, 799c). For details, see my article

“Hanchuan shoujie fa zhi kaocha” 漢傳受戒法之考察, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 9 (1996): 65–82.

monks! nuns to be ordained by monks.” (“*anujanami bhikkhave bhikkhuhi bhikkuniyo upasampadetun.* ”)⁴

Since the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha had not been founded at that time, bhikṣuṇī ordination was performed by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone. And that is the fundamental rite of bhikṣuṇī ordination.

Bhikṣuṇī ordination had been performed in this way, i.e. by bhikṣu saṅgha alone, for a period of time. Then, according to Theravada’s Vinaya, female candidates felt uncomfortable when they were questioned about the 24 stumbling-blocks, which are mostly concerning physiological functions and skin diseases. Hence, the Buddha considered allowing the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha to ask about the stumbling-blocks before formal ordination. The Buddha said: “I allow, monks! ordination in the order of monks after she has been ordained on the side, and has cleared herself (in regard to the stumbling-blocks) in the order of nuns.” (“*anujanami bhikkhave ekatoupasampannaya bhikkhunisaṃghe visuddhaya bhikkhunisaṃghe upasampadan.*”)⁵

Contrary to the Theravada’s viewpoint, the Chinese version of Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, perceiving from another angle, states that originally karmans involving four and more people were all conducted by both orders. Then, the karmans happened so

⁴ *Vinaya Pitakam* (ed. H. Oldenberg) Cullavagga X,2.1, p. 257. English version: *THE BOOK OF THE DISCIPLINE* (tr. I. B. Horner) vol. V p. 357. Japanese version of *The Pāli Tripitaka: Vinaya Pitaka 4*, p.383

⁵ *Vinaya Pitakam* (ed. H. Oldenberg) Cullavagga X,17.1-2, pp. 271-272. English version: *THE BOOK OF THE DISCIPLINE* (tr. I. B. Horner) vol. V p.375. Japanese version of *The Pāli Tripitaka:4* , pp.403-404.

frequently as to affect the life of cultivation. As a result, the Buddha formulated that karman should be conducted in the bhikṣu or bhikṣuṇī saṅgha separately except for rehabilitation of saṅgha-avaśeṣa, bhikṣuṇī ordination, and probation (manatta) performed for fifty days.⁶ The two traditions hold different opinions in their chronicles: Mūlasarvāstivāda in favor of ordination by both orders, and Theravada, by one order alone at first and by both orders as an evolvement. Nevertheless, they both reflect that only those important karmans concerning the endowment of ordination and rehabilitation of saṅgha-avaśeṣa etc. would be conducted by both orders. As for ordination karman, the rite must be performed by the bhikṣu saṅgha since the ordination is formally completed on that side.

Therefore, the course of its development shows that bhikṣuṇī ordination is basically completed by the bhikṣu saṅgha. Ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha is always to be taken as a preliminary measure whether the rite evolved from the one-side to the

⁶ *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu*, fascicle 30 (Taisho 24, 252a): “Then the bhikṣuṇīs in four, five, or twelve respectively, called for both saṅghas to initiate the karman. The karmans happened so frequently as to interfere with the teaching, reading and reflecting in the saṅghas. Then the bhikṣuṇīs reported the situation to the Buddha, and the Buddha said: ‘Karman will be conducted separately in each saṅgha except for rehabilitation, ordination, and half-month which must be conducted by both saṅghas together.’” *Sifenlyu-Jiemosu-Jiyuanji* (abbreviated for *Jiemosu*, 《四分律羯磨疏濟緣記》), a sub-commentary [by Yuanzhao (元照, 1048-1116)] the commentary [by Daoxuan (道宣, 596-667)] of *Dharmaguptaka Vinayas* on karman) f. 2. 15. 6: “The bhikṣu saṅgha is to be invited by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha for three events only: ordination, half-month, and rehabilitation.” ‘Half-month’ refers to the event that after committing the saṅgha-avaśeṣa, the bhikṣuṇī must confess her sin in front of the bhikṣus (i.e. “perform the mānatta for a half month”). ‘Rehabilitation’ is the event that the bhikṣuṇī, after committing the saṅgha-avaśeṣa and having accomplished the mānatta, must perform the rehabilitation karman. Also, the *Daśādhyāya-vinaya* holds a similar anecdote in fascicle 40: “The Buddha was in Rajagrha, when the bhikṣus were attending the karman of the bhikṣuṇīs. The bhikṣuṇīs were unhappy and reported the experience to the Buddha. The Buddha said: “From now on, the bhikṣus should not co-conduct a karman with the bhikṣuṇīs. Bhikṣuṇīs are to conduct karmans on their own except for the ordination, mānatta, and rehabilitation karmans. The Buddha was in Śrāvastī, when the bhikṣuṇīs were attending the karman of the bhikṣus. The bhikṣus were unhappy and reported the experience to the Buddha. The Buddha said: “the bhikṣuṇīs should not co-conduct a karman with the bhikṣus. Bhikṣus are to conduct karmans on their own except for karmans of non-revering, non-communicating, non-offering.”

dual-side procedure according to the Theravada's Vinaya or originated as the dual-side rite according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.

During the time of the Buddha, the transmission of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha was never broken. Ordination by both saṅghas had been maintained even if it was performed in an uncivilized land where the Buddha's doctrine rarely exist, though with fewer preceptors, namely, five bhikṣus and five bhikṣuṇīs. The reason for maintaining ordination by both orders was that bhikṣuṇīs never entirely vanished during that time. However, suppose the transmission of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha was ever cut off, it is reasonable to assume that the Buddha could not but restart to perform the bhikṣuṇī ordination in the bhikṣu saṅgha.

§1.2 Traditions of single and dual Saṅgha ordination in China

Five hundred years after its establishment by the Buddha in the 5th century B.C., Buddhism spread to China in the 1st century A.D. And bhikṣus started to take full ordination in the 3rd century.⁷ As for bhikṣuṇīs, it was not until the 4th century that the ordination was endowed upon them, being performed and completed by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone.⁸ Ordination on both sides, first by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha and then by the

⁷ In China, the bhikṣu ordination originated in the reign of Cao-wei Qi-emperor (AD 249-253) in the time of San-guo dynasty. The monk Dharmakāla (meaning "time of dharma" literally) arrived in the capital, Luoyang, from India (the Middle Tianzhu) and started to promote ordination-by-karman, ordination performed by ten preceptors. He also translated the *Mahāsaṃgha-vinaya* as guidance. Besides, the monk Tandi from Anxi kuo (Persia), proficient in Vinaya, translated the karman chapter of the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*. See *Sifenlyu-Xingshichao-Zichiji* (abbreviated for *Shichao*, 《四分律行事鈔資持記》, a sub-commentary [by Yuanzhao (元照, 1048-1116)] the commentary [by Daoxuan (道宣, 596-667)] of *Dharmaguptaka Vinayas* on observing precepts)f. 15. 26. 20.

⁸ As accounted in the first fascicle of *The Biographies of Nuns* (大50, 934c), in the reign of Western-jing Jianxing (313-319), the nun Jingjian went forth to the monk Zhishan of Xiyu (Central Asian), and received the ten precepts. Later, in the reign of Eastern-jing Xiankang (335-342), the monk Jian arrived from Yuezhi-guo, carrying the *Mahāsaṃghika Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya* and the

bhikṣu saṅgha, was to be waited until the 5th century. For bhikṣuṇī saṅgha in China, it was quite a long time to expect ordination conducted by both orders. For nearly a thousand years from 5th century B.C. to 5th century A.D., the inconvenience of transportation had prevented the Indian bhikṣuṇīs from coming to preach in China.

In China, bhikṣuṇī ordination to be completed by both orders started after the arrival of Vinaya master Gunavarman⁹ (meaning “virtue armor”; AD 367 – 431) in Yangzhou, the capital city, from Kāśmīra, in AD 430 (Yuanjia 7th year, Liusong dynasty) (or AD 424, as proclaimed in other records.) One day, eight bhikṣuṇīs from the Lion country (Sri Lanka) asked the master: “If no bhikṣuṇīs ever came to the middle land, how could the ordination be completed by both orders.” Gunavarman answered: “Bhikṣuṇī ordination performed by bhikṣu saṅgha alone instead of both saṅghas is considered valid, but the preceptors committed the pāyattika (expiatory) fault. The prior ordination in the order of nuns is made so that the candidates arouse their faith, and is regarded as a preliminary measure. The ordination is formally completed under the threefold-assent karman by bhikṣus saṅgha.”¹⁰

karman proceedings, and, in the year of 357, with the assistance of Tanmo Jeidou (曇摩羯多, Dharmāgata ?), established bhikṣuṇī ordination platform for Jingjian and three of her companions to receive full ordination. They were the first bhikṣuṇīs of China.

⁹ The monk Gunavarman, meaning “virtue armor” literally, was a sūtra translator during the reign of Liu-song. A native of Kāśmīra, he was proficient in the Tripiṭaka. After arriving in the year of 424, he expounded the Lotus Sūtra and the Sūtra of Ten Stages, and devoted himself to translating the scriptures as well. His translations include *Pusa-shanjie-jing* (《菩薩善戒經》, *a sūtra of the Good Disciplines of Bodhisattvas*), *Sifenlyu-bhikṣuṇī-jiemofa* (《四分比丘尼羯磨法》, *the bhikṣuṇī karmans of Dharmaguptaka Vinayas*), *Yuposai-wujiexiang-jing* (《優婆塞五戒相經》, *a sūtra of five precepts of upsākas*), *shami-weiyi* (《沙彌威儀》, *the conduct of śrāmaṇera*). quoted from *Foguang Buddhist dictionary*, p. 2966.

¹⁰ *Shichao* (f. 15.28.19): “After the first bhikṣuṇī ordination, in Yuanjia 7th year of Sung dynasty, the monk Gunavarman of Jibinguo (Kāśmīra) arrived in Yangzhou and translated *The Good Disciplines* and other scriptures. Later, eight nuns of the Lion

Also, according to the *Biographies of Great Monks*, in reply to the same question asked by the nuns Huiguo¹¹ and Jingyin, Gunavarman observed, “The formal ordination is always to be completed by the bhikṣu saṅgha. Failure to perform preliminary ordination in the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha does not invalidate the ordination, just as the case when Mahāprajāpatī was ordained as a bhikṣuṇī.”¹² His interpretation, showing the essence of vinaya, is reasonable.

However, bhikṣuṇīs in China were still worried since some of them had been ordained under twenty years of age.¹³ They pleaded to Gunavarman for a re-ordination by both saṅghas and were consented at his pleasure. Gunavarman proceeded to invite more bhikṣuṇīs from India, in a hope to amount the bhikṣuṇī

country arrived and queried: ‘No bhikṣuṇīs ever came to the land of Sung, how could ordination be completed by both orders.’ Gunavarman answered: “Without undergoing the preliminary proceeding in the her own saṅgha, the bhikṣuṇī candidate still succeeded in ordination, but (the preceptors) committed the fault. As formulated by the Buddha at first, ordination was formally performed by monks. Thus, ordination is naturally completed as long as it is carried out by the monks. The prior ordination in the order of nuns is made so that the candidates arouse their faith, and is regarded as a preliminary measure. The ordination is formally completed through the karman conducted by the monks.”

¹¹ See *The Biographies of Nuns*, Fascicle 2 (Taisho 50, 937b).

¹² *The Biographies of Great Monks*, Fascicle 3 (Taisho 50,341a28ff.) : “Then Hui-guo, Jing-yin and other nuns of the Ying-fu Temple went to Gunavarman and asked: “Six years ago, the eight nuns from the Lion country came to the capital and said: ‘No bhikṣuṇīs ever came to the land of Sung, how could ordination be completed by both orders?’ We are afraid our ordinations are incomplete.” Gunavarman said: “Ordination is formally performed in the order of monks. Without the prior proceeding (*benshi*), the ordination is valid just as the example of Mahāprajāpatī. *Benshi*, also called *benfa*, refers to the prior ordination performed in the order of nuns.

¹³ Some of the nuns ordained under 20 by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone wished to be re-ordained and to re-count their ordination years. For details, see the underlined part in note ‘Samghavarman’.

preceptors to ten in total.¹⁴ Unfortunately, Gunavarman passed away in September, AD 433 (Yuanjia 10th year), unable to carry out the ordination as planned.

The same year, Indian bhikṣu Saṃghavarman (meaning “Saṃgha’s armor”)¹⁵ arrived in Yangzhou. Next year (AD 434, Yuanjia 11th year), three bhikṣuṇīs from Sri Lanka, including Tiesuoluo, also arrived in the capital, which made the ordination by two saṅghas possible, with the number of bhikṣuṇīs, plus the previous 8, reaching 11.¹⁶

14 Shichao (Fascicle 15.29.5): “Upon those nuns’ eager pleading for re-ordination, (he) answered: ‘Very good! The quality of discipline, concentration, and wisdom develops from slight to notable aspects. I rejoice in your diligence to make improvement.’ (He) let the western nuns learn Chinese language, and managed to invite more nuns from India to suffice the number of preceptors to 10.” The Biographies of Great Monks, Fascicle 4 (Taisho 50,341b3): “Those nun, being afraid that they had been ordained under age 20, pleaded for re-ordination. Gunavarman said: ‘Very good! You would like to seek improvement. I greatly rejoice in it.

¹⁵ The monk Saṃghavarman, meaning ‘saṅgha’s armor’ literally, was a sūtra translator in the reign of Liu-song. A native Indian, he is proficient in the Vinaya-piṭaka, especially in the *Abhidharma-sāra-prakīrṇaka-śāstra*. He arrived in China in Liou-song Yuanjia 10th year (433), when Huiguo and other nuns of the Yingfu Temple pleaded to the master for re-ordination, with hundreds of bhikṣuṇīs ordained as a result. As instructed by the master, those ordained under age 20 at first would re-count their ordination years after the re-ordination, while those ordained above age 20 could keep their previous years. His Chinese translations include *Abhidharma-sāra-prakīrṇaka-śāstra* and so on. (quoted from *Foguang Buddhist dictionary*, p. 5725.)

¹⁶ *Shichaon* (Fascicle 15.29.6): “In the 10th year of Yuanjia, Saṃghavarman, namely ‘Zhongkai’ (meaning ‘Saṃgha’s armor’), proficient in *Za-xin* (*Abhidharma-sāra-prakīrṇaka-śāstrī*), arrived via Silk Road in Yangzhou. Previously, Gunavarman granted re-ordination to the nuns, but he passed away leaving the planned proceeding un-fulfilled. Soon afterwards, Tiesuoluo and three other nuns from the Lion country arrived in the capital, sufficing the number of bhikṣuṇīs to reach ten. Zhongkai was invited as the preceptor to conduct the re-ordination for the nuns.” *Zhichiji* explains: “It first accounts the arrival of Zhongkai, who was from India. ‘Previously’ leads the sentence to describe the background for the re-ordination in which Dekai (Gunavarman) died in Sep., 10th year. ‘Soon afterwards’ leads the text to announce the sufficient number of the bhikṣuṇī preceptors. ‘Soon afterwards’ refers to the next year, 11th year, and the total bhikṣuṇīs are 11 that met the required number 10.” See also *The Biographies of Great Monks*, Fascicle 3 (Taisho 50, 342b11ff.).

Vinaya master Daoxuan (596 – 667) of the Tang dynasty thereupon concludes, with reference to the statements made by Gunavarman: “Since bhikṣuṇīs are formally ordained by the bhikṣus, ordination performed by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone, bypassing the preliminary ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha, is valid, but the preceptors would commit the fault. The Vinaya-piṭaka does not explicitly state that ‘failure to perform the *benfa* 本法 (preliminary ordination by only the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha) invalidates the ordination.”¹⁷

As discussed above, the bhikṣuṇī ordination started to be performed by both the bhikṣuṇī and bhikṣu saṅghas in AD 434 (Liusong of Northern-southern dynasty); before that, it was performed by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone. After the Sung dynasty, around 12th century, the stipulation of dual-order ordination was sometimes followed, and other times, neglected.

To examine the lineage of bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Sung dynasty, the statement made by Zanning (919 – 1001) in *A Brief History of Monks in the Sung Dynasty* reads (Taisho 54, p. 238c4):

¹⁷ *Jiemoshu* (<諸戒受法篇>): “According to the history of monks, in the biography of Gunavarman, it states bhikṣuṇī ordination is formally carried out in the bhikṣu saṅgha. To perform the ordination directly in the bhikṣu saṅgha without undergoing the *benfa* is valid except that (the preceptors) will commit the fault. The law was not formally formulated, but was inferred for application. Testified with instances, it is clear that performing ordination in the bhikṣu saṅgha is required.” *Jiyuanji* explains: “ ‘The law was not formally formulated ’ means there are no records that explicitly state without performing the *benfa* invalidate the ordination.” (vol. 17.48.9).

“The bhikṣuṇī Jingjian was ordained on one side alone, which is not a complete ceremony. Beginning in the reign, titled Jianwu (494-498), of Ming-emperor in the Northern-southern dynasty, bhikṣuṇīs around the areas to the north of the Yangzi river continued to go to bhikṣu monasteries for ordination. And it lasted for generations. Until recently, because the emperor Taizu (927-976, of the Northern-sung dynasty) ‘forbade the bhikṣuṇīs to be ordained in the bhikṣu saṅgha, drawing them back to one-side ordination,’ the ordination became incomplete again ever since.”

But Zhipan (Southern-song monk, age unknown) offered different opinions in *Fozu-tongji* (written in the reign of Xianchun 1265-1274, Southern-song) vol. 43 (Taisho 54, p. 238c4):

“The edict states: ‘without taking monks and nuns apart, the discipline is confused. Hence, the nuns are permitted to set ordination platform and lead the ceremony.’ The comments: ‘the Imperial intended to differentiate monks and nuns, with no idea that nuns must be ordained by monks. For nuns, to set ordination platform by themselves is invalid. That is a compromise rather than the Vinaya rule. The prohibition is no longer observed now’”.

The quoted above signify that the prohibition set by Northern-song Taizu was no longer followed during the time of Southern-song Xianchun (1265-1274). In other words, the dual-side ordination had been forbidden and was restored afterwards

during the Sung dynasty. However, the Chinese Vinaya master Hongyi observed in the *Vinaya Abstract* (Hongyi-dashi Faji, Volume III, p.1531): “This Vinaya rule (of dual-side ordination) has no longer been implemented since the Southern-song dynasty (1128-1276).”

As for the situation in Qing dynasty, “the dual-side ordination for nuns has been cut off for a long time,” stated Vinaya master Hongzan (1611–1685; bridging Ming and Ching dynasties) in the *Records of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination*. (*Manji Zokuzokyo* [卍續] 107, p.186b, Xin Wen Feng reprint) On the other hand, Vinaya master Shuyu (1645–1721) of the Qing dynasty indicated in the *Origin of Dual-order Ordination Ceremony* (written during 1679 – 1703; *Manji Zokuzokyo* [卍續], p.115b, Xin Wen Feng reprint) that the Vinaya master Jianyue (1601–1679) ever performed the dual-order ordination. Besides, Vinaya master Songyin, a junior to master Shuyu, also performed the dual-order ordination in his time. It is evident that during the time of Ming and Qing dynasties, the stipulation of dual-order ordination for bhikṣuṇīs was sometimes followed, and other times, neglected.

The Tibetan Buddhists have been expecting the Chinese Buddhists to point out where in the Vinaya-piṭaka it states that ordination by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone is valid, so that they can build up Tibetan bhikṣuṇī saṅgha accordingly. But, please be reminded, as discussed above, since the transmission of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha was

never broken during the time of the Buddha, it is impossible to find any Vinaya records about the bhikṣuṇī ordination by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone.

Furthermore, the purpose of learning Vinaya is to know “what we should not do,” such as killing, and stealing etc., which were forbidden by the Buddha. Should we have waited to take each action until the Buddha said, “you may do this,” it would be an endless list of events for the Buddha to formulate. The Buddha could not have encountered all possible events. For example, the airplane was not invented in the Buddha’s time yet, but we would not argue that the Buddha did not say, “You may take the airplane.” It is unreasonable. Again, because the transmission of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha was never broken during the Buddha’s time, it is impossible to find any Vinaya records about the bhikṣuṇī ordination by the bhikṣu saṅgha alone.

In short, we may look at the bhikṣuṇī ordination in China and India from a historical perspective. Indian Vinaya master Guṇavarman said, “Bhikṣuṇīs are ordained by the bhikṣu saṅgha. Ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha is to be taken as a preliminary measure.” In China, Vinaya master Daoxuan of the Tang dynasty concluded, “The Vinaya-piṭaka does not explicitly state that ‘failure to perform the *benfa* 本法 (preliminary ordination by only the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha) invalidates the ordination.”

§2. Śikṣamāṇā and Śrāmaṇerikā Precepts

§2.1 Is it necessary to receive śikṣamāṇā and śrāmaṇerikā precepts prior to full bhikṣuṇī Ordination?

We may look at the bhikṣu ordination as reference to see whether the female candidates must take other ordinations to undergo a training course. Before receiving full bhikṣu ordination, male candidates must first take the śrāmaṇera ordination. It is a common consensus that the origin of śrāmaṇera ordination was due to Rāhula's joining the saṅgha. Being assigned as the preceptor of Rāhula, śāriputra hesitated: "He is not only the son of the Buddha but also the prince. How could I ordain him?" As a result, the Buddha let śāriputra endow Rāhula the ten precepts. Thereupon, Rāhula became the first śrāmaṇera.¹⁸ Likewise, before receiving the full bhikṣuṇī ordination, female candidates must also take the śrāmaṇerikā ordination.

According to the Vinaya, the procedure for śrāmaṇerikā ordination is exactly the same as that for śrāmaṇera ordination: (1) to shave, (2) to endow the ten

¹⁸ Jiemoshu (vol. 11.26.17): "Rāhula was the first, as recorded in the Adbhutadharmaparyāya, to renounce at such young age, namely 9 years old." It is also accounted in Fascicle 12.41.20 of the same book. According to the account in the first half part of the Adbhutadharmaparyāya, the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu six years after his attainment and let Rāhula renounce, with śāriputra as his preceptor and Māudgalyāyana as ācārya (teacher). That was the origin of Buddhist śrāmaṇera. As a śrāmaṇera, Rāhula did not completely observe the disciplines in the beginning, but became diligent in practicing after being admonished by the Buddha. He attained arhatship finally and has been praised as the 'best secret-practitioner' ever since. (See Foguang Buddhist dictionary, p. 6681.) In the chapter of ordination in Vinaya, it accounts that a group of children renounced but could not endure the hardship of practice. The Buddha thus stipulated full ordination is not permitted until the candidate is 20 years old. (Under age 20, a candidate can only be accepted as a śrāmaṇera.) Another stipulation is the lowest age for a śrāmaṇera, which is 15, or lower if the child knows how to expel crows. (above 7 years old, according to Shichao Fascicle 41.20.7).

precepts, and (3) to perform the ordination. The only difference lies in the literal expressions of śrāmaṇera and śrāmaṇerikā that show the gender of the candidates.¹⁹

The śikṣamāṇā precepts are due to the possibility of pregnancy in female candidates. This training period lasts over one year to ensure that the female candidate is not pregnant. Also, this time is used for training in the six dharmas (part of the bhikṣuṇī Vinaya)²⁰, and for evaluation of the candidate's suitability for full ordination.

But, is the śikṣamāṇā ordination a required procedure? In the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles, we read the record that in the 3rd century B.C., the bhikṣuṇī Samghamittā, sister of mahindra, arrived in Sri Lanka, along with 11 bhikṣuṇīs, to perform the ordination for the queen Anuala.²¹ There are records of śrāmaṇerikā and bhikṣuṇī ordinations, but no records of śikṣamāṇā ordination. It is clear that for some early saṅghas, there may have been instances of local adaptations.

¹⁹ *Shifenlyu-Shanbu-Suijijie* (abbreviated for *Suijijie*, 《四分律刪補隨機羯磨》, the handbook [by Daoxuan (by道宣, 596-667)] of *Dharmaguptaka Vinayas* on Karman) < 諸戒受法篇 > : "The procedure for endowing śrāmaṇerikā precepts, including rules (karman) for accepting disciple, shaving, and renunciation, is all the same as that for the monks above. The only difference is the literal expression of śrāmaṇerikā." (*Suijijie*, first half 30.2) (*Nanshan Vinaya Dictionary*, p.550) For the procedure for śrāmaṇera ordination, see *Suijijie*, first half.19.5. (*Nanshan Vinaya Dictionary*, p.549)

²⁰ See note 24.

²¹ In *Dīpavaṃsa*, chapter 15 Arrival of the Relics (Japanese version of *The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka* 4, p.104), and in *Mahāvamsa* chapter 15 Import to the Great Temple (Japanese version of *The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka* 4, p. 245), it mentions that at first the queen pleaded for renunciation to Mahinda, and Mahinda answered: "we are not suitable to ordain a woman." As a result, his sister, the nun Samghamittā, was invited to Sri Lanka to ordain the queen. Another account in *Mahāvamsa* chapter 19 Arrival of the Bodhi Tree (Japanese version of *The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka* 4, p. 279) shows that the queen Anuala and her maid-servants were ordained by the elder nun Samghamittā, while ministers, and attendants to the royal were ordained by the elder monk Mahinda. It is reasonable to presume that male candidates were ordained by bhikṣus and the female were ordained by bhikṣuṇīs separately.

§2.2 Is there the sequence for performing śikṣamāṇā and śrāmaṇerikā ordinations?

According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka Vinayas ²², the bhikṣuṇī ordination, which is first done in the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha and then in the bhikṣu saṅgha, must be preceded by the śrāmaṇerikā and śikṣamāṇā ordinations respectively.

However, because the transmission of the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha in the Theravāda Buddhists has discontinued for quite a long time, it is hard to know the sequence of ordinations for female candidates in that tradition. In the past conference, a Theravāda bhikṣu proposed to determine the sequence by the amount of the precepts: the five precepts, śikṣamāṇā ordination (six dharmas), śrāmaṇerikā ordination (ten precepts), and finally the bhikṣuṇī ordination (more than 300 precepts). ²³

In fact, although there are only six clauses of śikṣamāṇā precepts in total, they are based on the ten precepts for śrāmaṇerikā, along with part of the bhikṣuṇī precepts, and are almost equivalent to the bhikṣuṇī precepts. Take the first clause “restrain

²² Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, Fascicle 48, Bhikṣuṇī Skandha No. 17 (Taisho 22, 922ff.).

²³ According to the report and speech of Ven. M. Winalasaa Thero at the conference.

from traveling alone” (or “restrain from caressing a man” in Dharmaguptaka Vinaya) for instance, it is also contained in the bhikṣuṇī precepts.²⁴ Therefore, it is improper to determine the sequence of ordinations by the amount of precepts. The śikṣamāṇā ordination should be preceded by the śrāmaṇerikā ordination, as it reads in both the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka Vinayas.

§3. Procedure for Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

§3.1 Should the bhikṣuṇī, śikṣamāṇā, and śrāmaṇerikā ordinations be performed by bhikṣus?

Typically, the śrāmaṇerikā, śikṣamāṇā, and preliminary bhikṣuṇī ordinations are all performed by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha.

Nevertheless, according to Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles, there seem to be records of bhikṣus performing the śrāmaṇerikā ordination. In the 3rd century B.C., during the reign of the king Devanampiyatissa (247 B.C.-207 B.C.), King Aśoka’s son, the

²⁴ “The Buddha said: ‘A śikṣamāṇā should learn all the bhikṣuṇī precepts except the one of giving food to others with her own hands. The śikṣamāṇā should learn in three categories: (1) the fundamentals, namely the four grave crimes; (2) the six dharmas: abstinence from sex, stealing, killing, lying, consumption of alcohol, and eating at improper times; (3) the rules of action: manners and other precepts maintained by bhikṣuṇīs. The commission of one of the fundamental offenses will result in expulsion from the saṅgha; deficiency in the learning of the six dharmas will result in an extra karma for two years; violation in manners with offenses against the Buddha’s teaching will need a confession but will not demolish the six dharmas.’” (*Shijijiemo* first half , 30.3)

bhikṣu Mahinda led missionaries of four bhikṣus, a śrāmaṇera, and a upāsaka (lay Buddhist) to preach in the Sri Lanka. Mahinda performed the śrāmaṇerikā ordination for the queen Anuala as well as her maidservants.²⁵ Soon afterwards, Mahinda's sister, the bhikṣuṇī Samghamitta, also arrived with 11 bhikṣuṇīs, and performed the bhikṣuṇī ordination for the queen.²⁶

As discussed above, although there are records about the śrāmaṇerikā and bhikṣuṇī ordinations, there are no records about the śikṣamāṇā ordination. And the records show that on some occasions, it seems proper for bhikṣus to ordain the śrāmaṇerikās.

25 Mahāvamsa p. 122 Geiger's translation. (According to Ven. M. Wimalasā Thero's report at the conference.) See Dīpavaṃsa chapter 15 Arrival of the Relics (Japanese version of The Pāli Tripitaka Fascicle 60, p.104). However, in Mahāvamsa, chapter 18 Import to the Great Bodhi (Japanese version of The Pāli Tripitaka Fascicle 60, p. 269), it reads the queen Anuala and 500 maid-servants as well as 500 women in palace all aspired to take ten precepts, wear kaṣāya, and renounce the worldly life. And they were looking forward to the arrival of the elder bhikṣuṇī (Samghamittā). That means the queen was ordained the ten precepts by the bhikṣuṇī Samghamittā.

26 In Dīpavaṃsa chapter 15 Arrival of the Relics (Japanese version of The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka4 , p.104), and in Mahāvamsa chapter 15 Import to the Great Temple (Japanese version of The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka4 , p. 245), it mentions that at first the queen pleaded for renunciation to Mahinda, and Mahinda answered: "we are not suitable to ordain a woman." As a result, his sister, the nun Samghamittā, was invited to Sri Lanka to ordain the queen. Another account in Mahāvamsa chapter 19 Arrival of the Bodhi Tree (Japanese version of The Pāli Tripitaka Vinaya Pitaka 4 , p. 279) shows that the queen Anuala and her maid-servants were ordained by the elder nun Samghamittā, while ministers, and attendants to the royal were ordained by the elder monk Mahinda. It is reasonable to presume that male candidates were ordained by bhikṣus and the female were ordained by bhikṣuṇīs separately.

As for the ordination rites, the śrāmaṇerikā ordination takes the simple way of triple refuge,²⁷ while the śikṣamāṇā ordination requires the rite of karman by assent.²⁸

§3.2 The Procedure for Dual Saṅgha Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

The procedure for bhikṣuṇī ordination, according to the karman text in the Chinese version of Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya translated by Yijing in the 7th century, includes the following steps:²⁹

- A. Preliminary ordination in the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha:
 - a. Pleading for ordination,
 - b. Examination of the kaṣāyas and alms-bowl,
 - c. Private instructions, asking about the stumbling-blocks,
 - d. The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha (of 12 preceptors) performs the karman by one assent.

- B. Full ordination by both saṅghas:

²⁷ To repeat what the ācārya says in front of the preceptor: “I, named so and so, go for refuge to the Buddha, go for refuge to the Dhārma, go for refuge to the Saṅgha. I now go forth homeless to the Tathāgata, who, being the utmost true, completely enlightened, is the one I venerate.” And complete the ordination.

²⁸ Shichao “Nizhong biexing pian” (“Nizhong biexing pian”, <尼眾別行篇>): [The candidate] should stand within seeing and hearing distance. After the one motion and three proclamations, the candidate should be instructed in the six rules, and respond that she can uphold them.” For details see, Suiji jiemo (《隨機羯磨》), “Zhuji shoufa pian” (“Zhuji shoufa pian”, <諸戒受法篇> 30.3.)

²⁹ Taisho 24, 461a-465a.

- a. The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha invites the bhikṣus to the ordination platform,
- b. Pleading for ordination and asking about the stumbling-blocks,
- c. The two saṅghas (10 bhikṣus and 12 bhikṣuṇīs) perform the karman by threefold assent, and
- d. Explanation of the precepts.

The bhikṣuṇī ordination procedure according to the Dharmagupta Vinaya is slightly different:

- a. The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha also performs the karman by threefold assent as the bhikṣu saṅgha.
- b. Ten preceptors for each saṅgha are required.
- c. The candidates are led by the bhikṣuṇīs to the bhikṣu saṅgha for ordination.

In the light of the tradition held in the Mūlasarvāstivāda, We may conclude that the ordination is formally performed by the bhikṣu saṅgha under the threefold-assent karman while the comparatively simple procedure, the ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha, a “karman by one assent,” is taken as a preliminary measure.

A comparison for the procedures of the dual-saṅgha ordination karman in the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmagupta Vinayas respectively are shown in the table below:

	Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya	Dharmagupta Vinaya
The preliminary	12 bhikṣuṇīs	10 bhikṣuṇīs

ordination by the bhikṣuṇī saṅgha	Karman by one assent	Karman by threefold assent
The full ordination by both saṅghas ³⁰	10 bhikṣus and 12 bhikṣuṇīs	10 bhikṣus and 10 bhikṣuṇīs
	The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha invite the bhikṣus to their platform.	The bhikṣuṇīs lead the candidates to the bhikṣu saṅgha.
	Karman by threefold assent	Karman by threefold assent

§4. Bibliography

Sifenlyu-bhikṣuṇī-jiemofa (《四分比丘尼羯磨法》, Taisho22, no. 1434)

Shisonglyu (《十誦律》; *Daśādhyāya-vinaya: Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, Taisho23, no. 1435)

Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu (《根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事》, Taisho24, no. 1451)

Sudarśanavinaya Vibhāṣa (《善見律毘婆沙》, Taisho24, no. 1462)

Sifenlyu-Xingshichao-Zichiji (《四分律行事鈔資持記》, Taisho40, no. 1805)

Shifenlyu-Shanbu-Suijijie (《四分律刪補隨機羯磨》, Taisho40, no. 1808)

Sifenlyu-Jiemosu-Jiyuanji (《四分律羯磨疏濟緣記》, X41, no. 728)

Nanshan Vinaya Dictionary (《南山律學辭典》) edited by Seeland Monastery. Taipei: Seeland Publisher . 1996.

Huimin Bhikṣu (1996) "Hanchuan shoujie fa zhi kaocha" (漢傳受戒法之考察), *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 9: 65–82. Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies.

Vinaya Pitakam (ed. H. Oldenberg) Cullavagga. English translation (*THE BOOK OF THE DISCIPLINE*, tr. I. B. Horner) vol. V. Japanese translation in *Nanden daizokyo, ritsubu* (日譯《南傳大藏經》律藏)。

(This paper presented at the 1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages, Hamburg University)

³⁰ *Suijijie* Taisho 40, 498c-501b ; *Sifenlyu-bhikṣuṇī-jiemofa* (《四分比丘尼羯磨法》, Taisho22, 1065b-1068b).