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I Prefatory Remarks

Hardly could have anyone imagined at the end of the 6th century C.E., when the first Japanese Buddhist nuns took the vows, that the fate of their institutions would be so stormy for the next seven centuries. Swirling between ups of lavish Court sponsorship and downs of disheartening neglect from state authorities, their history commenced in a very promising manner, then dangerously dwindled to near-extinction, and later recreated itself almost miraculously. One of the aims of the present essay is to outline this impressive story, but what underlies it is more than a mere intention to offer a bird's-eye view of the ecclesiastical and social history of the Japanese nuns between the 6th and the 13th century.¹ A basic and

¹ The bird's-eye view which this essay also attempts is far from being exhaustive in its examination of primary sources and coverage of secondary literature. As far as the latter is concerned, the following studies are particularly noteworthy: Ishida 1978, Hosokawa 1987, Ushiyama 1990, Matsuo 1995, Groner 2002 (certainly the most outstanding contribution in English on the fate of the Japanese nuns between 8th and the 10th centuries). The following two collections of studies represent excellent contributions dealing with various aspects of the history of nuns from Ancient to Pre-modern times: Ōsumi and Nishiguchi ed. 1989 (in Japanese) and Ruch ed. 2002 (in English—a superb scholarly achievement). The more general problem of the history of precepts and ordinations, mainly for monks, in Ancient and Mediaeval Japan is treated in Tokiwa Daijō 1943 (an old but still very useful study) and Ishida [1963] 1976 (the unrivalled 'classic' in this field). A rather brief but very lucid presentation of Kakujo's and Eison's contribution to the revival of the Risshū 律宗 or Japanese Vinaya School and ordinations is Minowa 2004.

simple question actually binds these seven centuries together into a more or less coherent whole: when were the first full ordinations for Japanese nuns performed? The intricacies and mistiness of the answer is what takes such a long span to cover.

Before we embark upon this journey of lofty aspirations and worldly ambitions, ecclesiastical creativity and bureaucratic obtuseness, let us briefly remind ourselves what a full ordination is. The traditional Buddhist society is divided into seven assemblies (Skt. *saṭṭa naikāyikāḥ*; Ch. 七衆) consisting of (1) fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*; 比丘), supposed to observe 250 precepts; (2) fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*; 比丘尼), expected to observe 348 precepts; (3) novice monks (*śrāmaṇera*; 沙彌), required to follow ten precepts; (4) probationary nun (*śikṣamāṇā*; 式叉摩那), similarly, six precepts; (5) novice nuns (*śrāmaṇerikā*; 沙彌尼), likewise, ten precepts; (6) lay man (*upāsaka*; 優婆塞); and (7) lay women (*upāsikā*; 優婆夷)—the last two categories ideally leading lives governed by five precepts.²

A lay man or woman desiring to join the Holy Order is first expected to go through a period of novitiate, which corresponds to classes (3) to (5) in

² While the number of precepts for the last five classes is similar in all Buddhist schools, the number of precepts for fully ordained monks and nuns differ according to the Vinaya tradition. The numbers given above are based on the *Fourfold Vinaya* 四分律, a text extant only in Chinese translation and representing the monastic tradition of the Dharmaguptaka school 法藏部. This actually became the most popular monastic code in China and Japan. For more details, see below, especially note 66.

The word *vinaya* (same form in Pali, Classical Sanskrit, and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit) is mainly used in Buddhist literature in the sense of 'norm of conduct', 'morality', 'precepts', and as a genre, it refers to the 'code of monastic discipline and procedures'. (Needless to say, this will also be the meaning with which I employ the term in this essay.) Let us, however, add that in many ancient Indic languages, Classical Sanskrit included, the lexeme has a wider semantic sphere: from 'removal' to 'taming', '(good-)breeding', 'education', etc. (for the usage and meaning of the word in Indian sources, see Hara 2004).

the enumeration above. Having successfully completed it, the novice may seek full ordination. In the case of a male postulant, the status of fully ordained monastic is granted by a congregation of ten qualified monks. For female postulants, a dual ordination is stipulated. First, ten qualified nuns conduct a ritual of admission into the Order. This preliminary part of the ordination is technically known in Sanskrit as the *brahmacaryopasthāna* or ‘ceremony [for achieving] pure conduct’ and is usually referred to in Chinese sources as 本法 (Ch. *benfa*; Jp. *honbō*) (literally, ‘root-factor’) or 本事 (*benshi*; *honji*) (literally, ‘root-fact’). This is followed by a second procedure, this time carried out by ten monks who give the final validation of the nun’s ordination.³ The *Vinaya* or the *Code of Monastic Discipline* stipulates detailed provisions for each step of the entire process.⁴ These rules and regulations as well as their interpretation, hopelessly ample and complex, may seem unessential to a modern mind, but in a traditional environment, they are regarded to be the Buddha’s own word or inspired by Him. Following and implementing them is a sacred duty for the Holy Community as well as for any individual deciding to join its ranks. Furthermore, ordination in accordance to *Vinaya* constitutes not only a religious and social recognition of one’s admission into a lineage presumably stretching back to Lord Buddha Himself but also a gate granting full monastic rights. And the latter signify, *inter alia*, full access to spiritual education and praxis, the very *raison d’être* of the entire monastic life—at least, ideally speaking.⁵

³ Ten is the quorum stipulated by the *Fourfold Vinaya*. Traditions such as the Mūlasarvāstivāda require twelve monks for the second part of the ordination (see Wei-chun 2007; Huimin Bhikṣu 2007; etc.).

⁴ For more technical details and primary sources concerning the dual ordination, see note 36 below.

⁵ Though the usage of ‘full’ in collocation with the noun ‘ordination’ or the verb ‘to ordain’ is rather common in Buddhist studies, there is good reason to question its semantic appropriateness. The main controversial issue is the fact that we have no

straightforward contrasting phrases such as 'partial ordination' or 'half ordination'. If one takes the view that language and style should be logical to the last detail, then 'full' admittedly has no place in such a collocation. In spite of some reservations, I find, nevertheless, that adding the qualification 'full' to 'ordination' confers more stylistical precision. This is the main reason for my employment of the phrase to refer to what traditional sources call *upasaṃpad* (Skt.), *upasaṃpadā* (Pali as well as some Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit varieties),⁽¹⁾ *bsnyen par rdzogs pa* (Tib.), 具足戒 (Ch. *juzu-jie*; Jp. *gusoku-kai*), etc. I think it better differentiates the formal state in which a monastic is supposed to observe the entire set of precepts and rules of discipline (i.e. 250 for monks, 348 for nuns, according to the *Fourfold Vinaya*) from the novitiate in which only a limited number of precepts (ten or six) are to be followed. In this sense, 'full ordination' can be contrasted to 'initiation into novitiate'. This form of joining the Order as an apprentice or probationer could be, after all, described as a preliminary ordination. If a traditional term is required for the latter, then this will be 'going forth' or 'leaving the household [or: lay] life' (Skt. *pravrajyā*; Ch. 出家).

One must, however, add that the latter lexeme is itself far from being semantically monolithic. Especially the Chinese binome 出家 (Ch. *chujia*; Jp. *shukke*), literally meaning 'leaving the house', is employed as a general term denoting the joining or the state of monastic life, whether as a novice or a fully ordained monk/nun. In this sense, it is contrasted to the state of lay followers, usually called 在家 (Ch. *zaijia*; Jp. *zaike*), literally 'being at home' (see Nakamura 1981, s.v. 出家). Furthermore, especially in early Buddhist sources, it refers to the simple act of abandoning the lay life for the pursuit of ascetic practices (e.g. *agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajati* in the *Dīghanikāya* vol. I, p. 160), often set in the solitude of the wilderness or amongst other renunciants and not necessarily implying a formal ceremony. This is the way the future Buddha himself began his own path of spiritual quest, and in the earliest years of the Saṅgha, admittance to the community appears to have been made by a simple act of taking the three refuges (*saraṇagamanehi upasaṃpadā*), as actually stated in the Pali *Vinayaṭīkā* (vol. I, p. 56). The same source tells us that later the Buddha abolished this 'fast-track' ordination and set a more complex and formal ceremony through the procedure of four announcements (*ñatticatutthena kammena upasaṃpādetum*) (ibid.), which consists in a motion and one resolution repeated three times. (For a comparative study of this procedure in Chinese and Pali sources as well as its history in China, see Shi Huimin 1996.) No mention is made in this passage whether the postulant should be required a formal period and/or ceremony of novitiate, though in a different context, the same *Vinayaṭīkā* details

Now to return to the history of the full ordinations for nuns in Japan, there are quite a few details which remain (at least, to me) rather obscure. We know for sure that female monastics and convents made their appearance very early in Japanese history and thrived for a while under the auspices of the Court. What is less clear, actually quite unclear, is whether these 'monastics' were proper *bhikṣuṇīs* ordained according to the orthodox Vinaya procedures and legitimate lineages.

However, irrespective of their orthodoxy and legitimacy, the number of female monastics and nunneries kept on increasing until around the middle of the 8th century when the situation began changing for the worse.

how the Buddha set the ten rules of training for novices (vol. I, p. 83-84).

On the other hand, the *Vinayasūtra* and *Vinayasūtravṛtti*, composed by the great Vinaya expert Guṇaprabha (fl. 5th century C.E.?), speaks of an old procedure (*purākalpa*) in which no difference was made between 'going forth' (*pravrajyā*) and 'full ordination' (*upasaṃpad*). A procedure of four announcements (*jñāpticatortha*) was enough to confer a new comer who had abandoned the household life (*pravrajīta*) the state of full member of the monastic community. *Mais où sont neiges d'antan?* This was possible, Guṇaprabha adds, in times of yore when men were holy by nature (*Vinayasūtra* cum *Vinayasūtravṛtti*, p. 5). Later, a new and more complex set of rules had to be devised, and this led to the 'current procedure' (*vartamānakalpa*) requiring a period of novitiate during which the preceptor (*upādhyāya*) must check the disciple's purity (ibid.) (see also Introduction to *Vinayasūtra* cum *Vinayasūtravṛtti*, pp. XXV-XXVI).

In a full-fledged monastic institution, whose framework was defined by strict and complex regulations, 'going forth' (*pravrajyā*) came to refer to initiation into novitiate, a state which implied a formal procedure and had its well-defined set of precepts. This was and continues to be a 'partial ordination', so to speak, and only a successful completion of the novitiate can lead to 'full ordination' (*upasaṃpad*). Finally, I must once again stress that the issue of the semantic suitability of the phrase 'full ordination' is far from simple. My usage stems, therefore, mainly from stylistic preferences rather than being based on strong linguistic grounds.

(1) In the *Bhikṣuṇīvinaya*, for instance, we see forms as diverse as *upasaṃpad*, *upasaṃpadam*, and *upasaṃpadā* used side by side (see Roth ed. 1970, pp. 347-348, for a list of such occurrences).

The threat came from two different angles. The first inauspicious wind started to blow from the Court and state authorities who reduced substantially their support for nuns and nunneries. This meant that even if there had been a legitimate lineage of fully ordained female monastics in the first two centuries of Buddhism on Japanese soil, it later and gradually became more and more difficult to find the quorum needed for carrying out ordinations according to the Vinaya procedures. The second threat came from inside the Buddhist community itself, or to be more precise, from its male half, socially and institutionally dominant. The exact nature of the earliest ordinations and lineages of Japanese monks is not much clearer either. We know, however, that the need for Vinaya orthodoxy within the ranks of the Saṅgha grew as the amount of knowledge and understanding of Buddhism increased over the decades. By the middle of the 8th century, sustained efforts to introduce a lineage of legitimate *bhikṣu* ordinations from China finally bore fruit in the arrival and activities of the famous scholar-monk Jianzhen (Jp. Ganjin) 鑑真 (688–763). Nothing of the kind, or at least of equal success, was, however, undertaken for the female half of the Order.

The situation did not change much after Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school 天台宗, came to stress the formula of Mahāyāna ordination based on the Bodhisattva precepts expounded in *The Brahmā's Net Sutra* 梵網經. Actually, women were not even allowed, let alone encouraged, to take the vows on Mt Hiei, the headquarters of the new school. It was only later in the Heian period when they began to avail themselves of this new procedure. Furthermore, the Mahāyāna ordination added extra confusion as to what the requirements of a monastic status meant: were the Bodhisattva precepts alone sufficient for a follower of the Great Vehicle to be declared a full-fledged monk or nun? How should one regard the old Vinaya procedure, which basically reflects a 'Lesser Vehicle' (Hīnayāna) ideological framework, and its legitimacy? Such questions

concerned monks and nuns alike, but female monastics, already in a socially and institutionally much weaker position, were affected in a more profound way.

For the clear birth of the *bhikṣuṇī* Order, we actually have to wait until the 13th century when a group of creative and intrepid monks led by Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290) set up the institutional framework for ordaining nuns. This was an act of bold interpretation rather than a transmission, but it proved successful for centuries to come. What under more generous conditions could have been a straightforward and orthodox process of passing the Torch of Monastic Law from one generation to the other turned out to be a long and meandering path. This is a saga in its own right, albeit little noticed, and it doubtless requires a treatment proportionate to its impressive scale and depth. Admittedly, I am not the ideal guide for taking the reader along this ragged path, let alone for pointing to all its narrow, winding trails. I, nonetheless, trust that this modest essay will succeed in giving a rough, yet coherent, picture of how the main threads of our story unfold.

II Auspicious Dawn

There is some irony in the fact that in contrast to the less prominent and often neglected role of nuns in the history of Japanese Buddhism, the first inhabitant of the Land of the Rising Sun to become a monastic was a woman. It was in the 13th year of Emperor Bidatsu's 敏達天皇 reign, i.e. 584 C.E., when a young girl named Shima 嶋 took the decisive step of renouncing lay life and devoting herself to the Buddhist path. Many details remain shrouded in the mist of times, but a sketchy reconstruction of the crucial event is possible.

Let us first see the earliest and probably most reliable account given by the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 or *Chronicles of Japan*, the oldest official

history of the country completed in 720.⁶ According to it,⁷ Soga no Umako no Sukune 蘇我馬子宿禰,⁸ Grand Minister 大臣 and leader of the pro-Buddhist faction at the Court, came into possession of two sacred images. This prompted him to look for spiritual practitioners (修行者 *okonahihito*) capable and qualified to worship them. The range of choice was far from wide. The only person able to assist was Hyep'yōn 惠便 (Jp. Eben), a former Korean monk who had settled in Japan.⁹ Exceptional circumstances

⁶ For the *Nihon shoki*, I make use of the annotated edition compiled by Sakamoto Tarō et al. (1965). The original text is written in Classical Chinese, but this edition is accompanied by the traditional translation into Classical Japanese (*kundoku* 訓讀). The latter is based on early manuscripts, preference being given to the oldest extant versions. In the case of Scroll XX, from which most of the quotations in this paper are made, the *kundoku* follows the so-called Maeda Manuscript 前田本 which was dated back to the late Heian period 平安後期, i.e. from around the second half of the 11th century to the 12th century (see *Nihon Shoki*, vol. I, Introduction, pp. 48-52). The Japanese pronunciation of many of the Chinese characters from this work reflects, therefore, fairly old readings (albeit not contemporaneous with the events described).

It must be added here that in quite a few instances, I also note the classical Japanese reading of the Chinese characters, i.e. the so-called *rekishiteki kana zukai* 歴史的假名遣 or 'historical *kana*-syllabary usage', which basically reflects the pronunciation before and around the Mid-Heian 平安中期 period (from the 10th century to the first half of the 11th century). In order to distinguish it from the modern pronunciation 現代假名遣, I usually refer to it as 'Classical Japanese pronunciation' or 'Classical Japanese spelling'.

⁷ The main part of the account is found at *Nihon shoki* vol. 2, pp. 148-149. For an English translation, see Aston tr. [1896] 1972, vol. 2, p. 101.

⁸ The name is also read 'Soga no Mumako no Sukune' (cf. Aston tr. ([1896] 1972, vol. 2, p. 101).

⁹ The *Nihon shoki* calls him 'Koma no Ebin' 高麗の惠便 (*Nihon shoki* vol. 2, pp. 148-149), suggesting that he was a native of Koryō 高麗. The only things which the text tells about his background is that he was a 'monk who had returned to secular life' 僧還俗 and that he was a resident of the 'Land of Harima' 播磨國 (*ibid.*)(located in the Southwest of modern-day Hyōgo Prefecture 兵庫県).

asked, however, for extraordinary means. Although Hyep'yōn had returned to secular life, he was declared 'preceptor' (師 *norinoshi*) and requested to ordain Shima, the daughter of Shime Dachito¹⁰ 令度司馬達等女嶋.¹¹

Shima, aged eleven at that time,¹² assumed the monastic name Zenshin 善信.¹³ She was joined in her pious act by two other girls, Toyome 豊女 and

¹⁰ I follow here the Maeda Manuscript reading adopted by the editors of the *Nihon Shoki*. Aston tr. ([1896] 1972, vol. 2, p. 101) reads 'Shiba Tattō', as do many other modern secondary sources. Ōsumi (2002, XXX) also mentions the reading 'Shima Tachito'. Whatever the exact pronunciation may have been, the surname 'Shiba' 司馬 suggests a naturalised Chinese family (see *Nihon shoki*, vol. II, p. 148, n. 7). The only detail which the *Nihon shoki* mentions about him is that he was one of the two people sent by the Grand Minister to look for spiritual practitioners (see above). This suggests that he must have been a Buddhist follower himself, or at least ready to embrace the new faith, and had thus gained the trust of an exalted personage like Soga no Umako. See also note 14 below.

¹¹ The *kundoku* reading in the Maeda Manuscript goes as follows: 司馬達等の女嶋^{むすめ}を度^{いへて}せしむ. (*Nihon shoki* vol. 2, pp. 148).

¹² Aston tr. ([1896] 1972, vol. 2, p. 101, gives Zenshin's age as 'twelve' (which may have been the reading of the edition adopted for his translation?). The *Nihon shoki* vol. 2, pp. 148-149, however, clearly reads: 年十一歳 (*kundoku* reading: *toshi towo amari hitotsu*)(which appears written as interlinear commentary) '[being] eleven years of age'.

¹³ The name literally means 'Good Faith'. The *Nihon shoki* gives no explanation for the choice of this name, but if a rationale deeper than its plain denotation was behind it, it may have been connected to a tradition referring to a so-called 'Good Faith Bodhisattva' 善信菩薩. The Japanese scholar-monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240-1321) mentions 'the twenty-four precepts of a [/the?] Good Faith Bodhisattva' 善信菩薩二十四戒, which according to him are expounded in the *Good Faith Bodhisattva Sutra* 善信菩薩經. Gyōnen then adds, 'a [/the?] Good-Faith Bodhisattva is a lay women' 善信菩薩是在家女人也 (T74. 8a21-24). As far as I know, there is no extant sutra by this name. (The only remote possibility is that it might refer to the *Shan xing nü jing* 善信女經, a lost apocryphal text, already considered spurious by the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集; see T 55. 38b25). The twenty-four precepts of a [/the?] Good-Faith Bodhisattva 善信菩薩二十四戒 also appear mentioned in the *Guanding bachu guozui shengsi deduo jing* 灌頂拔除過罪生死得度經 (T21. 534b5), an early esoteric sutra,

Ishime 石女, who became Nun Zenzō 禪藏尼 and Nun Ezen (Classical Japanese reading: *Wezen*) 惠善尼 respectively.¹⁴ They are referred to as Zenshin's 'disciples' (弟子 *deshi*).¹⁵ The text does not give any details about how this 'ordination' took place. The verb used in the original is 度 (Ch. *du*; Jp. *do*), literally meaning 'to go across'. In such contexts, the verb is rather ambiguous because it may refer to either 'going forth' (*pravrajyā*) into the homeless state of mendicant, which in a full-fledged monastic environment amounts to being accepted into novitiate, or to becoming an 'ordained' (*upasaṃpanna*) monk or nun.¹⁶ The classical Japanese reading of the Chinese character 度 in the *kundoku* 訓讀 of the Maeda Manuscript 前田本 is *ihede* or 'leaving the house[hold life]'.¹⁷ Its most likely interpretation in this context is that Shima and the other two girls received the ten precepts for novice nuns (*śrāmaṇerikā*) or (/and?) the six precepts for probationary nuns (*sikṣamāṇā*).¹⁸

but without any further details. Cf. also T41. 455b15.

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that Toyome was the daughter of a naturalised Chinese, and Ishime's father appears to have been a naturalised Korean from the Kingdom of Paekche 百濟.

¹⁵ All these events are described taking place in the 13th year of Emperor Bidatsu's reign, i.e. 584 C.E.

¹⁶ The concrete meaning of 'going across' 度 in a Buddhist context is that of crossing the sea of ignorance and affliction to the other shore of Awakening and Nirvana (see Furuta Shōkin et al. eds. 1988, s.v. 得度). For technical details connected to 'going forth' and 'ordination', see note 5 above.

¹⁷ For this manuscript, see note 6 above.

¹⁸ In Vinaya terms, eleven years of age was enough to qualify Shima for becoming a novice (*śrāmaṇerikā*). The *Fourfold Vinaya* lists three conditions necessary for a child to be allowed to go forth 出家: being able (1) to chase away a crow 能驅烏; (2) to keep the monastic precepts 能持戒; and (3) to eat only one meal a day 能一食 (see T 22. 810c24-811a3). The ability of chasing crows away, taken as a basic criterion for monastic eligibility, is seen in a variety of Vinaya sources (cf. T 22. 117a-b; T 22. 216c; T 22. 461b; T 24. 415b; T 24. 484c; T 24. 600b; T 24. 619a; etc.). Some texts are more specific about the precise age beginning with which this condition can be applied, i.e.

7 years old (cf. T 22. 461b; T 24. 415b; T 24. 484c; T 24. 600b; etc.). The reason for this rather peculiar criterion is spelled out in a Mūlasarvāstivādin source: such an ability was needed for keeping watch over the crops owned by the Saṅgha and chasing away the ubiquitous avian intruders (能爲衆僧 看守穀麥, 驅烏鳥者, 亦與出家。T 24. 600b.)

As for the minimum age of probationary nuns (*sikṣamāṇā*), this appears to have been ten (see note 26 below).

Another possibility would be that the so-called ‘going forth’ refers here to the administration of the five precepts to be observed by lay men (*upāsaka*) and women (*upāsikā*). Though not impossible and actually easier to explain in terms of strict Vinaya procedures, this interpretation is, however, less likely. Any lay man and woman could and actually should receive the five precepts, and at least that much must have been known to Soga no Umako. If he had needed only lay persons committed to the five precepts, the Grand Minister could have done this himself or could have asked members of his immediate family to do so. Furthermore, he seems to show great respect and care for the three ‘nuns’, much more than one would display to laywomen. Soga no Umako reveres them in accordance with the Buddhist Law 依佛法崇敬 and orders offerings of food and robes 令供衣食 for them. He also builds a Buddha Hall (佛殿, Classical Japanese spelling: *hotoke no ohotono*), in which he places Maitreya’s image, and asks the ‘nuns’ to come for what appears to be a ceremony of religious observance (大會設齋, *kundoku* reading: *daiwe no wogami su*) (*Nihon shoki*, vol. II, pp. 148–149). The latter most likely refers to the important Buddhist ceremony known in Pali as *uposatha*, in Sanskrit as *upavastha*, and in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit as (*u*)*poṣadha*. (On the history of *uposatha*, see Gangopadhyay 1991; Daswani 2006, 106–108; etc.)

Finally, let us also add that according to the *Gangō-ji garan engi* 元興寺伽藍縁起, the young ‘nuns’ later received the six precepts for probationary nuns in Korea. A slightly different scenario is suggested by the *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 which tells us that they received both the ten precepts for novice nuns or the six precepts for probationary nuns. More about these accounts and texts will be said below, but here it suffices to mention that even if their information is accurate, it would not invalidate my conjecture, i.e. receiving the ten precepts for novice nuns or (/and?) the six precepts for probationary nuns at the time of the girls’ initiation into novitiate. This was, first and foremost, a symbolic act: a ceremony marking the partaking of the sacredness of the new religion. As far as detailed Vinaya regulations were concerned, even if they were known to those involved in the process, they must have

This is also apparent from the fact that the three girls later requested Soga no Umako to allow them to travel to the Korean Kingdom of Paekche 百濟國 for ordination.

The nun Zenshin and [the others] said to the Grand Minister, 'The precepts represent the foundation of the path of monastic life.¹⁹ [We] beg [for permission] to head for Paekche in order to study and receive the precepts.'²⁰

(善信阿尼²¹等謂大臣曰：「出家之途 以戒爲本。願向百濟 令

been of secondary importance. The very fact that this initiation into novitiate was performed by an *ex-monk* makes the whole act quite controversial in terms of Vinaya provisions (to say the least!). Later, the young 'nuns' and/or their Korean host monastery may have felt that a proper ceremony, albeit partly redundant, would be not only desirable but actually necessary. Cf. also note 40 below.

¹⁹ Ch. 出家之途 literally translates as 'the path of leaving the household'.

²⁰ The *Gangō-ji garan engi* (2a3-4) gives the same account but with a different wording: 「傳聞，出家之人以戒爲本。然無戒師。故度百濟國欲受戒。」.

²¹ The Chinese character 阿 used as a suffix attached to terms denoting family relations (e. g. 'mother' 阿母, 'elder sister' 阿姉, 'elder brother' 阿兄, etc.), titles, or proper names is well-attested from the time of the Eastern Han 東漢 (25-220 C.E.) Dynasty onwards. Originally, it appears to have been employed only for women, and though later it started to be used for men, too, the prefix continued to be more frequently seen attached to female terms, titles, or names (see Ōta 1988, 15). Its basic function appears to be that of adding a nuance of familiarity in addressing someone or a diminutive connotation (see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 11, s.v.). The prefix is also used in Chinese translations of Buddhist texts dating to an early period (see Ōta 1988, 15, for one example). We actually find 阿 attached to 姨, i.e. 'aunt', in the *Fourfold Vinaya* as a form of address to the preceptor by a novice nun. Thus, 我阿姨 (T 22. 922c26, and passim) appears to mean something like 'my good aunt[-like teacher]'.

In Classical Japanese sources, 阿 employed as prefix is pronounced /o/ and appears attached mainly to the names of women and children. In our passage, however, the Maeda Manuscript reading of 阿尼 is just /ama/, which is not different from the regular Japanese pronunciation for 'nun' (usually written only with one

學受戒法。」 *Nihon shoki* vol. II, pp. 162–163)²²

The argument appears to have been persuasive enough to convince Soga no Umako to grant permission in 588.²³

Unfortunately, the *Chronicles of Japan* does not say anything about their monastic training in Paekche.²⁴ We only know that the three nuns returned to Japan two years later. If we think along the lines of standard Vinaya procedures, these two years must have represented the period usually required for a probationary nun (*śiḱṣamāṇā*).²⁵ Theoretically

Chinese character, i.e. 尼). Nonetheless, the authors of the original must have intended a certain nuance, probably something like ‘good nun’ or ‘little nun’ (the latter would thus be alluding to the fact that Zenshin was still a young girl).

²² The punctuation in this and most of the originals cited in this essay belongs to me. With the exception of Tibetan, I have adopted modern punctuation rules for all classical languages cited here.

²³ Nothing is said in the *Chronicles of Japan* about why women, instead of men or a mixed group, were chosen to become the first monastics and were sponsored by the state for such an important (as well as expensive) enterprise as studying abroad. As pointed out by a number of scholars (Sakurai 1974; Okada 1982, 49–51; Ōsumi 2002, XXXI; etc.), this seems to have been connected to the predominant role which women appear to have played in the pre-Buddhist, native religion of Japan. Women acting as shamanic mediums, called *miko* (written in Chinese characters as 巫女 or 神子), were regarded as the main intermediaries between the sacred and the profane. According to Shimonaka ed. [1937] 1986, 1315, in ancient times, women actually appear to have been the sole ‘professionals’ worshipping the Gods, men being de facto barred from this function. This predominant role of women in old Shinto 神道 practices and institutions seems to decline in the second half of the 8th century, and from around the beginning of the 9th century, male priests start to replace women as the main intermediaries between the Gods and the humans (see Takatori 1979, 266–267; Okada 1982, 48). Although *mikos* have continued to be an important part of the Japanese religious life to this day, their position has been relegated to secondary functions (see also section V below).

²⁴ For the early history of the monastic discipline on the Korean Peninsula, see Ch’ae 1977.

speaking, the successful completion of this apprenticeship entitles one to receive full ordination—presumably, the ultimate aim of the young Japanese renunciants. Here, however, we stumble upon another Vinaya technicality which may have precluded them from achieving this objective. According to most monastic codes, including the *Fourfold Vinaya*, full ordinations for both men and women are granted only if the postulant is twenty years of age or above.²⁶ We remember that Zenshin was eleven at

²⁵ On the *Fourfold Vinaya* rules concerning a probationary nun, see T 22. 756b7–9. See also Satō [1972] 2003, pp. 354–355, for explanation and other Vinaya parallels.

²⁶ Being under the age of twenty is one of the so-called impediments or stumbling-blocks (Pali, *antarāyikā dhammā*; Skt. *antarāyikā dharmāḥ*; Ch. 障法), i.e. conditions which disqualify a woman (and in this particular case, a man, too) for ordination. The list of impediments in the Pali Canon is found at Vin II 271–272. (For a modern discussion of these impediments, see Horner 1930, 145ff.; especially pp. 149–151). The check as to whether the postulant meets these conditions or not, which usually takes the form of a series of questions, is a part of the ordination procedure of most Vinaya traditions (for the *Fourfold Vinaya*, see T 22. 924c–925a). One of the questions put the ordinand is, ‘Are you full twenty years of age or not?’ (年滿二十不?, *Fourfold Vinaya*, T 22. 924c17). The act of ordaining a woman under the age of twenty actually constitutes an offence requiring expiation (Pali, *pācittiya*; Ch. 波逸提) (see *Fourfold Vinaya*, ‘if a *bhikṣuṇī* knowingly performs full ordination for [a woman who] has not reached the age of full twenty, this is an offence requiring expiation’ 若比丘尼 知年不滿二十, 與授具足戒 波逸提. T 22. 756a4–5; for other Vinaya parallels and a discussion, see Hirakawa [1998] 2000, 578–579). The same actually holds true for men, and the rule further stipulates that the ordination of the monk under twenty becomes invalid (see T 22. 1027b20–22; also 679c–680c; etc.; cf. Satō [1972] 2003, 200–201).

However, female monastics can benefit from a special clause: women who had been married are allowed to be ordained as early as the age of twelve, after, of course, having undergone a period of apprenticeship as probationary nuns for two years (*Fourfold Vinaya*: 若比丘尼 度曾嫁婦女, 年十歲, 與二歲學戒, 年滿十二, 聽與受具足戒。若減十二 與受具足戒者, 波逸提. T 22. 1037c3–5; cf. Satō [1972] 2003, 356–357). The age of twelve and ten respectively may seem surprising to us, but set against its historical background, it becomes fully understandable. The system of child marriage for girls, sometimes decided as early as the time of birth or

the time of (what appears to have been) her initiation into novitiate, which means that by 590 she must have been seventeen or eighteen years old.²⁷ This is a serious flaw in the picture of Zenshin being the first *bhikṣuṇī*, and therefore the first fully ordained monastic, on Japanese soil.²⁸ Later sources, two of which will be discussed below, may have sensed the inconsistency, and the picture which they offer is 'slightly' retouched, subtly enough to conform to all Vinaya niceties. Their reliability is, however, not beyond doubt, and a certain degree of data 'massage' may have been involved.

For the moment, let us, however, focus upon the testimony of the *Chronicles of Japan*, which probably remains our most reliable source for these events. The *Nihon shoki* itself does not give any clue about the ecclesiastical status which the three 'nuns' had upon their return to Japan.²⁹

even while during the mother's pregnancy, has a long history in India, having been more of a rule than an exception for centuries (see Bhandarkar 1893). The termination of the marriage may have been brought by the husband's death (even if the marriage had not been consummated) or, less frequently, through divorce, which as a rule could be effected only by the husband under certain conditions (see *Manu's Code of Law* Ch. IX, §§ 80-82, 194 and 760-761). Young girls in such a situation appear to have been deemed mature enough for the rigours of full monastic life, and the minimum age was therefore lowered considerably. This special clause appears to have been exploited in Gyōnen's account of the event (see below).

²⁷ The *Nihon shoki* does not say anything about her companion's age, but since they are called Zenshin's 'disciples' 弟子 (see above), they could not have been much older than her.

²⁸ One could, nonetheless, imagine that since the act of ordaining a nun before the age of twenty is only an offence requiring expiation, a relatively light punishment in Vinaya terms, some Korean monastic community may have performed ordinations for their less fortunate co-travellers on the Path out of sheer bodhisattvic compassion or as a skilful means. However, even if some compassionate nuns and monks decided for such a course of action and took upon themselves the task of later confessing the irregularity in monastic procedures, we are still faced with the Vinaya stipulation declaring such ordinations null and void (see note 26 above). More importantly, such a scenario remains mere speculation as no source corroborates or even suggests it.

The only relevant things added by the *Chronicles of Japan* (vol. II, pp. 168–169) are that Zenshin and her companions took their abode in Sakurai Temple 櫻井寺 and in the course of the same year, i.e. 590, three other women and eight men renounced lay life. As no mention is made about these postulants heading for the Korean Peninsula or of any monastics from the Continent being present at the ceremony, the most straightforward interpretation would be to assume that they took the tonsure under the

²⁹ Zenshin and her companions are qualified here as 學問尼, which is read by the Maeda Manuscript as *mononarahi no ama*. It is not very clear to me how 學問, usually meaning ‘study’ or ‘learning’, should be construed here. Aston (tr. [1896] 1972, 118) renders 學問尼 here as ‘student nuns’. To be sure, the binome 學問 may also refer to the process or period of one’s pursuing his/her studies as a disciple. And this might be the nuance implied by the Japanese reading *mononarahi* as well, though this word itself is far from being crystal-clear. If this is the sense intended here, then Zenshin and her companions were not—or at least were not considered by the authors of the *Nihon shoki* as—full-fledged nuns. And if this was meant to refer to their monastic status, then ‘novice nuns’ would be the meaning, which would also imply that at they were not ordained as *bhikṣuṇī*s (at least, not at this stage). However, this is not the only possible interpretation. Ch. 學問 more often tends to refer to a state in which one has already accumulated a certain (usually, considerable) amount of scholarly (or in this case, religious) knowledge and training.

At any rate, the Chinese binome does imply that the person qualified by it is engaged in the pursuit of studies, secular or ecclesiastical, on a permanent basis. This is also the sense which Nakamura (1981) gives to the words 學問尼 and 學問僧, which are explained as referring to nuns and monks respectively studying or having studied abroad. (For both entries, Nakamura adduces examples from the same *Nihon shoki*, which means that he had in mind Japanese monastics engaged in studies and training on the Continent.)

The most probably rendering of 學問尼 is thus ‘nun in pursuit of [religious] studies [/training]’, an epithet probably implying in our context that the nuns have already attained a certain level of achievement, at least above that of mere beginner. Their ecclesiastical status in Vinaya terms does not, however, appear to be implied by the qualification 學問, which thus does not give in itself any clue on whether Zenshin and her companions had been ordained in Korea.

guidance of Zenshin and/or the other two 'nuns'. In Vinaya terms, provided they were scrupulously followed, this abandonment of lay life must have amounted to the administration of the ten precepts for novice monastics.³⁰ No mention is made as to whether these fresh renunciants were later ordained as *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṅīs*.³¹

The *Nihon shoki* is not the only source describing the origin of the monastic institutions on Japanese soil. The story of Zenshin and her companions is told in a few other writings, some of which provide further

³⁰ The terms used by the *Nihon shoki* are, once again, rather ambiguous. It speaks of the 'nuns who have become monastics [literally, have crossed over]' (度せる尼, *kundoku* reading: *ihede seru ama*) (on 度, see explanations above as well as note 16), while the verb used for the men is 'abandon the lay life' (出家す, *kundoku* reading: *ihede su*).

³¹ We also know from the statistical data compiled by the Japanese scholar Ushiyama (1990, 16) that a number of 12 nuns were allowed to receive 'extraordinary ordinations' (臨時度 *rinji-do*) between 590 and 609 (on this system, see Section III below). The figures, however, do not tell us if Zenshin and/or her companions played any role in these ordinations.

Let us also add that even if Zenshin and her companions had been ordained as *bhikṣuṅīs* in Korea, they could not have conducted ordinations as preceptors immediately. Most monastic codes stipulate that only nuns who have been themselves ordained for at least twelve years can perform ordinations, failing which they would commit an offence requiring expiation (*Fourfold Vinaya*: 若比丘尼 年未滿十二歲, 授人具足戒者 波逸提。T 22. 761c4-6; see also Hirakawa [1998] 2000, 584-585, for parallel sources and discussion). Besides, a nun is not permitted to conduct ordinations for more than a person per year (*Fourfold Vinaya*: 若比丘尼 不滿一歲, 授人具足戒者 波逸提。T 22. 764b2-3; see also Hirakawa [1998] 2000, 599-605, for parallel sources and discussion), which may have added further complications in such a tiny monastic community. All this holds, however, true only if Vinaya provisions were followed scrupulously. And once again, we should remember that the offence requiring expiation is quite light, and to all intents and purposes, a monastic may assume the responsibility and go on with such irregular ordinations without risking expulsion from the community. Nevertheless, this remains a mere speculative possibility with no evidence to support or suggest it.

and sometimes rather different details.³² We shall have a brief look at only two of them, emphasising the main points of divergence with the testimony given by the *Chronicles of Japan*.

The first one will be the *Gangō-ji garan engi* 元興寺伽藍縁起 or *Chronicles of the Gangō Monastery* (pp. 1-2). This is an ecclesiastical text written in 1165, i.e. more than four centuries after the *Nihon shoki*. Although it apparently makes use of earlier documents,³³ some of its information seems to have been doctored in the light of a better understanding of the Buddhist teachings in general and Vinaya regulations in particular.

One important difference is that Zenshin is said to have been seventeen years old at the time of her initiation into novitiate (*Gangō-ji garan engi*, 1c9).³⁴ This would actually solve the Vinaya inconsistency which the account of the *Nihon shoki* would create if we suppose that Zenshin had been ordained in 590, to wit, before the age of twenty. On the other hand, if we follow the *Gangō-ji garan engi*, Zenshin would have been twenty-three or twenty-four when she received full ordination on the Korean Peninsula (see below).

Another unique detail is the presence of an old *bhikṣuṇī* named Hōmyō 法明 (or 'Beommyeong', in Korean pronunciation), who was also involved in the training of the three nuns. The wording of the *Gangō-ji garan engi* is not very clear,³⁵ but one possible way of construing it is that the old nun, too, was of Korean origin and had returned to secular life like Hyep'yōn. The

³² For an excellent examination of these sources, see Ishida [1963] 1976, 1-3.

³³ See Ono ed. 1964, vol. 2, p. 207.

³⁴ These events are said to take place in the Year of the Yin-Water Rabbit 癸卯 (*Gangō-ji garan engi* 1c5), i.e. 583, which is one year earlier than the date given by the *Nihon shoki*.

³⁵ *Gangō-ji garan engi* (1c8-9): 但是時 針間國有 脱衣高麗老比丘, 名惠便, 與老比丘尼, 名法明。

Chronicles of the Gangō Monastery is not more generous in details as to the ceremony which marked the girls' abandonment of lay life 出家. What the text adds, however, is that they studied the Buddhist teachings under Beommyeong (/Hōmyō)(三女等 就法明 受學佛法。 *Gangō-ji garan engi*, 1c10-11).

The *Gangō-ji garan engi* depicts Zenshin as being fully aware of the requirement for dual ordination.³⁶

³⁶ The requirement for dual ordination (known in Chinese sources as 二部僧得 *er bu seng de* or 二部僧具足 *er bu seng juze*) can be seen in several Vinaya regulations. It is actually one of the eight weighty rules (or: eight rules of reverence)(Pali, *aṭṭha garudhammā*; Skt. *aṣṭau gurudharmā*; Ch. 八重法 *ba zhong fa* or 八敬法 *ba jing fa*). According to the *Fourfold Vinaya*, this is the fourth of the weighty rules (式叉摩那學戒已，從比丘僧乞受大戒。此法應尊重恭敬讚歎。盡形壽不得過。 T 22. 923b8-10). Cf. also 若比丘尼 僧不聽而授人具足戒者 波逸提。 T 22. 761b2-3). See also Satō [1972] 2003, pp. 278-279. For the *aṭṭha garudhammā* in the Pali *Vinaya*, see Vin II 255-256. For the *aṣṭau gurudharmā* in the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*, see Roth ed. 1970, 17-18. On a detailed discussion of the *aṭṭha garudhammā* in the Pali Canon, see Horner 1930, 118ff. For a more recent analysis, see Hüsken 2007.

In the *Fourfold Vinaya*, the actual procedure for dual ordination is detailed in the *Bhikkṣuṅṅskandhaka* 比丘尼撻度 (T22. 922c6ff.). For the Japanese *kundoku* translation of this chapter, see KIK-DhVin, vol. 4, pp. 8ff. (see also T 22. 756c-758c; etc.).

On the various types of ordination for nuns, see Hirakawa 1999-2000, vol. 2, 162-166. See also Hirakawa 1998, 87-89. The history of the ordination is examined by Bhikkhuni Juo-Hsüeh Shih 2000, 345-405. The *upasampadā* ceremony in Pali sources is presented in detail in Horner 1930, 138ff. A very good discussion of the dual ordination is also found in Huimin Bhikṣu 2007. See also Shih 2007 (touching upon the requirement of dual ordination in various Vinaya traditions) and Wei-chun 2007 (for a presentation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *bhikkṣuṅṅi* ordination).

The act of ordaining a female postulant without the approval of a *bhikkṣu* congregation actually constitutes an offence requiring expiation (*pācittiya*)(*Fourfold Vinaya*: 若比丘尼 年滿十二歲，衆僧不聽，便授人具足戒者 波逸提。 T 22. 762a7-8; see also Hirakawa [1998] 2000, 585-587, for parallel sources and discussion).

The three nuns said to the officials, ‘There are only six monks who have come [to this country],³⁷ [which is] not enough [for the quorum] of twenty masters [i.e. ten *bhikṣuṇīs* and ten *bhikṣus*]. Therefore, we still wish to go over to the Land of Paekche and receive the precepts.’

(三尼等官白：「但六口僧耳來，不具廿師，故猶欲度百濟國受戒。」 2a24-25).³⁸

Their wish granted, the nuns headed for the Korean Peninsula. What is interesting here, and again different from the *Chronicles of Japan*, is that the *Gangō-ji garan engi* records their number as five. The text says, ‘in all, five nuns were sent [to Paekche]’ (合五尼等遣。2b1-2), without actually explaining the divergence between this figure and the ‘three nuns’ mentioned in the previous passages.³⁹

³⁷ This is a detail which is not recorded in the *Nihon shoki*. The *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 (T 74. 17c3-8), on the other hand, likewise mentions the arrival of six monks from Korea. The latter text, however, may have been influenced by the *Gangō-ji garan engi* (for more details, see below).

³⁸ The *okurigana* 送り假名, i.e. the *kana* 假名 notation added to Chinese characters to indicate the Japanese pronunciation of their endings, belongs to the original.

³⁹ Note the usage of 等 here as well as in the immediately preceding passages speaking of the three nuns. There is a certain ambiguity in the usage of 等 in Classical Chinese. Placed after one or more nouns, the word often means ‘etc.’, ‘and so on’. Closely linked to this open series meaning, it can be employed as a plural marker—a usage frequently seen after pronouns or in Buddhist translations rendering Sanskrit plurals. But 等 can also be construed as marking a close series or end of an enumeration (‘items such as ...’), therefore not implying any further members (cf. Nakamura 1981, s.v.). A definitive conclusion is difficult to draw for many contexts, including the one under discussion here. Therefore, 等 in 三尼等 can be interpreted as ‘the three nuns’ (end of enumeration as well as plural marker enforcer) or ‘three nuns [who first received the precepts], and so on [i.e. two more nuns who joined them later]’. The latter would be in tune with the 合五尼等遣 sentence.

Upon their return to Japan, they duly report to the officials the main course of their ecclesiastical training on the Continent:

In the Year of the Yang-Earth Monkey [i.e. 588], we went [to Paekche] and received the six precepts [for probationary nuns]. In the third month of the Year of the Yin-Earth Cock [i.e. 589], we took the great precepts [for fully ordained nuns].⁴⁰

(戊申ノ年往^て, 即受六法戒。己酉年三月 受大戒。⁴¹ 2b9-10).

If we believe the account given by the *Gangō-ji garan engi*, Zenshin and her four companions were properly ordained as *bhikṣuṇīs* in Korea. Furthermore, ‘five nuns’ can account for the fast pace of the impressive growth in the number of nuns over the next decades. Five *bhikṣuṇīs* is actually the quorum for carrying full ordinations in remote regions where securing the number of ten witnesses is not possible. This also confers full legitimacy to the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage commenced by Zenshin and her companions. However, we have to stress again the uncertainty surrounding the historical reliability of the picture offered by the *Gangō-ji garan engi*.⁴²

⁴⁰ This would have been, however, rather irregular in Vinaya terms. Usually, a probationary nun is required to spend a period of two years before full ordination (see note 26 above). But perhaps in this particular case, the fact that the Japanese monastics had already been initiated into novitiate in 583/584 may have been regarded as having fulfilled this requirement about the minimum period of apprenticeship. See also the *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 below. Cf. also note 18 above.

⁴¹ The binome 大戒 ‘great precept(s)’ is often used in Chinese translations of monastic codes and Vinaya exegetical literature for the precepts taken by a monk or nun at the time of full ordination, being equivalent to the (Ch.) *juzu-jie*/ (Jp.) *gusoku-kai* 具足戒 (see the frequent usage of the binome in the *Bhikṣuṇīskandhaka* 比丘尼撻度 in the *Fourfold Vinaya*, T 22. 923b9, etc.; cf. Nakamura 1981, s.v.).

⁴² Whether entirely trustworthy or not, the *Gangō-ji garan engi* (2b-c) continues its account of Zenshin’s activities in more detail than the *Nihon shoki*.

The second source to which we turn our attention now is the *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 or *Compendium of the Vinaya School* written by the erudite scholar-monk and historiographer Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321). In this account, Zenshin is presented as the ‘wife of Shima’ 斯末妻, and the other two girls are likewise qualified as ‘wives’ 妻 (T 74, 17b27–28). The implication, of course, is that before abandoning lay life, the young monastics had been married. This may look like a trivial detail for the main thread of our story, but in Vinaya terms, it makes a huge difference. Being widowed or having obtained divorce from her husband entitles a woman to full ordination as early as the age of twelve.⁴³ However, as

⁴³ See note 26 above. Nothing is said, however, if the three women were divorcees or widowed. Neither are we told anything about their age. Actually, closely linked to this is the issue of the marriageable age for a girl in Ancient Japan. The historical background is quite intricate, and I am far from being prepared to tackle the matter with sufficient competence. However, what I can say—very tentatively indeed!—is that further doubts as to the historical reliability of this detail arise if we assume that Zenshin’s age was eleven as recorded in the *Nihon shoki*. According to Article 24 of the ‘Family Regulations’ 戸令 in the *Yōrō Code of Criminal Laws and Administrative Regulations* 養老律令 (compiled from 718 to 720 and enacted in 757), ‘men of fifteen and above and girls of thirteen and above are allowed to marry’ (凡男年十五, 女年十三以上 婚嫁聽。 *Rituryō*, 233). The age here must apparently be calculated according to the Japanese counting system (the so-called *kazoe doshi* 數え年) which regards an infant at birth as one year old (see notes to Article 24, in *Rituryō*, 233). This would mean that the nubility age for girls stipulated by the regulation above should be construed as the thirteenth year of life, i.e. twelve years old and above. The practice is also seen in the so-called *mogi no gi* 裳着の儀 or the traditional ceremony of a girl’s coming-of-age which starts from the Heian period and continues to the Late Mediaeval Age (16th century). The ceremony would usually be performed between the age of twelve and fourteen (see Suzuki 1991, 5–6).

One should, however, add here that the *Yōrō Code of Criminal Laws and Administrative Regulations* was patterned upon similar Chinese codes and its stipulations did not always reflect ground realities, so to speak, of the Japanese society. Actually, many of its regulations were not rigorously applied, especially when they tended to come into conflict with native Japanese customs and practices

(see Suzuki 1991, 82–83; 95–97; one of the articles Suzuki mentions as not agreeing with pre-existing customs is the above mentioned Article 24, though no further details are given). It is hard to say how relevant this code as well as similar ones pre-dating it by several decades, often based upon Confucian ideals rather than de facto realities, is to determining whether Zenshin, who lived in second half of the 6th century, could have been married.

Actually, the dominant, though not unique, form of marriage in pre-Nara Japan appears to have been the so-called *tsumadoi-kon* 妻問婚 (also written 妻訪婚; on the difference as to the usage of Chinese characters, see Suzuki 1991, 32–33) or duolocal marriage. This meant that the husband and wife did not co-habitate, and the former would usually visit his wife occasionally. Actually, such a visiting husband would often frequent more than one wife, and sometimes the wife, too, would accept visits from more than one partner (see Aoki et al. 1992–1994, vol. III, pp. 456–457; Sekiguchi 1993; Suzuki 1991, 26ff.; etc.) I could not find any record concerning the nubility age in this type of marriage, which actually seems to have been rather loose in its rules, but as far as I can understand, it would have been pretty pointless to visit a partner before she reached the age of fertility. As procreation (along with its accompanying pleasures) seems to have been the major aim in such a relation, a girl eleven years old or younger, like Shima, would have been a rather unlikely ‘wife’ even in the case of a duolocal marriage.

Other varieties or subvarieties of marriage did also exist, but once again, there is no evidence that early age was a rule in any of them. One could think here of a marriage of convenience (known in Japanese as *seiryaku kekkon* 政略結婚), in which case the age could be younger than twelve. The practice is, however, attested from the Nara period on and becomes fairly common in mediaeval times amongst the upper classes. Even it existed in Zenshin’s age, it would be rather strange for a relatively low-ranking clan like Shima to marry their daughter to another family for socio-political interests.

One could also surmise a form of engagement, and indeed its existence in ancient time is attested in a few historical documents (see Sekiguchi 1994, vol. II, pp. 280ff; cf. also Article 26 of the ‘Family Regulations’ in the *Yōrō Code of Criminal Laws and Administrative Regulations*, where engagement is referred to as *teikon* 定婚; *Ritsuryō*, p. 233, and n. 26b, p. 563). But even if we suppose that Shima may have been betrothed to another man at an early age, serious doubts still remain as to why Gyōnen should have used the word ‘wife’ 妻 in such a case. Last but not least, we must remember that there is no hint at the source(s) on which his piece of

pointed out by the Japanese scholar Ishida Mizumaro ([1963] 1976, 2), Gyōnen appears to have deliberately used the Chinese character 妻 instead of 賣 found in a very similar passage in the *Gangō-ji garan engi*. The latter records Zenshin's lay name as 斯末賣 (1c9),⁴⁴ a transcription using Chinese characters which reads /*Shima-me*/, i.e. 'Shima [family] woman/girl'.

To be sure, the old Japanese word *me*, basically meaning 'woman', has a large variety of connotations. When a Chinese character is used to write it, the most usual one is 女 'woman', but other graphemes can also be employed, one of them being 妻.⁴⁵ The usage of the latter character is, however, restricted to instances when the woman in case is married, therefore, meaning 'wife'. It is quite unlikely that a scholar of the breadth and depth of Gyōnen's learning would have 'innocently' used 妻 primarily

information is/are based, which makes it all the more doubtful. (Of course, if one adopts the age of seventeen as presented in the *Gangō-ji garan engi*, there is no need to worry about Zenshin's nubility, but then neither do we face any Vinayic necessity to have her married before her renouncement of lay life.)

One final detail: assuming that marriage would have been possible at a pre-puberty age and Shima had indeed been a 'wife', could she have obtained a divorce? Apparently, yes. According to Confucian-inspired legal provisions (see Articles 26 and 28 of the 'Family Regulations' in the *Yōrō Code of Criminal Laws and Administrative Regulations*, *Ritsuryō*, p. 233-234; see also Suzuki 1991, 86-93), divorce was usually the husband's prerogative, but in real life, especially under the duolocal system and even later in the Heian period (when the custom still continues to be seen in one form or another), the husband's failure to continue to visit his wife (referred to as *yogare* 夜枯れ 'night withering away [of the husband's visits], *yogare* 夜離れ 'night separation', or *tokosari* 床去り 'leaving the [conjugal] bed') meant a de facto termination of the marriage (see Aoki et al. 1992-1994, vol. III, pp. 456-457; Suzuki 1991, 97-98; etc.). One could also conjecture that the Grand Minister of Japan would and could have asked the husband to divorce Shima if he really deemed it necessary to have *her* join the Order. Alternatively, the husband's death would have given Shima the freedom to take the vows without any legal or social worries.

⁴⁴ See also 島賣 *Shima-me* at *ibid.*, 1c12 (interlinear commentary).

⁴⁵ See *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, s.v.

for its phonetic value, i.e. for noting the pronunciation *me* and intending a non-specific sense of ‘woman’.⁴⁶ It is more probable that Gyōnen may have allowed himself a bodhisattvic ‘licence’ (or relied upon an earlier tradition?) and corrected what appeared to him and, for that matter, to any student of Vinaya literature, a clear inconsistency: Zenshin would have been too young for full ordination if she had been only eleven in 584, to wit, at the time of her initiation into novitiate.⁴⁷

Actually, Gyōnen, too, clearly states that the three ‘nuns’ received full ordination in the Kingdom of Paekche. According to the *Risshū kōyō* (T 74. 17b–c), several monastics from the Korean Peninsula were present in Japan around the time when Zenshin and her companions decided to take the tonsure.⁴⁸ Their intention to formally join the Order could not, however, be granted in their land of birth, because, as a Korean envoy-monk 使僧 explains, ‘without the two congregations [of monks and nuns], receiving the nun [ordination] is not possible’ (以無二衆, 故尼受不能. T 74. 17b29–c1).

Therefore, in the Year of the Yang-Earth Monkey [i.e. 588], the three nuns went of the Land of Paekche. In that year, they received the ten precepts [for novice nuns][as well as] the six precepts [for probationary nuns].⁴⁹ In the third month of

⁴⁶ One could also imagine here a case of *aberratio oculi*, either attributable to Gyōnen himself or to an earlier scribe of the *Gangō-ji garan engi* manuscript on which the Master relied. Though not completely impossible, the characters 妻 and 賣 are, however, only remotely similar, and the *aberratio* must be qualified as quite *gravis*!

⁴⁷ This, of course, is the year given by the *Nihon shoki*. Gyōnen does not refer to this source, but its tradition would arguably have been familiar to many of the educated readers of his age.

⁴⁸ Let us note that Gyōnen speaks only of three girls, not five like the *Gangō-ji garan engi* (see above).

⁴⁹ The *Gangō-ji garan engi* mentions only the six precepts (see above).

the following year, the Year of the Yin-Earth Cock [i.e. 589], they took the precepts for fully ordained [nuns].⁵⁰ [And] next year, the Year of the Yang-Wood Dog [i.e. 590], they returned to our country.

(三尼即以此，戊申之年 度百濟國。其年受十戒，六法。明年己酉三月 受具足戒。明年庚戌 即還本朝。T 74. 17c1-3)

Whether the whole account is trustworthy or not remains a controversial issue. Few monastics could vie with Gyōnen in his encyclopaedic knowledge of Buddhist doctrines and history, but in terms of scholastic affiliation, he basically followed Kegon 華嚴宗 and Vinaya 律宗 agendas. By the time when he wrote the *Risshū kōyō* in 1306, he had already become the elder 長老 in charge of the ordination platform 戒壇院 of the Tōdai Monastery 東大寺 in Nara 奈良.⁵¹ Actually, the main purport of the text itself is to prove the orthodoxy of the Japanese Vinaya tradition.⁵² Although, on the whole, it is a valuable source, one cannot deny a certain degree of ‘retouching’ the large picture. A modest, non-orthodox dawn of the Japanese Saṅgha was not enough, even if this meant immense dedication and effort on the part of three young girls and those who supported them. The rays of the dawn had to be in line with all the details of the Vinaya, and Gyōnen (as well as the authors of texts like the *Gangō-ji garan engi*) apparently tried to make this alignment smooth through various strategies.

In the end, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion as to the monastic status gained by Zenshin and her companions as well as to whether they contributed, together with other monastics, to the

⁵⁰ See notes 18 and 40 above.

⁵¹ On the ordination platform, see Section IV below.

⁵² See Ono ed. 1964, vol. 11, pp. 208-209.

establishment of a legitimate lineage of nuns on Japanese soil. Their achievement as the first Japanese Buddhist monastics, whatever this may have meant in Vinaya terms, remains, however, a landmark event which needs no further embellishments.⁵³

III Growing 'Out of Wedlock'?

The legitimacy of the monastic lineage(s) will actually be *the* question which continues to haunt us throughout most of the period we cover here. And it also seems to have haunted many of the players involved in the actual events. The importance of legitimacy and orthodoxy was a matter which gradually came to captivate the minds and hearts of ever larger sections of the Japanese clergy during the 7th and 8th centuries. This does not mean that Buddhist institutions came to a halt. Regardless of the legitimacy of its 'ordinations', the Japanese Saṅgha actually kept on expanding at a rapid pace. A census carried out in 624 reveals that no less than 46 Buddhist temples had already been established. The number of 'monks' is recorded to have risen to 816 and that of 'nuns' to 569 (*Nihon shoki*, vol. II, pp. 210-211). Obviously, the strong pro-Buddhist policy forged ahead by Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574-622) had borne fruit. However, the flourishing of a Saṅgha sponsored by the Court and a few powerful aristocratic clans had its pitfalls. Especially in a cultural milieu not fully familiar with the Buddhist thought and institutions, recognition and support given by the Court and nobility may easily trigger a general misconception of orthodoxy—a misconception which leads to ignoring or treating lightly the importance of Vinaya-sanctioned lineages.

⁵³ Let us, however, remember that in all likelihood, the three girls were not purely ethnic Japanese, as their families seem to have been of Chinese and Korean origins. However, seen against the historical background of the epoch, this is probably less important, and in socio-cultural terms, they can be regarded as Japanese.

The paucity of written materials prevents us from drawing definitive conclusions concerning the existence of long-lasting lineage(s) of fully ordained monks and nuns in this age. As far as I am aware of, there are no sources supporting their existence, though, to be fair, there is no compelling evidence to rule them out either. It is largely a matter of conjecture, but it seems more plausible to suppose that the earliest ordinations may have not based upon orthodox lineages, i.e. not performed by quorums *entirely* consisting of nuns and monks themselves ordained according to proper Vinaya provisions. A local ad-hoc lineage may have been initiated by Zenshin and her two companions as early as the end of the 6th century.⁵⁴ Likewise, other lineages may have been begun by non-orthodox ‘quorums’ sometime during the 7th century. Or they may have commenced as a result of one or more acts of self-ordination, a peculiar formula of joining the Order which was, as we shall see below, accepted by at least a part of the clergy as a legitimate option.

No matter how a lineage began, once accepted by the Court and government as such, it gained official recognition. Even if aware of the non-

⁵⁴ But if we accept the *Gangō-ji garan engi* account, then the number of five nuns is no longer a problem. Generally, most Vinaya traditions stipulate that in remote regions, defined as those areas outside the Central Lands [of India] (Skt. *Madhyadeśa*; Ch. 中國 *Zhongguo*), i.e. usually referring to the Upper and Middle reaches of the Ganges, the quorum needed for ordinations becomes five monks (as well as five nuns for *bhikṣuṇīs*) instead of ten (see, for instance, the *Fourfold Vinaya*: 是中五人僧者在中國, 除受大戒, 出罪, 餘一切如法羯磨應作。T 22. 886a25-26). The Chinese Buddhists were clearly aware of this (e. g. 若有中國十人, 邊地五人, 如法受戒。(T 40. 5c8-9), in Daoxuan’s *Sifen lü shan fan bu que xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔), as most probably were the Korean and Japanese scholar-monks.

Once again, however, we must stress that the *Gangō-ji garan engi* account is not the most reliable witness. Furthermore, even if this was the case, there is no evidence that such a legitimate lineage continued. Later events, especially in the 8th century, would rather show that nuns did not (and actually could not?) make any claim at having inherited such a lineage.

orthodoxy of the practice, the state authorities must have accepted it as a necessary means to implement their plans to control a unified and centralised Saṅgha. It is unclear whether this is how things actually happened, but if this is a scenario close to reality, we may further surmise that such ordinations were not condoned indiscriminately. Once the number necessary for a regular quorum was secured, no matter how unorthodox the ordination of its own members may have been, future ordinations could be carried out according to proper Vinaya regulations. Such a lineage may have been, so to speak, a child born out of the wedlock of state-sponsored legitimacy and non-orthodox monastic procedures. But it was a child who would steadily, even vigorously, grow for more than one and a half centuries as far as 'nuns' were concerned and even longer for 'monks'. It must be stressed, however, that this remains a highly conjectural scenario.

Let us now have a look at some of the main facts. As the *bhikṣuṇī* history is closely entwined with that of the monks, a few words on the *bhikṣu* ordinations are also necessary. This process is better documented, though many details remain open to questions and further scrutiny. What is known with certainty is that in 754 the Chinese master Jianzhen (Jp. Ganjin) 鑑真 (688-763) and a group of his disciples established an orthodox lineage of fully ordained monks.⁵⁵ Once again, we must remember, this does not mean that the preceding century had witnessed a period of decline in the number and institutions of the Japanese Saṅgha. On the contrary, the Buddhist Order had continued to grow and become increasingly integrated into the state apparatus.

Amongst the decrees promulgated during the Taika 大化 Reform, a

⁵⁵ There is an impressive literature on Jianzhen and his impact on Japanese Buddhism. A brilliant historical analysis is found in Sakuma 1983, 242-262. Ishida [1963] 1976, 55-103, too, offers an excellent discussion of Jianzhen, including many of the doctrinal aspects of his Vinaya transmission.

long series of political actions initiated in 645 in order to create a centralised Japanese state, we find an *Edict concerning Monks and Nuns* 僧尼令. This act, first issued in 702 and containing 27 articles, sets the general framework for the organisational and penal control of monastics.⁵⁶ Its main source was the *Regulations for Taoist and Buddhist Clergy* 道僧格, a Chinese code of legal provisions compiled in its final form and issued in 637.⁵⁷ Influences from other Chinese legal codes are also discernable, and it appears that the Vinaya literature was likewise consulted to some extent.

Quite a few of the articles are actually monastic prohibitions made into legal provisions and entailing penal punishment.⁵⁸ For instance, according to Article Seven of the *Edict*, 'if a monk or nun partakes of liquor, meat, or the five pungent vegetables [i.e. onions, leeks, scallions, garlic, and chives],⁵⁹ [he or she must serve] 30 days of forced labour' (凡僧尼飲酒, 食六, 服五辛者, 卅日苦使。 *Ritsuryō*, p. 218)—a law which, by the way, might bring substantial state revenues if still enforced in modern-day Japan ...⁶⁰ This looks more or less like government-enforced Vinaya and shows that the Saṅgha had become incorporated into the official institutions of the country. But this integration into the state apparatus also meant the loss of the monastic rights to exercise full control over its own organisation and

⁵⁶ The extant text of the edict represents the emended version dating to 718 (see Ishida [1963] 1976, 14).

⁵⁷ On this code, see Kamata 1994, 189–197 (also containing a bibliography of the main Japanese studies on the subject, p. 203). The date of its compilation and promulgation are far from certain (see Kamata 1994, 190). On the *Dao seng ge* in the context of the Tang political history, see Weinstein 1978, 17–22.

⁵⁸ An excellent analysis of the sources of the *Edict* is found in Ishida [1963] 1976, 14–24.

⁵⁹ On the five pungent or alliaceous vegetables in Vinaya literature as well as in Chan 禪 monastic codes, see Yifa 2002, 55–56. The *Brahmā's Net Sutra* prohibits them to all those who take the bodhisattva vows (see Ishida [1971] 2002, 141–142).

⁶⁰ On the parallels in Vinaya literature and legal codes, see Ishida [1963] 1976, 16, and *Ritsuryō* 543–544.

regulations.

The state jurisdiction over the Saṅgha did not stop here. A series of further measures led to the creation of a framework of legislative and bureaucratic control on the ordination procedure as well as number of subjects (i.e. tax-payers!) joining the ranks of the Holy Order. The central government came thus to decide the number of officially recognised monastics. This first took the form of state-sponsored ‘extraordinary ordinations’ (臨時度 *rinji-do*) and later led to setting quotas of yearly ordinands (年分度者 *nenbun dosha*),⁶¹ The first measures of the kind were taken as early as 696, but the full-fledged system would come to completion in 798, after a century of modifications and revisions. The regulations concerning the conditions and exams for ordination eligibility were promulgated in 734. The eligibility was based on the applicants’ successful completion of three years of novitiate, called ‘pure practice’ 淨行, and the results of exams testing the ability to chant by heart a part of the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*, Ch. 妙法蓮華經) or the *Scripture of the Golden Light* (Skt. *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*, Ch. 金光明最勝王經).⁶²

In a typical procedure, successful candidates would have the applications screened by officials and high-ranking monks. Those allowed to take the tonsure were first issued an ‘ordination [-eligibility] certificate’ (度牒 *dochō*), which actually represented a governmental act (公驗 *kugen*). After the ordination proper, the postulants were issued a ‘precept certificate’ (戒牒 *kaichō*), sealed and signed by the quorum of ten masters 十師 who had administered the precepts (具足戒 *gusoku-kai*). The bearer of a ‘precept certificate’ would be recognised as an officially ordained monk or nun (官僧尼 *kansōni*) and was permitted to take residence in state-sponsored monasteries (國分寺 *kokubun-ji*) or convents (國分尼寺

⁶¹ More on the system of yearly ordinations will be said in Section V below.

⁶² See Ushiyama 1990, 14–15.

kokubun niiji).⁶³

It seems that the ordination ceremony itself followed the *Fourfold Vinaya*.⁶⁴ But this does not automatically mean that those conducting ordinations before Jianzhen's arrival to Japan were themselves ordained according to a legitimate lineage. Once again, it must be stressed that Japanese novices sent by the Court to Korea or China may have been ordained there or monks from the Continent may found their way to Japan in numbers large enough to provide quorums required for full ordinations.⁶⁵

⁶³ Many of the bureaucratic measures and institutions actually had parallels in China, which basically was the source and model of Japan's efforts to create a central and efficient state. For the state control of Buddhism in Tang China, see Kamata 1994, 145ff., as well as Weinstein 1987 (the best monograph in English dedicated to this subject as well as a marvellous piece of historical writing in general).

Sakuma 1983, 1-34, offers an excellent survey and discussion of the official monks and nuns, state regulations concerning ordination, monastic hierarchies, etc. The problem of nuns and nunneries in Nara Period is discussed in Ikehara 1980, 547-566. The history of the famous Hokke-ji, established during the same period, is traced from its origins to modern times in Ikeda 1986 (some details will also be presented below). See also Ushiyama 1990, 14-19; Groner 2002, 66-67; Furuta Shōkin et al. eds. 1988, s.v. 得度, 度牒; etc.

Let us also add that not state-sponsored ordinations did not encompass monks 僧 and nuns 尼 only. Novices (沙彌 and 沙彌尼) also appear amongst the titles used in official documents of the kind (see Groner 2002, 67).

⁶⁴ See Groner 2002, 67.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, the large delegation of monastics dispatched by Emperor Kōtoku 孝德天皇 to China in 648 (*Nihon shoki*, vol. II, 318-319). If assume that all of them had been ordained in Chinese monasteries, then the quorum would have been available. The *Chronicles of Japan* does not say, however, anything to this effect. The *Nihon shoki* also contains evidence of many foreign monastics, mainly from the Korea Peninsula, visiting or residing in Japan. But again, no mention is made of such monks and nuns being gathered in quorums necessary for establishing orthodox lineages of ordinations. We also remember that the *Gangō-ji garan engi* and the *Risshū kōyō* mention six monks from the Korean Peninsula at the time when Zenshin and her companions were novices (see Section II above), but in this case, too, there is

Such isolated instances may have indeed existed, but to the best of my knowledge, there is no clear testimony of a *continuous* lineage. What we actually witness within the Japanese Saṅgha of this period is a growing awareness of the fact that monastic institutions, even when sponsored by the state and aristocracy, need to be based on strict Vinaya rules *as well as* on legitimate lineages.

Already in the second half of the 7th century, the *Fourfold Vinaya* began to be studied in earnest by Japanese monks. This came as a natural reflection of the fact that the text had attained the status of main Vinaya authority in China.⁶⁶ We see a number of scholar-monks sent to study Buddhism in China also writing commentaries on this text or on the exegetical literature of the Vinaya school 律宗. The first one appears to have been Dōkō 道光 (d. 694) who authored the *E Shibun ritsu shō sen rokumon* 依四分律抄撰錄文 and also brought to Japan the *Sifen lü xingshi*

no record of them being actively involved in ordinations.

⁶⁶ By the 7th century, the *Fourfold Vinaya*, originally the monastic code of the Dharmaguptaka school, had become the main Vinaya authority in China. On its history in the larger context of the development of the Vinaya school, see Kamata 1999, 695ff. On a traditional account on the importance of the *Fourfold Vinaya*, see Gyōnen's *Hasshū kōyō*, pp. 134-135.

In its entirety, the *Fourfold Vinaya* survives only in Chinese rendering, i.e. *Si fen lü* 四分律 (T No. 1428, *Taishō Canon*, vol. 22, pp. 567ff.), in 60 scrolls 六十卷, translated by Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 between 410 and 412. As far as I know no extant manuscripts in Sanskrit or any other Indic language exist for the entire text (see Yuyama 1979; Nakamura [1980] 1989; Prebish 1994). Recently, the discovery of some Sanskrit fragments has been reported (see Chung and Wille 1997). The Chinese translation of the text is discussed in Hirakawa 1999-2000, vol. 1, pp. 138-142. In English, we owe to Ann Heirman (2002) a remarkable study on this text, accompanied by a partial translation.

It is noteworthy that although throughout the history of Japanese Buddhism, the *Fourfold Vinaya* was the most widely used of all the Śrāvakayānika Vinayas, in the Edo period we witness a revival of the interest in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. For this latter development, see the very stimulating contribution of Clarke (2006).

chao 四分律行事抄, a fundamental text by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667). The trend continued, and by the middle of the 8th century we find no less than fifteen commentaries on the *Fourfold Vinaya* written by Japanese monks.⁶⁷

This scholarly interest must have triggered a growing awareness that a valid ordination can be conferred only by a quorum of monastics who have *themselves* been ordained in conformity with all the provisions of the Vinaya literature. By the middle of the 8th century, the need to establish an orthodox lineage was felt more than ever, and this led to the decision to import it from China. If one or more legitimate lineages of Japanese *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* had existed, such a need would have been quite superfluous. Its absence as well as the use (or rather abuse?) of ordination alternatives, quite controversial to many of the Vinaya traditionalists, explains why such a decision received an enthusiastic support from large sections of the clergy and eventually from the Court itself.

IV Traditionalists versus Pragmatists⁶⁸

This alternative, which further complicated the picture, stemmed from the fact that quite a few Japanese monastics, following in the footsteps of the Chinese tradition, did not regard the *Fourfold Vinaya* as the only source of scriptural legitimacy in matters of ordination. In a climate of increased commitment to Mahāyāna ideals, at least two other texts came to command great, sometimes even exclusive, respect. One was the *Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論 or *The Foundations [Stages] of Spiritual Practice*, especially its Book XV titled the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* 菩薩地 or *The Foundations of the Bodhisattva[s Path]*.⁶⁹ The other was the *Fan wang jing*

⁶⁷ See Ishida [1963] 1976, 25–31.

⁶⁸ For more details on the history of the institutions and ordinations for nuns during the Nara and Heian periods, the reader is referred to Paul Groner's outstanding study (2002).

(Jp. *Bon mō kyō*) 梵網經 or *The Brahmā's Net Sutra*.⁷⁰ These two scriptures affected the very definition of the concept of ordination. Directly or indirectly, they opened the possibility for so-called 'private ordinations' (Jp. 私度 *shido*, 自度 *jido*, or 度 *do*) and 'self-ordinations' (Jp. 自誓受戒 *jisei jukai*, literally, 'receiving the precepts by taking vows by oneself'). The former were ceremonies in which the ordinand received the precepts directly from a teacher in a monastic or sometimes even lay environment. More often than not, these were the Bodhisattva precepts 菩薩戒 administered according to *The Brahmā's Net Sutra*. Privately ordained devotees were usually referred to as *shami* (沙彌 = *śrāmaṇera*) or *shamini* (沙彌尼 = *śrāmaṇerikā*), i.e. 'novices'.⁷¹

'Self-ordinations' could similarly be public or private acts. The latter necessitated no teacher or Saṅgha members to witness the 'ordination'. In such *sui generis* rituals, the would-be 'monk' or 'nun' would solemnly declare his or her intention to observe (a certain type of) Buddhist discipline, more often than not, the Bodhisattva precepts. Outwardly, this was usually marked by shaving one's head and donning the robes.⁷² Though

⁶⁹ The word °*bhūmi* in the title of the two works can mean and was traditionally construed as 'foundation' as well as 'stage' or 'level' (see Deleanu 2010 forthcoming, note 60). See below for more details about the texts.

⁷⁰ The text (T No 1484) presents itself as a sutra and is traditionally considered to have been translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 at the beginning of the 5th century. Most Buddhist scholars nowadays regard it as an apocryphal scripture compiled in China in the 5th century, though it makes uses of materials from Indian sources (see Ishida [1971] 2002, 11-20). (It thus belong to a sizeable category of Buddhist texts which could be called Sino-Indian or Sino-Serindian hybrid scriptures.) *The Brahmā's Net Sutra* would later become the sole source of authority for ordination in the Tendai school 天台宗. More on the latter development will be said below.

⁷¹ See Groner 2002, 67.

⁷² Sometimes even shaving one's head and donning the Buddhist robes were not considered essential.

usually not accepted by state authorities as proper monastics, privately self-ordained persons came, nonetheless, to be socially regarded as religious figures.

This also came to be reflected in the semantic fate of the Japanese word *ama* 尼,⁷³ conventionally rendered as ‘nun’. The term came to encompass a wide range of meanings in the Japanese society: from a pious woman leading a virtuous life and practising her faith in a household environment to a fully ordained *bhikṣuṇī*.⁷⁴ The former type, often referred to (almost oxymoronically) as a ‘home nun’ (家の尼 *ie no ama*),⁷⁵ actually

⁷³ No doubt, the etymology of the word is Indic. It seems to reflect a Middle-Indic term like **amma* (cf. Pali *ammā*, voc. *amma*), equivalent of the Sanskrit *ambā*. The pronunciation *ama* for the Chinese character 尼 is old and most probably comes from the Korean Peninsula via China and Central Asia. The fact that the character 尼 was pronounced *ama* is attested in a number of old documents. It was, no doubt, read so in the Heian period, and probably goes back one or two centuries earlier. The Maeda Manuscript of the *Nihon shoki*, which notes the pronunciation as *ama*, dates to the latter half of the Heian period (see note 6 above), but its readings most likely reflect an earlier tradition. The word あま (i.e. in *hiragana* which leaves no doubt as to the pronunciation) is also seen literary works such as the *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語, *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, etc. written in the mid-Heian period (see *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, s.v.).

The Japanese scholar-monk Chinkai 珍海 (1091–1152) is clearly aware of the Indian etymology of the word. In the *Bodai shin shū* 菩提心集, he writes: ‘In India, they call [a nun] *ama* 阿摩; in China, they call [her] “mother” 母 [Chinkai uses here the Chinese character]; here [i.e. in Japan], [we] call [her] “mother” はは [now he employs *hiragana*]. Furthermore, one calls a *bhikṣuṇī* “mother” out of respect, just like one respectfully calls a woman “elder sister” (天竺には《阿摩》といふ。唐には《母》といふ。此には《はは》といふ。然も比丘尼を敬ひて《はは》といふ。女を敬ふには《姉》といふがごとし。 *Jōdoshū zenshū* 15. 25b–26a).

⁷⁴ On these types of ordination, see Groner 2002, 66–70; Furuta et al., eds. 1988; etc.

⁷⁵ See Groner 2002, 90. The term ‘home nun’ (家の尼 *ie no ama*) is also found in the *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語. For example, Tale 27 of Scroll XXIV (vol. IV, pp. 317–31), is titled *Ōe no Asatsuna no ihe no ama* 大江朝綱家尼 or *The Home Nun of the House of Ōe no Asatsuna* (my underlining). The character giving the name of the

became an increasingly frequent pattern of religiosity during the Heian 平安 period (794–1185/1192).⁷⁶

More importantly, an act of self-ordination could also take place in a monastic environment. This actually seems to have gained clear ecclesiastical acceptance in the first half of the 8th century and may also have been at the origin of one or more lineages of ordination before Jianzhen's arrival.⁷⁷ Such monastic self-ordinations appear to have been considered a valid, or at least acceptable, formula especially when no legitimate lineage was readily available. Once the lineage was thus established, the standard Vinaya procedure could be implemented. This pattern of 'self-ordination' was probably used only on a limited scale in the monastic environment, but its presence seems undeniable. It is actually the existence of such a tradition, coupled with the growing awareness of the need of an indubitably legitimate lineage of ordinations, that would precipitate the events around middle of the 8th century when Master Jianzhen was invited to Japan.⁷⁸ And by this time, not only a handful of

story is a former servant who used to do needlework and washing (物張 *monohari*) for the late Ōe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱 (886–957), a noble man famed for his knowledge of Chinese learning 漢學, calligraphy, poetry, etc. Nothing is said of her 'ordination', but the impression one gets from the tale is that this is a retired woman who has chosen or had no other alternative but to continue to live in the remains of her former master's house.

⁷⁶ The indecision as to the end of the period comes from the date when Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–1199), the founder of the Kamakura military government 鎌倉幕府, came to assume actual control over the state. Though nowadays 1185 appears to be the more widely favoured date, 1192, the year when Minamoto no Yoritomo was officially appointed by the Emperor as *shōgun* 將軍, is still accepted amongst historians.

⁷⁷ Another alternative could have been receiving the precepts from a monk or nun ordained on the Continent or from a monastic of Korean or Chinese origin in a private ordination ceremony.

⁷⁸ Jianzhen (Jp. Ganjin) has been an iconic figure in the history of Japanese

Buddhist scholars but also the central government started to show support for the introduction of such a lineage.

The efforts and dedication of Jianzhen and his disciples would come as a crucial event finally conferring full legitimacy to the Japanese Saṅgha. Even if this was not the first instance of an orthodox lineage on Japanese soil, it surely was the most widely-known and publicised of all attempts, and one having lasting effects. True, it does not mark the birth of the Buddhist establishment in Japan, but it does constitute its clear birth certificate, belated as it may be. Odd as it may sound, it brought legitimacy not to an incipient tradition but to already flourishing monastic institutions.

Even an ecclesiastical historiographer as Gyōnen, more often than not quite eager to stress the legitimacy of the Japanese Saṅgha, openly admits this. After giving an account of Zenshin and the beginnings of the monastic tradition in the Land of the Rising Sun, Gyōnen says:

After that, [the number of] monks and nuns gradually increased filling the [entire] country. Nonetheless, [since] [the necessary] conditions [could] not [be] satisfied completely, no ordinations could be performed.

The monks who came from abroad to this land were all [properly ordained] *bhikṣus* in the [ir own] countries. However, in this country, they could not bestow the precepts

Buddhism and culture. The scholar-monk was himself trained and became an authority in the Vinaya school. Having been invited to the Land of the Rising Sun by two Japanese monastics, Yōei 榮叡 and Fushō 普照, Jianzhen attempted the voyage no less than five times. After twelve years of frustration and failures, he finally reached Japan, but his determination had already taken a heavy toll on the Master's health. By this time, he was a blind man. This, however, did not deter him from conducting ordinations and spreading the teachings and path of Buddhism for another nine years in Japan (on Jianzhen, see Ishida 1958; Andō 1989; etc.). See also note 82 below.

for full ordination.

(厥後僧尼 漸多滿國。然而諸緣不具，無行受戒。他國來朝之僧 皆彼國比丘僧。但於此國 不能授具。 *Risshū kōyō*, T 74. 17c9-11)⁷⁹

Gyōnen concludes that in more than two hundred years from the time of Emperor Kinmei 欽明天皇 (r. 539-571) to the reign of Empress Kōken 孝謙天皇 (r. 749-758), ‘[proper] Vinaya [ordinations] had not been transmitted to this country’ (此國戒律未傳. T 74. 17c21).⁸⁰ As to the methods used during these two centuries for admitting new members into the Order, the scholar-monk mentions receiving the precepts from other(s) 從他受 and self-ordinations 自誓受 (T 74. 17c12-14).⁸¹ The former does not seem to refer to orthodox ordinations, and obviously neither do the latter. In Gyōnen’s eyes, the first orthodox Vinaya-stipulated ordinations and lineage had doubtless been introduced by Jianzhen and his disciples.⁸²

The practice of self-ordinations actually turned out to be a thorny issue between the members of the old Japanese Saṅgha and the newly arrived

⁷⁹ On Gyōnen and this text, see Section II above.

⁸⁰ According to the *Nihon shoki* (vol. II, 100-103), it was in the 13th year of Emperor Kinmei’s reign, i.e. 552, that Buddhism in the form of images, scriptures, etc. sent by the king of Paekche was introduced to Japan. This is the most wide-spread theory, but not the only one (see Hayami [1986] 2005, 16-27.)

⁸¹ The precepts received from other(s) appear to have been the ‘three categories [of pure precepts]’ 三聚, thus being based on the *Yogācārabhūmi* tradition. As for the self-ordinations, Gyōnen refers to the *Sutra on Divining and Discerning Good and Bad Karma* (see below). In this context, he also mentions the ‘method of inclusive receiving [of the precepts]’ 菩薩通受方軌 (T 74. 17c12-14). On all these methods, see below.

⁸² In the *Risshū kōyō*, Gyōnen gives a detailed account of Jianzhen’s activities as well as the events leading to them (T 74. 17ff.). In his famous *Hasshū kōyō* (pp. 140-141), too, the scholar-monk starts his history of the transmission of the Vinaya tradition with Jianzhen.

Chinese monastics. Situo 思託 (Jp. Shitaku), one of Jianzhen's leading pupils who accompanied his master to the Land of the Rising Sun, expresses this situation straightforwardly when describing the Japanese monastics as being 'without [properly received?] precepts and not knowing the origins [i.e. lineage] of the transmission of the precepts' (無戒, 不知傳戒來由. *Nihon kōsō den yōmon shō* 日本高僧傳要文抄; in *Bukkyō zensho* Vol. 101, p. 69a). Furthermore, Situo states that Japanese monks like Shichū 志忠, Reifuku 靈福, and Kenkyō 賢璟 (705–793) tried to defend the legitimacy of self-ordinations by making appeal to the *Sutra on Divining and Discerning Good and Bad Karma* 占察善惡業報經 (Ch. *Zhan cha shan e ye bao jing*, Jp. *Sen zatsu aku gō hō kyō*).⁸³ This is how Situo describes the dispute with the partisans of self-ordinations:

Amongst these, Shichū, Reifuku, and Kenkyō cited the *Zhan cha jing*, [saying that] self-ordinations are permitted. [I, Situo] adducing the *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*, Scroll LIII, rebuked [them] with the following words: '[In the case of] various [Bodhisattva] precepts, it is permissible to receive them by taking the vows by oneself. [However,] as far as the Śrāvaka[yāna] moral restraint is concerned,⁸⁴ it

⁸³ The scripture is included in the *Taishō Canon* (T No. 839, vol. 17). The title is mainly known in its abridged form, i.e. (Ch.) *Zhan cha jing*, (Jp.) *Sen zatsu kyō* which is also used in the quotation below.

⁸⁴ Ch. 律儀 is most probably used here and in many other instances as a binome meaning 'moral restraint' and basically referring to the Buddhist precepts, whether taken by monastics or lay followers. In Buddhist translations, it frequently renders Skt. *saṃvara* or 'restraint', a term often, though not always, referring to the moral restraint which the precepts should have on one's mind, words, and bodily acts. Ch. 律儀 is certainly used as a rendering for *saṃvara* in Xuanzang's translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論. In the *Śrāvakahūmi* 聲聞地, for instance, we see it used both for moral restraint (*śīlasaṃvara*, rendered as 戒律儀)(*Śrāvakahūmi*, 62ff.) and

does not allow receiving [precepts] through [an act of] taking the vows by oneself. If [taking the precepts by] oneself were allowed, such moral restraint would have no [consistent and/or common] model whatsoever.⁸⁵ Shichū, Kenkyō, and the others shut their mouths, being un[able] to give a reply. They all [just] took their robes and alms bowls [as required by the ordination ceremony] and received the precepts [from Jianzhen and his disciples].

(其中志忠，靈福，賢璟引『占察經』，許自誓受戒。便將『瑜伽論·決擇分』五十三卷詰云：“諸戒容自誓受，唯聲聞律儀不容自誓受。若容自者，如是律儀都無軌範。”志忠，賢璟等杜口，無對，備以衣鉢受戒。Nihon kōsō den yōmon shō; in *Bukkyō zensho* Vol. 101, p. 69a)

Does the *Sutra on Divining and Discerning Good and Bad Karma* allow self-ordinations when a precept-master and/or the quorum of monks are not available, as argued by the Japanese opponents? Apparently it does:

Furthermore, in future ages, [there will be] various sentient beings [who] will seek to go forth [or] have already gone forth. If they are unable to obtain [i.e. meet with the chance

restraint of senses (*indriyasamvara* = 根律儀) (ibid., 100ff). In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* 菩薩地, *samvara* = 律儀 is mainly used in the sense of moral restraint (e. g. BoBh-W 42, 22-23; 180, 11-12; see also *samvaraśīla* in the passages cited below). Situo, who explicitly refers to the *Yogācārabhūmi* here, must have used the word in a similar sense, in our context, more precisely for the precepts which the Vinaya literature clearly prescribes for monastics. (For the importance of *samvara* in Vinaya theory and practice, especially in Guṇaprabha's interpretation, see Nakagawa 2009.)

Another difficulty of the phrase 唯聲聞律儀 is presented by 唯 which I take as a topicaliser of the subject, here 聲聞律儀 (on this usage of 唯, see Duan 1992, 919).

⁸⁵ See the *Yogācārabhūmi* quotation below.

of] a good precept-master and a pure assembly of monks, and their minds doubt and worry whether they can [ever] receive the precepts according to the Dharma, then they can just practise and generate the unsurpassed resolve to [attain] Awakening [*bodhicitta*], and cleanse their bodily, verbal, and mental [acts]. Those who have not gone forth yet should shave their heads, don the robes, and take the vows as [explained] above. Taking the vows by oneself and receiving the three categories of precepts of the Bodhisattva moral restraint is called the complete acquiring of the *prātimokṣa* [i.e. monastic precepts]. The holy names of those who go forth [in this manner] are [to be known as] *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*.

(復次未來世 諸衆生等，欲求出家 及已出家。若不能得 善好戒師 及清淨僧衆，其心疑惑 不得如法 受於禁戒者，但能學發 無上道心，亦令 身口意 得清淨已。其未出家者 應當剃髮 被服法衣 如上立願。自誓 而受 菩薩律儀 三種戒聚，則名具獲 波羅提木叉。出家之戒名 爲比丘 比丘尼。T 17. 904c11-18)

The main problem, however, is that the sutra appears to be an apocryphal scripture compiled in China. And its spurious nature had already been pointed out in its own native land, which made its authority a matter of debate in ecclesiastical circles.⁸⁶ Situo most probably knew about this, but he did not make the scripture itself the target of his attack. Instead, he chose to refute his Japanese opponents by making appeal to an indisputable authority, i.e. the *Yogācārabhūmi*. This encyclopaedic treatise chiefly dedicated to the exposition of the doctrines, psychology, and praxis

⁸⁶ See Ikehira 2000; Furuta et al., eds. 1988, s.v.

of Buddhist spiritual cultivation also played a major role in the history of morality and monastic codes throughout Asia.⁸⁷ Its teachings would affect various traditions in different ways, and their interpretation would often be open to debate. However, its imprint on the development of monastic institutions is undeniable. As we shall see below, later at the beginning of the Japanese Middle Ages, it would also influence the revival of the ordination lineages of monks, in a direct way, as well as of nuns, in an indirect manner.

The *Yogācārabhūmi* also speaks of three categories of precepts, but its definition and, more importantly, its interpretation appear rather different from the *Sutra on Divining and Discerning Good and Bad Karma*. These are first defined in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* 菩薩地, Book XV of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, in connection to the so-called 'entire [set of] Bodhisattva precepts' (Skt. *bodhisattvasya sarvaśīlam*; Ch. 菩薩一切戒):

To sum up, [moral] precepts are threefold: [1] restraining precepts, [2] precepts comprising wholesome factors, and [3] precepts [consisting] in acts for the benefit of all [sentient beings].

(Sanskrit original: *śīlam samāsatas trividham: samvaraśīlam kuśaladharmasamgrāhakaṃ śīlam sattvārthakriyāśīlam ca*.

BoBh-W 138, 23-24; BoBh-D 96, 8-9;

Xuanzang's Chinese translation: 略說三種：一、律儀戒；二、攝善法戒；三、饒益有情戒。T 30.511a15)

The text then proceeds to describe each of the three categories:

⁸⁷ The influence of the *Yogācārabhūmi* in East Asia is well-known. A part of this history is also touched upon in the present essay. One should not forget, however, that the text also played an important role in the history of the Mahāyāna monastic morality in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (see Fujita 2009).

[1] The Bodhisattva's restraining precepts refer to the undertaking of moral restraint [according to the Śrāvākayāna] *prātimokṣa* [i.e. precepts as prescribed for each] of the seven assemblies.⁸⁸

(Skt.: *tatra saṃvaraśīlaṃ bodhisattvasya yat saptaṅgaikāyikam prātimokṣasaṃvarasamādānam*. BoBh-W 138, 24-25; BoBh-D 96, 10-11; Ch.: 律儀戒者：謂諸菩薩所受七衆別解脫律儀。T 30. 511a16)⁸⁹

[2] The precepts comprising wholesome factors refer to the [fact that] after undertaking the restraining precepts, the bodhisattva accumulates wholesome [factors] for [the attainment of] the Great Awakening through bodily, verbal, and mental [acts].⁹⁰

(Skt.: *tatra kuśaladharmasaṃgrāhakaṃ śīlaṃ yat kimcid bodhisattvaḥ śīlasaṃvarasamādānād ūrdhvaṃ mahābodhāya kuśalam ācīnoti kāyena vācā manasā*⁹¹. BoBh-W 139, 1-3; BoBh-D 96, 13-14;

Ch.: 攝善法戒者：謂諸菩薩受律儀戒後，所有一切爲大菩提，由身語意積集諸善。T30 511a21-22)

⁸⁸ That is, monks, nuns, novice monks, probationary nuns, novice nuns, lay male followers, and lay female followers (see Section I above).

⁸⁹ In the *Śrāvākabhūmi* (62, 18-19), Book XIII of the same *Yogācārabhūmi*, one of the explanations given for *śīlasaṃvara* is that of *prātimokṣasaṃvara* or the set of moral precepts to be observed by each of the seven assemblies of Buddhist followers (*saptaṅgaikāyikam śīlaṃ*).

⁹⁰ This is pan-Buddhist classification of human acts. For this taxonomy in Vinaya literature, see Shōno 2009.

⁹¹ BoBh-W omits *manasā*.

[3] What are the Bodhisattva's precepts [consisting] in acts for the benefit of all [sentient beings]? It should be known that briefly [speaking], they represent the eleven aspects [of altruistic behaviour].⁹²

(Skt.: *tatra katamad bodhisattvasya sattvānugrāhakaṃ śīlam? tat samāsata ekādaś' akāraṃ veditavyam*. BoBh-W 140, 4–5; BoBh-D 97, 9–10;

Ch.: 云何菩薩饒益有情戒? 當知此戒略有十一相。T 30. 511b13)⁹³

The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* does not include any concrete provisions as to how these precepts relate to each other or how the ordination of a would-be Bodhisattva should be conducted. The most plausible interpretation is, I believe, to assume that a devoted Mahāyāna practitioner must first be ordained as a traditional *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* and then should also take the Bodhisattva vows. This is in line with the basic stance of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, i.e. espousing Mahāyāna ideals and yet maintaining an important dose of Śrāvakayāna practices and doctrines. In different manners and to various extents, the same attitude can be said to underlie more or less the whole of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. This inclusivistic attitude appears to be also reflected in its concept of threefold precepts.⁹⁴

One cannot, however, rule out the semantic possibility of construing the passage in different way, whether or not in tune with the original intentions of the author(s) of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Such a reading (or

⁹² These eleven aspects are listed in the passage immediately following our citation, and include such acts as affectionate talk, charitable actions, etc.

⁹³ These three categories of precepts are traditionally explained as 'the gate to stopping the evil' 止惡門, 'the gate to cultivating the good' 修善門, and 'the gate to promoting the good' 勸善門 respectively.

⁹⁴ For a discussion on the history of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, see Deleanu 2006, 147ff.

mis-reading?) would imply that since the 'entire set of Bodhisattva precepts' includes the traditional Śrāvakayāna Vinaya, taking the Bodhisattva precepts *alone* is sufficient to ensure a status identical or at least equal to that of a fully ordained monastic. And this is precisely how the passage seems to have been interpreted by some sections of the Japanese clergy.

The authors of the later portions of the *Yogācārabhūmi* itself, probably aware of such a hermeneutical danger, appear intent to straighten out this possible source of confusion. A passage in the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*,⁹⁵ which Situo most likely had in mind when rebuking his opponents,⁹⁶ states the following:

One [may] receive [the precepts of] moral restraint from other [ordained monastics][and at the same time] by [committing] oneself [to them].⁹⁷ Or one [may] merely

⁹⁵ The *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* is the auto-commentarial section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, which glosses and elaborates upon its previous Books. Historically, much of it seems to be later than most of the other parts of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. It most probably assumed its present form in the latest stages of compilation of this encyclopaedic treatise (see Deleanu 2006, 147ff.).

⁹⁶ See Ishida [1963] 1976, 32–33.

⁹⁷ My admittedly tentative understanding of this first alternative is that a postulant receives the precepts from a quorum of monastics and at the same time he/she commits himself/herself to them, i.e. consents to observe the *prātimokṣa* precepts 'by his own' (Ch. 由自; Tib. *rang*) will. The Chinese wording juxtaposes the two: 由他由自, i.e. 'by/through others' 由他 and [?] 'by oneself' 由自. The Tibetan rendering here reads: *gzhan las sam rang yang len par byed* (for entire Tibetan passage, see note 102 below), connecting *gzhan las* 'from others' and *rang* 'oneself' by *sam*. Let us note that the alternative conjunction 'am (here assuming the form *sam* due to the euphonic addition of the coda of the preceding syllable) may also have the semantic value of 'and' (see Beyer 1992, 285), which I think fits better here. If we do not construe the sentence in this way, it would be rather difficult to understand why this alternative is contrasted to that in the next sentence, which most likely refers to

receive spontaneously [the precepts by taking the vows] by oneself alone.⁹⁸ [The latter type, however,] excludes the *bhikṣu* moral restraint.⁹⁹ Why? Because the *bhikṣu* [precepts of] moral restraint cannot be received by all [sentient beings as there are qualifications required for this].¹⁰⁰ If one does not indeed receive the *bhikṣu* [precepts of] moral restraint from other [ordained monastics], then no matter whether one would be qualified to go forth or not, merely by formulating the wish to go forth, he/she could spontaneously go forth in accordance to this wish. Thus there would be neither a model [or: standards] for the Holy Teaching, nor would there be [a way for] clearly knowing [which is] the well-spoken Dharma and Vinaya [of the Buddha].¹⁰¹ Therefore, the *bhikṣu*

the practitioner's taking the vows by oneself alone.

⁹⁸ Ch. 自然受 is glossed upon by Saeki, the Japanese translator of KDK-YoBh (vol. 7, p. 721, n. 8) as 'receiving of the precepts in one's own pure mind without relying on a precept-master'. The Tibetan translation of the phrase is *rang kho na las len par byed*, corresponding to something like Skt. **svaivasamādāna* or **svayam eva samādānam* (for entire Tibetan citation, see note 102 below). (See also *rang gis yang dag blang ba*, D Zhi 29b1, = Skt. **svasamādāna* or **svayam samādānam?*). I take — in the Chinese translation to mean here 'alone', 'by oneself' (for this nuance, see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 1, s.v.). This is also the reading suggested by the translators of the KDK-YoBh (vol. 7, p. 721), i.e. ひとり, as well as, most likely, by the KIK-YoBh (vol. 4, p. 2). It thus appears to emphasise 唯, and may reflect a Skt. *eva* (cf. Tib. *kho na*).

⁹⁹ Although the original does not say anything about nuns, I think that it is safe to assume that the same applies to *bhikṣuṇī* precepts.

¹⁰⁰ 'Sentient beings' 有情 is also inserted between brackets by the translators of the KIK-YoBh (vol. 4, p. 3).

¹⁰¹ Tib. renders rather differently: *de dag thams cad kyis bstan pa brtan par mi'gyur zhing | legs par gsungs pa'i chos'dul ba nyid kyang med par'gyur pas | de'i phyir dge slong gi sdom pa ni rang la rag lus pa kho na ma yin no ||* (for entire Tibetan citation, see note 102 below) 'because all these [people who have gone forth by their

[precepts of] moral restraint are not [included in] the meaning [covered by] spontaneous receiving [of the precepts].

(此中或有 由他由自 而受律儀。或復有一 唯自然受，除苾芻律儀。何以故？由苾芻律儀非一切堪受故。若苾芻律儀 非要從他受者，若堪 出家，若不堪出家，但欲出家者，便應一切隨其所欲，自然出家。如是聖教 便無軌範，亦無善說 法毘奈耶 而可了知。是故苾芻律儀 無有 自然受義。T 30. 589c22-28)¹⁰²

In spite of some diehard defenders of self-ordinations,¹⁰³ Jianzhen's efforts to introduce an orthodox Vinaya lineage were successful. A large part of the Japanese clergy was re-ordained. This, however, applied to monks only. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, the Chinese monastics

own wish and vows] would make the Teaching [of the Buddha] unstable [Skt. **adhira*, **adr̥ḍha*; or: non-lasting (Skt. **asthira*)] and even the well-spoken Dharma and Vinaya would exist no [more], therefore the *bhikṣu* [precepts of] moral restraint of are not [received] by oneself alone.'

¹⁰² There is no extant Sanskrit original for this passage. Apart from some matters of detail, most of which have been touched upon above, the Tibetan translation is basically the same as the Chinese version. It runs as follows: *de la de dag las la la ni gzhan las sam rang yang len par byed do || de dag las la la ni rang kho na las len par byed de dge slong gi sdom pa ni ma gtogs so || de ci'i phyir zhen na | 'di ltar dge slong gi sdom pa ni thams cad kyi yang dag par blang bar'os pa ma yin pa'i phyir te | de la gal te dge slong gi sdom pa gzhan las nges par blang ba ma yin par gyur na | de la gang dag rab tu'byung bar'os pa dang | gang dag rab tu'byung bar'os pa ma yin pa rang la rag lus pa'i rab tu'byung bas rab tu'byung ba de dag thams cad kyi bstan pa brtan par mi'gyur zhing | legs par gsungs pa'i chos'dul ba nyid kyang med par'gyur pas | de'i phyir dge slong gi sdom pa ni rang la rag lus pa kho na ma yin no ||* (D Zhi 29a5-7).

¹⁰³ According to the *Tōdai-ji yōroku* 東大寺要錄, the monk Hōjaku 法寂 of Kōfuku-ji 興福寺 was so upset that he stood up and shouted wild words of abuse at the Chinese masters (有興福寺僧法寂 起立大叫麤言). See Sakuma 1983, 254.

as well as the Japanese Court and the pro-(re)ordination faction of the Buddhist church seem to have focused their efforts upon establishing solely a *bhikṣu* lineage. Only three nuns accompanied Jianzhen to Japan, which made it impossible to perform proper *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations.¹⁰⁴

Fajin 法進 (Jp. *Hōshin*), one of Jianzhen's disciples who would later become the main precept-master (戒和上 *kai-wajō*) of the ordination platform at Tōdai-ji 東大寺戒壇院, authored a manual on the *Procedures of Bestowing the Precepts* 授戒方軌, which is said to have devoted two chapters to the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. The chapters are, however, no longer extant,¹⁰⁵ which makes it hard to ascertain if they included any special provisions for *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations conducted under special circumstances. More importantly, there remains some doubt as to whether Fajin actually managed to write the chapters or not. However, as argued by Ishida Mizumaro (1978, 2), even if he did, their content could not have been different from the basic Vinaya rules of dual ordination requiring the quorum of ten nuns and ten monks. Furthermore, the fact that one of Jianzhen's disciple may have written on *bhikṣuṇī* ordination does not change the basic picture: nuns were excluded from Jianzhen's crucial act of investing the Japanese Saṅgha with Vinaya legitimacy. This fact, coupled with a few other historical changes, marked a sad twist in the fate of nuns for the next centuries.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ See also Groner 2002, 75; Ishida 1978, 2.

¹⁰⁵ See Ishida 1978, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Another testimony, rather controversial, is brought by the usage of pairs like *daini* (*kō*) / *ōama* (*gimi*) 大尼 (公), literally 'great (venerable) nun' and *shōni* (*kō*) / *koama* (*gimi*) 小尼 (公), literally 'little (venerable) nun'. We find them in the *Shoku Nihongi* 續日本紀 or *Sequel to the Chronicles of Japan* as well as in a number of old documents in the Shōsō-in Collection 正倉院文書. According to Ikeda Shunpō (1980, 556-559) and Ushiyama Yukio (1990, 7-8), two eminent scholars in this field of research, the terms are connected to monastic hierarchies. The former would thus be a polite form of address, something like ' (venerable) superior nun'. Indeed such a

V The Dark Interlude

Regardless of the legitimacy of their lineage, the nuns continued to prosper under the patronage of the Court and nobility for almost 150 years after Zenshin's pioneering act. This support began, however, to decrease by the middle of the 8th century and reached a low ebb in the Heian period. By the

usage can be ascertained in the literature of the age. In *The Tale of Genji* 源氏物語, the most likely interpretation for 大尼君 *ō-amagimi* (Classical Japanese spelling: *oho-amagimi*) appears to be that of a polite term and form of address for a respectable nun. For instance, in Chapter Spring Shoots I 若菜上 (*Genji monogatari*, vol. III, p. 278), we find such an occurrence which Tyler (tr. 2001, 607) aptly, I think, renders as 'venerable nun'. Here the word is employed for the grandmother of Akashi no Nyōgo 明石女御, the Heir Apparent's Consort. She is an elderly nun in her mid-60s and obviously enjoys a high social standing.

This is one semantic possibility but not the only one. The terms are actually explained by the *Koji ruien* (p. 677) as follows: *'daini* [literally, 'great-nun'] is someone having received the precepts according to the Dharma [i.e. full ordination]; *shōni* [literally, 'little-nun'] is someone who is not like that' (大尼ハ如法ノ受戒ヲ爲シシモノ、小尼ハ然ラザルモノナリ。). The editors of the *Koji ruien*, a huge Japanese encyclopaedic thesaurus compiled between 1896 and 1914, do not mention any traditional source to substantiate their conjecture, but one cannot deny the fact that the pair 大尼 and 小尼 seems to have also been used, at least occasionally, in the sense of 'ordained nun' and 'novice nuns'. For example, in the 13th century, Eison writes in his *Kan jin gaku shō ki* 感身學正記 (p. 23), about the Sixteen Arhats who 'bemoan the fact that the assemblies of *bhikṣuṇīs* and *śrāmaṇerikās* [literally, 'great [and] little nuns'] have not been entirely re-established' (悲大小尼衆 都未再興。; more on this passage will be said below). Likewise, in the *Ju bosatsukai yōi kikigaki* 授菩薩戒用意聞書, which collects Eison's teachings as recorded by his disciple Kyōki 教基 in 1290, the term 大尼 'great nun' seems to be contrasted with *shikishani* 式叉尼, i.e. *śikṣamāṇā*, and appears akin to *daisō* 大僧 'great monk', most probably meaning a fully ordained *bhikṣu* (e.g. 大僧、大尼、式叉尼等の時も之に准ず。 cited after Minowa 2004). However, this detail, even if we adopt the latter interpretation, equally fails in telling us whether these 'superior nuns' were ordained according to a legitimate lineage.

end of the epoch, state-sponsored full ordinations had come to an end altogether, and contemporary documents clearly testify to the fact that the remaining 'nuns' were, technically speaking, merely novices.¹⁰⁷ So how did this all happen?

The first half of the Nara period (710-784) represents an age of unprecedented prosperity which saw large numbers of officially ordained nuns as well as the establishment of state-sponsored convents. In many ways, this was a natural continuation of the earlier policy of the Court, but it also owed substantially to one single personage: Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701-760), a devout Buddhist who put much of her energies and personal wealth to support the Dharma in general and nuns in particular.¹⁰⁸ Her death in 760 gave a serious blow to the state-sponsored ordinations and institutions for nuns. And this could not have come at a worse time. The second half of the 8th century witnessed a fundamental change in the place of women in the Japanese society. But before we say a few words on the background of this paradigm shift, let us look at some of the symptoms of this change in the Buddhist community.

One clear sign was the dramatic decline in the numbers of nuns allowed to benefit from state-sponsored ordinations. Surviving historical records give us a pretty good image of the change in the figures of women allowed to become nuns in extraordinary ordinations (臨時度 *rinji-do*). In the Nara period, these usually were ceremonies conducted under the auspices of the Court on special occasions, especially for generating religious merit for the health of the Emperor or Empress. During the Heian period, on the other hand, the edicts for extraordinary ordinations tend to become personalised, i.e. noting the name of the person(s) who is/are

¹⁰⁷ See Chinkai's 珍海 citation at the end of this section.

¹⁰⁸ For her role in the patronage of Buddhism in general and nuns in particular, see Groner 2002, 76-77.

granted permission to be ordained or entrusted with the right to ordain others.¹⁰⁹ According to the statistical data prepared by the Japanese scholar Ushiyama Yoshiyuki (1990, 15-16) for the period between 590 and 889, the clearly identifiable cases of women allowed to be ordained on such special occasions show steadily dwindling numbers.¹¹⁰

What about the system of yearly ordinands commenced at the end of the 8th century?¹¹¹ Here the situation seems even bleaker. From the very beginning, the scheme was apparently designed for male monastics only. No provisions or cases of women allowed to become nuns 尼 as part of the yearly ordination system can actually be found in historical sources.¹¹² By the 10th century, legal documents appear to refer only to the possibility of novice women 沙彌尼 being allowed to join the Order in extraordinary ordinations.¹¹³

Other symptoms of the decline become increasingly discernable, too. The year 727 seems to be the last time recorded in official histories when 300 nuns are invited *together* with 600 monks to chant Buddhist scriptures at the Court (*Shoku Nihongi* 續日本紀・神龜四年二月辛酉條). Ten years later, an entry in the same *Shoku Nihongi* mentions *only* 600 monks being invited for a similar ceremony (續日本紀・天平九年五月甲戌朔條). Occasionally, we see nuns summoned to the Court, but this is no longer a

¹⁰⁹ See Ushiyama 1990, 14-15.

¹¹⁰ Actually, in the statistics prepared by Ushiyama (1990, 16), the figures for clearly identifiable cases of extraordinary ordinations for nuns come to an end after 829. The tables also contain, however, numbers for extraordinary ordinations in which the gender of the ordinand is not ascertainable. Besides, as argued below, we can see examples of provisions for extraordinary ordinations of novice nuns as late as the 10th century.

¹¹¹ For this system, see section III above.

¹¹² See Ushiyama 1990, 15-19.

¹¹³ See Ushiyama 1990, 18-19. The Japanese scholar refers to provisions in the *Engi shiki* 延喜式, a code of laws and regulations compiled in 927 and enforced 967.

frequent occurrence. Equally telling, when such events take place, the scale is far more modest and does not involve the company of male monastics as it happened in previous decades. In 773, for instance, a congregation of nuns *only* performed a funeral service for the late Empress Shōtoku 稱徳天皇.¹¹⁴ And this was, most probably, because the ceremony was dedicated to the memory of an August Monarch sharing the same gender with nuns.

The situation did not change much in the Tendai school 天台宗 introduced by Saichō 最澄 (767–822) at the beginning of the Heian period. Its ordination formula, based on the Bodhisattva precepts as expounded in *The Brahmā's Net Sutra* 梵網經, was permeated with high Mahāyāna ideals. Maybe too much of a modern paradigm of values underlies my judgement, but I cannot help feeling that such noble principles could and should have opened the doors to men and women alike. In many ways, however, it proved to be even more exclusively tailored to serve the needs of male practitioners. To start with, the ordination platform 戒壇 built on Mt Hiei 比叡山, the headquarters of Saichō's new school, was inaccessible to female aspirants. Women were not even allowed to set foot on the sacred mountain. Neither are there any special provisions concerning nuns in the *Sange gakushō shiki* 山家學生式, the Tendai ordination manual.

One must be, however, fair and add that later illustrious figures such as Ennin 圓仁 (794–864), one of the Japanese Tendai Patriarchs, endeavoured to establish an ordination platform for Bodhisattva nuns 菩薩尼戒壇. Sadly, his efforts ended in failure.¹¹⁵ However, mainly due to the strong links of the Court and aristocracy with the Tendai school, the

¹¹⁴ See the 寶龜四年七月庚子條 entry in the *Sequel to the Chronicles of Japan* 續日本紀.

¹¹⁵ See Ishida 1978, 3–4. The newly established Shingon 眞言宗 school was not more generous in this respect. Not unlike the Tendai tradition, the exponents of this tradition also 'barred women from their main monastery complexes and consequently were not concerned with female yearly ordinands' (Groner 2002, 71).

centuries following Saichō's death saw a number of women, especially of noble extraction, being allowed to become nuns in the new tradition. The ordination procedure detailed in the *Shukke sahō* 出家作法, a manual of the Manshu Monastery 曼殊院, shows that the female ordinands took the Bodhisattva precepts of *The Brahmā's Net Sutra*.¹¹⁶ It is noteworthy, however, that the ordinations for women did not take place on Mt Hiei proper but in Manshu Monastery which is situated at the foot of the mountain.

The fate of the surviving nunneries affiliated to other schools was not any better. Another mark of their institutional decline is seen in the increasing threat of losing autonomy and control over inner organisation. Around 751, a new post of 'superintendent' (鎮 *chin* or 寺鎮 *jichin*) was officially created. This position became the prerogative of monks and was given increasingly higher authority until it became stronger than any of the exiting monastic ranks in nunneries. The affairs of many convents became thus de facto run by monks.¹¹⁷ In quite a few cases, such social changes ultimately led to the loss of autonomy, and many nunneries became degraded to the status of subordinate temples 末寺.

The continuous weakening of official support and deterioration in the social status of female monastics does not, however, reflect a drop in the women's religious fervour and dedication. The historical documents and literature of the Heian period actually abound in records and stories of women who took the tonsure 落飾 (literally, 'drop one's [hair] ornaments'),

¹¹⁶ See *Shukke sahō* (pp. 24-25): 次可奉授三聚淨戒ヲ。攝律儀戒者^{トハ}是繼一切ノ惡ヲ也。則十重四十八輕等ノ一切律儀。(The *Shukke sahō* Manuscript uses a number of allographs which could not be reproduced on my computer; standard traditional Chinese characters have been used accordingly). See also Shirato 1978, 163. An excellent analysis of the text is found in Shirato 1978 as well as in the Introduction to the *Shukke sahō* by the same author.

¹¹⁷ See Ishida 1978, 19-29.

full or partial,¹¹⁸ and embarked upon the path of spiritual cultivation, whether this meant dwelling in a convent or still continuing to live in a lay environment. The latter represent privately ordained nuns,¹¹⁹ and in some extreme cases, the change in their outward appearance was not even necessarily accompanied by receiving any sort of precepts.¹²⁰ The most usual pattern of private ordinations implied, however, a ritual act of taking the precepts, whether the Bodhisattva precepts, as in the *Shukke sahō*,¹²¹ or the ten novice precepts 沙彌十戒, as in the *Nyōin go-shukke burui ki* 女院御出家部類記,¹²² or apparently only the five lay precepts like Lady Murasaki 紫の上 in *The Tale of Genji* 源氏物語, the heroine of the unsurpassed masterpiece of the Heian literature.¹²³

¹¹⁸ On the various forms which the tonsure took in this period, see Katsuura 2002.

¹¹⁹ For this system, see section IV above.

¹²⁰ As can be seen in the case of Fujiwara Senshi 藤原詮子 (967–1006) (see Ishida 1978, 5).

¹²¹ This is the ordination manual of the Manshu Monastery 曼殊院 (see above).

¹²² See Nishiguchi 1992, 88. The text reads: 沙彌十戒を授ける, but no doubt, 沙彌尼十戒 is meant. Nishiguchi's outstanding contribution (1992) offers many other similar examples in the Heian literature and historical records.

¹²³ For such examples, see Ishida 1978, 5–6. Speaking of Lady Murasaki, one must note, however, that the context is rather intricate and at least this case is difficult to be classified as a proper ordination. Let me outline the context in very broad lines. Lady Murasaki has been seriously ill as the result of what is believed to be possession by evil spirits (物の怪 *mononoke*). The noble lady is actually one step away from death when almost miraculously she manages to come back to life 生き出で給ひて. Prince Genji, her husband and main character of the novel, is still very worried that her condition might deteriorate again, and commissions whatever skilful religious services he can find いみじき法どもを盡くして for her recovery. It is at this juncture that Genji recalls of Lady Murasaki's wish to join the Holy Order. 'As she ardently hoped to take the tonsure, [Genji] thought that the power of the precepts verily [might help her recover]. He snipped [a lock of] her hair as a token [of the tonsure] and made her receive the five precepts.' (「御髪おろしてむ」と、せちに思したれば、「忌むことの力もや」とて、御いただき、しるし許はさみて、五戒許、受けさせたり給ふ。(*Genji monogatari*, Chapter Spring Shots II 若菜下, vol. III, p.

385). (My translation differs in some details from Tyler tr. 2001, 656). In the end, the prayers, religious services, and the act of having received the precepts come to bear fruit at least partially since Lady Murasaki's life is saved but the recovery is not complete.

What further complicates Lady Murasaki's case is that after her recovery, she continues to lead a regular lay life. On the other hand, she also continues to nourish the hope of becoming ordained. Her wish is finally (and sadly!) granted in a ceremony ordered by Prince Genji after her death, which in the novel, takes place in the Chapter on the Noble Teaching 御法 'Minori' (on this series of events, see also Kudō 1994, 108–112). Seen in this perspective, the five precepts received during her illness do not seem to represent an act of proper ordination. Kudō Shigenori (1994, 111–112) argues that since Lady Murasaki receives only the five precepts, which basically mark her commitment to the morality of a lay female follower (*upāsikā*, 優婆夷), this understandably has no bearing on Lady Murasaki's conjugal life with Prince Genji. Such acts were apparently performed in the epoch when one needed the sacred protection of the Buddha(s) in times of crisis.

The Japanese scholar adduces here an extra example from actual history (albeit as reported by the same person who wrote *The Tale of Genji*). The *Murasaki Shikibu Diary* 紫式部日記, which notes facts and episodes of the life at Court between 1008 and 1010, a period when the author served Empress Akiko 中宮彰子 (alias Fujiwara no Shōshi/Akiko 藤原彰子, 988–1074), contains a rather similar episode. In order to facilitate her safe delivery, the Empress has a lock of hair on the crown of her head snipped and receives the precepts (御頂きの御髪下ろしたてまつり、御忌む事受けさせたてまつりたまふ。 *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*). The word 御忌む, literally meaning 'abstaining' (with honorific prefix) denotes here the precepts (cf. Satō Kenzō et al. tr. 1954, 217, which renders 御忌む as 御戒), most probably referring to the five precepts for lay followers.

In broad lines, I do agree with Kudō's explanations, but what makes Lady Murasaki's and Empress Akiko's acts rather special (at least when seen from a Vinaya perspective) is not that a lay woman takes the five precepts and continues to have a more or less normal life (of course, ideally within the moral framework set by these very norms). It is not even the worldly wish for health or safe delivery. It is rather that such acts were accompanied by what appears to be a ritual tonsure, albeit in a symbolic form of cutting only an insignificant part of the hair. As far as I know, this is not required by Vinaya regulations, and the tonsure usually marks one's renouncing worldly desires altogether. Such acts represent, I assume, the

Time and space do not allow a detailed discussion of the reasons lying behind this drastic change in the fortunes of nuns. Suffice it to mention only the broad lines of the process. In many respects, the 8th century appears to have been an axial period in Japanese history marking a departure from earlier cultural paradigms. Prior to the reforms which changed Japan into a centralised state with a bureaucratic apparatus modelled on Tang China, women had enjoyed a higher status, especially in religious life, often reflected in their roles as *miko* 巫女 or shamanic mediums. The fact that the first monastics were nuns as well as the early growth of the *bhikṣuṇī* order was most likely not completely unrelated to the shamanic role of women.¹²⁴ The steady influx of Chinese institutions, predominantly based on Confucian ideology, had a strong impact on the way women, including nuns, were viewed in society. Confucianism, however, is not the sole 'culprit'. Buddhism, or to be more precise, a certain strand of Buddhist ideas, also contributed to a growing misogynist culture. This trend increases more markedly from the Kamakura period on, when the Confucian 'three obligations' 三從 become associated with the Buddhist 'five obstacles' 五障, or 'five sins' 五罪, i.e. women cannot be born as Brahmā 梵天, Indra 帝釋天, Māra 魔羅, a world-ruling king (*cakravartin*) 轉輪聖王, and a Buddha 佛身. Last but not least, such influences as Taoism, Yin-yang magic practices (陰陽道 Ch. *yinyangdao*; Jp. *onmyōdō*), and Korean folk beliefs introduced or emphasised existing views which linked women to blood pollution and an inferior position on the hierarchy of spiritual values.¹²⁵

combination of ritual ordination and taking the five precepts, the minimum moral set which would not preclude one from living a normal life. This combination must have been deemed stronger in generating the merit necessary for fulfilling one's wishes, especially in times of serious crisis.

¹²⁴ See also note 23 above.

¹²⁵ This issue has been dealt with in a variety of modern studies. Suffice it to

One should add to this paradigm shift in the Japanese ethos at least three direct historical reasons for the decline. The first one was, as we have seen, the loss of a strong and consistent supporter in the person of Empress Kōmyō. The second reason was the unfortunate decision of Jianzhen and/or his Japanese patrons not to initiate a legitimate lineage of ordinations for nuns, too. Last but not least, the alternative of private ordinations and self-ordinations introduced a more democratic and readily available path, but one which contributed to the erosion of the monastic system of traditional ordination as well as of some of its accompanying benefits, first and foremost, spiritual practice in officially sponsored convents.

Against this complex social, political, and cultural background, the view that nuns are inferior to their Dharma brothers gradually became prevalent. And this had a direct impact on the monastic institutions as well. By the end of the period, state-sponsored ordinations for nuns, whatever their content may have been, appear to cease altogether. Writing in the first half of the 12th century, the Sanron 三論 scholar-monk Chinkai 珍海 (1091-1152)¹²⁶ clearly states in his *Bodai-shin shū* 菩提心集 or *Collection of [Writings on] the Resolve of Awakening* that the only 'nuns' existing at that time were novices.¹²⁷

mention here Groner 2002, 72-75; Ushiyama 1990, 46-53; Nagata 2002; and Yoshida 2002.

A decline in the position of women, similarly beginning in late Nara Period and early Heian Period, is also discernable in the Shinto institutions (see Nishiguchi 2006, 61-78, though Nishiguchi's interpretation is rather unique in several respects). For the decline of the role of women in Shinto institutions, see also Takatori 1979, 266-267.

¹²⁶ Chinkai authored not only works on Sanron (Sino-Japanese Madhyamaka) philosophy. He was also versed in Buddhist logic 因明, Tantric Buddhism 眞言, and Pure Land 淨土. See Furuta et al. eds. 1988, s.v.; etc.

¹²⁷ Cf. Groner 2002, 89.

Question: 'How many precepts do those who go forth take?'
 Answer: 'Novice monks (*śrāmaṇera*) and nuns (*śrāmaṇerīkā*) take ten precepts. Probationary nuns (*śikṣamāṇā*) practise six precepts. Fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*) take and keep 250 precepts, [while] fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*) take and keep 500 precepts.¹²⁸ But the [so-called] nuns of our age¹²⁹ are [strictly speaking] novices. There are no fully ordained nuns. [Only] after ascending the ordination platform is [one] called 'fully ordained nun'. But [nowadays] there are only so-called novice nuns who take the ten precepts.'

(問：「出家の人はいくらの戒をか受る？」 答：「沙彌と沙彌尼とは十戒を受く。さきあまは六の戒を習ふ。比丘は二百五十戒、比丘尼は五百戒を受け持つ。しかるに此世の尼はこれ沙彌尼なり。比丘尼はあらず。戒壇に登りて後に比丘尼といふなり。然れば只十戒を受けたる沙彌尼の尼とてあるなり。」
Jōdo-shū zensho, vol. 15, p. 525b)

VI Generating Transmission under Sacred Inspiration

Hardly could have Chinkai foreseen that his assessment would become a mere piece of history in less than one century. The fresh winds of reform and creativity which swept at the beginning of the Japanese Middle Ages would affect the monastic ordinations in a dramatic way. And it would be

¹²⁸ In reality, the number of precepts for nuns in the *Fourfold Vinaya* is 348, but in Japan, the fact that this is larger than the number of precepts for monks has often been hyperbolically stated to be 500.

¹²⁹ Groner (2002, 89), who also translates this passage, takes 此世 to mean 'this realm'. This is a possible sense, but I think that the meaning of 'age' or 'period' is more appropriate here.

both monks and nuns who would benefit from this new spirit. During the Heian period, the *bhikṣu* ordinations initiated by Jianzhen had become more or less a mere formality which could hardly claim to stand for an orthodox monastic institution.¹³⁰ Adding to this, the new formula of ordination introduced and strongly advocated by Saichō had gained the support of large sections of the clergy as well as the aristocracy. Though not officially sanctioned by the old monastic authorities in Nara, these new ordinations conducted by the Tendai school had the additional advantage of claiming indisputable Mahāyāna spirit.¹³¹

Following in the footsteps of the Chinese and Korean traditions, Japanese Buddhism has tended from its very beginnings to regard the ideals of the Great Vehicle as the *only* ones truly worth espousing and practising. On a limited scale, recognisably 'Hīnayāna' doctrines and texts such as the famous *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (俱舍論 Ch. *Jushe lun*; Jp. *Kusha ron*) have been the object of intense monastic study and exegesis. Yet, without a strong Śrāvakayāna monastic presence like on the Indian Subcontinent, such interests remained confined to scholarly education and study. True, the ordinations based on the *Fourfold Vinaya* could claim legitimacy, but at the same time, they carried the potential stigma of stemming from a 'Lesser Vehicle' tradition. In spite of the controversial nature of Saichō's ordinations in terms of traditional Vinaya thinking, there was no doubt that they represented Mahāyāna ideals in letter and spirit. This clear advantage appears to have hit the ideological status of the orthodox Vinaya ordinations and lineages of the old Nara-based schools as much as did the changes in the political and social picture.

In the 13th century, a new generation of intrepid and ingenious monks decided to help the Vinaya tradition out of its plight and re-establish

¹³⁰ See Ishida [1963] 1976, 490–497 (especially p. 490, citing Gyōnen's testimony); Minowa 2004, 47–49.

¹³¹ See Minowa 2010.

lineages of fully ordained monastics with a true commitment to the observance of the precepts. Two monks came to the fore of this new movement. They were Kakujō 覺盛 (1194–1249), the reviver of Risshū 律宗 or Vinaya school, and Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290), the founder of the Shingon Risshū 眞言律宗 or Tantric Vinaya school.¹³² Without a proper lineage of fully ordained monks from whom they could receive the precepts, Kakujō and Eison needed a scriptural and spiritual basis which could legitimise their efforts. It was actually the idea of self-ordination 自誓受戒, the very concept which had been rejected by Jianzhen and his disciples, that resurfaced. With some re-interpretations and refinements, it was put to work again. The main doctrinal defence of this idea was elaborated by Kakujō, who in many ways became the chief theoretician of the new movement. Eison was more interested in the practical side, and though his writings show considerable familiarity with the doctrinal subtleties of the Vinaya literature, he is chiefly remembered for his relentless energy in putting into practice the Bodhisattvic mission of spreading the right path of conduct.¹³³

Kakujō had the brilliant idea of combining what actually represented two different historical strands in the development of the Buddhist Vinaya: the so-called ‘separate receiving [of the precepts]’ (別受 *betsuju*), which

¹³² The name is also pronounced ‘Eizon’. A comprehensive presentation of the Japanese Vinaya school is found in Tokuda 1969. The most famous traditional accounts of the history and tenets of the school are Gyōnen’s *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 and *Hasshū kōyō* 八宗綱要 (p. 130ff.). For a recent study in a modern European language, see Hankó 2003.

¹³³ There are numerous passages in Eison’s works which bear witness to the paramount importance attached by the Master to the observance of moral precepts. See, for instance, the *Kōshō bosatsu go-kyōkai chōmon shū* 興正菩薩御教誠聽聞集, ‘The Section on the Monastic Code Being the Foundation of the Great Vehicle’ 律ハ大乘ノ根本ナル事 (pp. 198–199), ‘The Section on Observing the Precepts as an Outstanding Cause for Attaining Buddhahood’ 持戒成佛勝因事 (pp. 205–206), etc.

constitute the traditional Śrāvakayāna ordination, and the ‘inclusive receiving (通受 *tsūju*) of the three categories of pure precepts (三聚淨戒 *sanju jōkai*)’, clearly a Mahāyānist synthesis. Not only did this open new gates for re-establishing lineages but it also contributed to dispelling any possible misgivings about the ‘Hināyānist’ affiliation of the orthodox Vinaya ordinations. The monk going through both types of ordinations could convincingly claim both Vinaya legitimacy and Bodhisattvic ideals.¹³⁴

Kakujo’s faced, however, a huge doctrinal task. A mere statement of the idea was obviously far from enough. He had to prove that the inclusive receiving does in fact encompass and guarantee the separate receiving as well. Kakujo believed he had sufficient scriptural and exegetical evidence to support the view that by taking the Bodhisattva vows, one automatically gains the nature 性 of a *bhikṣu* and can perform legitimate full ordinations. In the *Fragments Dispelling the Doubts about the Inclusive and Separate Receiving of the Bodhisattva Precepts* (菩薩戒通受遣疑抄 *Bosatsu-kai tsūju ken gi shō*) written in 1246, not long before his death, Kakujo defends this idea:

The [ordination] procedure of the three categories of pure precepts which are expounded in the *Yogācārabhūmi* already include [all precepts] of the seven assemblies [i.e. monks, nuns, etc.]. The manner of performing the self-ordination elucidated in the [*Sutra on*] *Divining and Discerning [the Good and Bad Karma]* equally [shows the way of] acquiring the Vinaya [precepts][in such a manner].¹³⁵ The commentaries of Master [Yi] ji¹³⁶ give detailed examples for the rules [of

¹³⁴ See Minowa 2010.

¹³⁵ It is not excluded that 學 could mean here ‘to teach’, a sense rarer than the far more usual and basic denotation of ‘to learn, to study’ (see Morohashi [1955] 1976, vol. 3, s.v.).

self-ordination]. The Chapter on Manifested and Non-manifested [Matter]¹³⁷ clearly contains passages [to this effect, too]. If one receives the three categories of pure precepts in such a manner, he/she will [also] defend and maintain the Five [Vinaya] Chapters [which detail the five classes of monastic rules] and the [correct] deportment [prescribed for each] of the seven assemblies. [One can thus] renew the discontinuation [of the lineage] and revive its extinction—how can this be against the intentions of the Buddha?

(『瑜伽論』所說三聚淨戒羯磨 既攝七衆。『占察』所明 自誓作法 亦學毘尼。寂法師疏 詳例軌則。「表無表章」明有文。若爾受得 三聚淨戒，護持五篇，七聚威儀。繼絕興廢。何背佛意？ *Nihon daizōkyō* 35. 519b)

A detailed analysis of the doctrinal background and sources of the passage is beyond the scope of our discussion, but Kakujō's mention of the *Yogācārabhūmi* as a scriptural proof of validity deserves a few words.¹³⁸ We have seen that the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī* actually rejects the possibility

¹³⁶ Yiji 義寂 (919–989) is the Twelfth Patriarch of the Chinese Tiantai school 天台宗. His scholarly interests and literary output also included Vinaya texts. See Kamata ed. 1981, s.v.

¹³⁷ This refers to a chapter in the *Dasheng fa yuan yi lin zhang* 大乘法苑義林章 by Ji 基 (632–682), Xuanzang's 玄奘 foremost disciple and the de facto founder of the Faxiang school 法相宗 (i.e. the Sino-Japanese counterpart of the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda tradition). The chapter (found at T 45. 299a–315c), which deals in great detail with Vinaya, became a very influential source of reference in East Asia. Eison also discusses this chapter in the *Kōshō bosatsu go-kyōkai chōmon shū* (e.g. pp. 199–200, 206).

¹³⁸ We owe an excellent investigation of these aspects to Ishida Mizumaro ([1963] 1976, 521ff.), a leading authority on Vinaya literature and its history in Japan.

of the *bhikṣu*'s precepts being automatically included in an act of self-ordination. Whether deliberately or not, Kakujō appears to ignore this passage. I say 'deliberately' because the Japanese monk was not exactly unfamiliar with the treatise. In the same *Bosatsu-kai tsūju ken gi shō*, Kakujō actually deals with the *Yogācārabhūmi* in some detail.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, in our passage here, he seems to content himself to referring to the locus classicus in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*,¹⁴⁰ without touching upon its interpretation in the *Viniścayasamgrahaṇī*. Kakujō only mentions that 'the great Bodhisattva precepts expounded in the *Yogā[cārabhūmi]* include the restraining precepts, [which] are the precepts of the seven assemblies' (『瑜伽』中説菩薩大戒攝律儀戒, 即七衆戒。 *Nihon daizōkyō* 35.515a). This clearly shows that according to his reading, the Bodhisattva precepts encompass *per se* all Śrāvakyāna precepts, therefore the *bhikṣu*prātimokṣa rules, too.

Eison does not elaborate upon doctrinal subtleties in the same detailed manner as Kakujō, but quite a few passages in his writings show that he shared more or less a similar understanding. In the *Kōshō bosatsu go-kyōkai chōmon shū* 興正菩薩御教誠聽聞集, for instance, he devotes quite a few lines to the concepts of 'inclusive receiving' (通受 *tsūju*) and the 'separate receiving' (別受 *betsuju*) of the precepts (pp. 2007-209). His autobiography, the *Kan jin gaku shō ki* 感身學正記, mentions the ordination based upon the all-inclusive receiving of the three categories of precepts 三聚通受進具. Like Kakujō, Eison, too, adduces the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the Chapter on Manifested and Non-manifested [Matter] as scriptural proofs for the possibility of this ordination.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ See *Nihon daizōkyō* 35. 515a-b.

¹⁴⁰ See Section IV above.

¹⁴¹ See Ishida [1963] 1976, 531. See also note 145 below on the inclusive receiving 通受 in the *Ju bosatsu-kai sahō* 授菩薩戒作法 and the *Ju bosatsu-kai yōi kikigaki* 授菩薩戒用意開書. On the Chapter on Manifested and Non-manifested [Matter], see note

Let us, however, leave aside these technicalities and have a closer look at the actual events which would deeply affect the institution and practice of ordinations. Eison's keen interest in Vinaya is already apparent in 1235 when he attends a series of lectures on Daoxuan's 道宣 *Sifen lü xingshi chao* 四分律行事抄 (Jp. *Shibun ritsu gyōji shō*) given by Ensei 圓晴 (1180–1241), a scholar-monk of Kōfuku-ji 興福寺, the headquarters of the Hossō school 法相宗. Eison's thirst for knowledge is not quenched, and he apparently continues to study Vinaya literature by himself. Willing to deepen his understanding, on the 18th day of the 7th month of 1236, he calls upon Kakujō, a senior fellow-monk who has already pursued such studies for a while. He meets Kakujō in the same Kōfuku-ji, and the two men find that they share a similar vision of re-establishing proper monastic ordinations and lineages. According to the *Kan jin gaku shō ki*, they are also joined by Ensei and another monk named Ugon 有嚴 and together begin to formulate concrete plans for their own self-ordinations.

Kakujō must have revealed his belief that self-ordination is a scripturally sanctioned possibility, but in the paradigm of the age, extra proofs of sacred confirmation are felt an indispensable part of the process. This is why the four monks agree that they will have to undertake arduous spiritual practices and penitence until auspicious signs 好相 sanction their readiness for the great act. Before long, the much-awaited favourable omens start to appear. By the end of the 8th month of the same year, wondrous dreams such as the Buddha stroking their heads or flowers falling from the sky are confirming to all of them that their decision has received the ultimate spiritual guarantee of legitimacy.¹⁴²

137 above.

¹⁴² Dream as truth-revealing/testing locus is a universal theme in the history of mankind. In Eison's age, it appears in the lives of quite a few monastics. Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), for instance, decides to abandon spiritual cultivation based upon self-reliance 自力 and turn to the path of complete faith in the power of Amitāyus/Ami-

On the 1st day of the 9th month of 1236, they take the five lay precepts. This is followed on the next day by receiving the ten novice precepts. On the 3rd day, Ensei and Ugon take the vows to observe the three categories of pure precepts, thus apparently following the *Yogācārabhūmi* tradition. So do Kakjō and Eison a day later. The crucial acts of self-ordination come thus to an end, but auspicious signs continue to appear in their dreams, which adds further proof of spiritual validity to the newly established lineage.¹⁴³

As stated in the *Sutra on Divining and Discerning Good and Bad Karma*, a text unequivocally encouraging self-ordinations, taking the vows by oneself is permissible *only* in the case one cannot find a precept-master and a pure assembly of monastics. Now that Kakujo, Eison, Ensei and, Ugon have received the entire set of Bodhisattva precepts, supposedly also obtaining the nature of fully ordained *bhikṣus*, a pure assembly has been, more or less, re-established. The scriptural and spiritual proofs which Kakujo and Eison had been looking for were meant to justify only very special and unique moments in the history of the Order. Following the initial series of extraordinary, albeit justified, acts of taking the vows by oneself, ordinations had to rely once again upon standard Vinaya procedures as much as feasible.

We have seen that Eison's views on the justification of self-ordination seem to follow broadly the same lines as Kakujo's theories, but the two

tābha Buddha 阿彌陀佛 after receiving a revelation from Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 in a dream (see Ōsumi and Nakao 1998, 150; Furuta et al., eds. 1988, s.v.; etc.). Equally relevant is the dream diary left by Myōe 明惠 (1173–1132), the reviver of the Kegon 華嚴 tradition (see Girard 1990; Tanabe 1992). On dreams in Ancient Japan, see also Ishii 2002.

¹⁴³ For the series of these events leading to self-ordination, see Minowa 2004, 50–52. Much of the information actually comes from the *Kan jin gaku shō ki*, Eison's autobiographical account.

reformers differed in quite a few points in the actual manner of performing ordinations. Kakujo's method consisted in the postulant taking the three categories of pure precepts set forth in the *Yogācārabhūmi*. The precept-master then preached and bestowed upon him the ten heavy precepts and forty-eight light precepts 十重四十八輕戒 expounded in the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*. The ceremony was considered to lead not only to the receiving of the Bodhisattva precepts but also to the automatic acquiring of any other type of precepts which the ordinand had in mind. For instance, if during the act of receiving the three categories of precepts he formulates the wish to become a *bhikṣu*, he was considered to automatically achieve this nature without having to take the 250 precepts explicitly. Likewise, in the case of a lay disciple, receiving the three categories of precepts would amount to a commitment to the five precepts. In the end, such a ceremony turned out to be a rather muddled form of ordination procedure (羯磨 *konma*). To make things even more confused, the procedure was followed by a 'preaching part' (説相 *sessō*) for which *The Brahmā's Net Sutra* was used. This made Kakujo's ceremony a de facto replica of the Tendai ordination which was also based upon the latter scripture and consisted in the Bodhisattva precepts only. This formula was not actually received very favourably amongst Kakujo's own followers, and the Vinaya school later adopted a revised pattern of ordination procedure.

Eison, on the other hand, introduced a few fundamental changes which brought more clarity and balance between the Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna components. He advocated the same the basic ordination procedure 羯磨 consisting in taking the three categories of pure precepts of the *Yogācārabhūmi* for all the seven assemblies of followers 七衆. However, the latter part of the ceremony, i.e. the preaching and bestowing of the precepts 説相, was different depending upon the postulant's aspiration. Thus, a would-be *śrāmaṇera* received the four defeats of a Bodhisattva (Skt. *catvāraḥ pārājaikasthānīyā dharmāḥ*; Ch. 四他勝處) as taught in the

*Bodhisattvabhūmi*¹⁴⁴ as well as the traditional ten precepts for a novice. In the case of an ordinand wishing to become a *bhikṣu*, he would receive the four defeats of a Bodhisattva as well as the four defeats (*pārājika*; 波羅夷) as known from Śrāvakayāna Vinaya regulations. In this way, the postulant as well as all those who witnessed the ordination had a very clear idea of the type of precepts which were actually taken.¹⁴⁵

Let us remind ourselves here that this was the all-inclusive type of ordination 通受, whose fundamental Mahāyāna spirit naturally had to be stressed. This is why the four defeats taught in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* had to be bestowed even for those ordinands who eventually became *bhikṣus* following the 250 precepts. Alongside this all-inclusive ordination, Eison also stressed the separate receiving 別受 of the precepts which was conducted according to the traditional *Fourfold Vinaya* ceremony. In the *Risshū saji konma* 律宗作持羯磨 written in 1251, Eison presents in detail the whole procedure and ritual for the full ordination.¹⁴⁶

Eison's life was dedicated to the spread of the Buddhist morality in whatever form this could benefit all living beings, whether by administering the five lay precepts, the Bodhisattva precepts, or the strict rules of the

¹⁴⁴ Strictly speaking, Skt. *catvāraḥ pārājikaḥ dharmāḥ* should be translated as 'the four factors giving rise to defeats'. As argued by Wogihara (BoBh-W, *Lexikalisches aus der Bodhisattvabhūmi*, pp. 34–35) and Edgerton ([1953] 1985, s.v.), *pārājika* is a hyper-Sanskritisation of *pārājika* 'defeat' (itself a term whose etymology is quite difficult to explain). Xuanzang uses a calque-translation for *pārājika*, literally meaning 'other-victory' 他勝 (他 = *pāra*-; 勝 = *ā-√* ji). Cf. also the Tib. equivalent *phas pham pa'i gnas lta bu'i chos*. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the 'the four factors giving rise to the defeats' are explained at BoBh-W 158, 2–159, 8; BoBh-D 108, 12–109, 2; T 30. 515b21–c10.

¹⁴⁵ Eison's procedure for the all-inclusive ordination 通受 is detailed in the *Ju bosatsu-kai sahō* 授菩薩戒作法 and the *Ju bosatsu-kai yōi kikigaki* 授菩薩戒用意聞書. An excellent discussion of the differences between Kakujo and Eison is found in Minowa 2004 (pp. 53–61).

¹⁴⁶ See especially *Risshū saji konma*, p. 152bff.

bhikṣu and *bhikṣuṇī prātimokṣa*. This mission, carried in different parts of Japan and at various levels of the society, was also accompanied by altruistic acts to promote the ideal of non-killing, care for lepers, and building bridges.¹⁴⁷ This makes Eison a remarkable and genuine monastic figure ready to toil unceasingly for the lofty ideals of the Buddhist path.

One of Eison's major concerns was the establishment of a lineage of fully ordained nuns 比丘尼. For this, he chose the famous nunnery of Hokke-ji 法華寺 in Nara as the first step on a long and arduous path.¹⁴⁸ Eison commences the process in 1245 by bestowing the novice precepts 沙彌尼戒 to five female ordinands residing in the convent (*Kan jin gaku shō ki*, p. 20). Two years later, he administers the precepts for probationary

¹⁴⁷ In the *Kōshō bosatsu go-kyōkai chōmon shū* (p. 191), Eison says: 'Even if one may beat me to death, I should just bear the pain without harbouring [any] feelings of hatred. [I should rather feel] just like a mother rejoicing at her infant stretching his hand and [softly] striking her.' (縦ヒ我ヲコロシ打ツモノアリトモ、痛キ計ヲ忍デ悪ム心アルベカラズ。少キ子ノ手ヲノベテ母ヲ打ツニ、コレヨロコブガ如シ。). Eison's commitment to the precept of non-killing is also seen in the content of his prayers in 1281, the year when Japan faced the danger of the second Mongol invasion. According to the *Kan jin gaku shō ki*, the Master prayed that an Eastern wind should blow the invading fleet back to its country and then having safely landed the troops, without a life lost, the ships should be burnt by fire (see Matuso 2004, 21). History, however, is much crueller than prayers, even when they come from saintly men like Eison ... The winds did blow, and verily they had a crippling effect on the combined fleet of Mongol, Korean, and Chinese troops. Yet, the war was won by the Japanese after quite a few battles on land and at sea claiming the lives of tens of thousands of men and women on both sides.

¹⁴⁸ The convent, whose entire name is *Hokke metsuzai no tera* 法華滅罪之寺 or 'Temple of Sin-Destruction [through] the [Scripture on the] Lotus [of the Right] Teaching', was founded by Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 in 745, and became the central state-sponsored convent (國分尼寺 *kokubun niiji*). In many ways, its history has been symptomatic for the fate of the *bhikṣuṇī* community in Japan. We owe an excellent monographic study on the history of Hokke-ji to Ikeda Genta (1986). See also the *Hokke niiji engi* 法華尼寺縁起 which is the basic traditional source.

nuns 式叉尼 to eleven postulants. The act is followed by an exposition of Daoxuan's 道宣 *Extracts on Bhikṣuṇī [Regulations] from the Fourfold Vinaya* 四分律比丘尼鈔, one of the basic texts of the Vinaya school (ibid., p. 21).¹⁴⁹ The final step is taken in 1249 when Eison performs full ordinations for twelve nuns.¹⁵⁰ In his own words, 'on the sixth day of the second month [of year 1 of the Kenchō 建長 Era], twelve people were administered the great *bhikṣuṇī* precepts at the Hokke Nunnery' (二月六日於法華寺, 十二人授大比丘尼戒。 ibid., p. 22). Eison further notes: '[This marks] the beginning of the complete establishment of the seven assemblies practising in accordance with Dharma in the Land of the Rising Sun' (日本國如法修行七衆圓滿始也。 ibid.).¹⁵¹

How did Eison solve the thorny problem of dual ordination for nuns without a pre-existing *bhikṣuṇī* assembly? As far as I know, there are no direct testimonies explaining this crucial detail. Eison must have been fully aware of this requirement. His *Risshū saji konma* 律宗作持羯磨 contains a whole section dedicated to the ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs* (pp. 154b–155b). The following citation leaves no doubt as to the fact that at least in this work, Eison had in mind the standard Vinaya procedure for a dual ordination: first the ritual performed by a congregation of nuns, followed by the confirmation from an assembly of monks. The way the *Risshū saji konma* spells out how the quorum of ten *bhikṣus* is to be addressed leaves no doubt as to the sequence of events:

[May] the most venerable [congregation of] monks listen:
this [postulant whose name is] so-and-so, has sought and
received the great precepts [for full ordination] from the nun

¹⁴⁹ The text is found in the *Manji zokuzō*, vol. 64. For its Chapter on the Precepts for Full Ordination 具戒篇, see pp. 316b–411a.

¹⁵⁰ See Minowa 2004, 67–69.

¹⁵¹ In the original, this appears written as interlinear commentary.

precept-master [called] so-and-so. This [postulant whose name is] so-and-so now begs the great precepts from the [congregation of] monks.

(大德僧聽：此某甲 從和尚尼某甲 求受大戒。此某甲 今從僧乞大戒。 *Risshū saji konma* 155a8-9).¹⁵²

The *Risshū saji konma* was, however, compiled two years after the first ordination of nuns. By this time, it appears that there were enough *bhikṣuṇīs* to carry out the preliminary part of the *upasamṃpad* ceremony 本法. The *Kan jin gaku shō ki*, our primary source for Eison's life, says nothing about how the bestowing of the great *bhikṣuṇī* precepts 大比丘尼戒 was actually performed in the case of the first ordination. The most probable scenario is that Eison carried out the preliminary part of the ordination at Hokke-ji with a quorum of ten monks instead of nuns. Then he must have performed the confirmation at Saidai-ji 西大寺, his headquarters temple, obviously with the congregation of ten monks as required by the standard procedure of dual ordination.¹⁵³

But did Eison have ten fully ordained monks to perform the ritual? For all we know, yes! The *Kan jin gaku shō ki* (p. 19) mentions the existence of 38 *bhikṣus* already back in 1244. Moreover, we see Eison in 1245 'perform [ing] for the first time [the ceremony of] the separate receiving of the [Śrāvakayāna] *bhikṣu* precepts according to the Dharma' (始行如法別受苾

¹⁵² This is a typical formulation technically known in the Vinaya literature as the 'stating of the matter' (Skt. *karmavācānā*). Here is how the *Fourfold Vinaya* prescribes such a statement: 大德僧聽：此某甲 從和尚尼某甲 求受大戒。此某甲 今從僧乞受大戒。(T 22. 925b4-6). It is pretty obvious that this must have been Eison's direct source of inspiration. Cf. also 大德僧聽：此某甲 從和上尼某甲 求受具足戒。此某甲 今從衆僧乞 受具足戒。(T 22. 757a25-27).

¹⁵³ This is also the interpretation put forward by Matsuo Kenji (1995, 384), one of the leading specialists in the history of Mediaeval Japanese Buddhism and Vinaya School.

芻戒, *Kan jin gaku shō ki*, p. 20), in which a total of 26 people become fully ordained monks (ibid.). By 1249, Eison must have felt that there were enough full-fledged monks, legitimate from the viewpoints of both Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna, to allow him to embark upon another extraordinary (but in his eyes, ultimately admissible) act: to make use of a *bhikṣu* assembly for the preliminary part of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. Eison was not, after all, the first personage in Buddhist history to have displayed such a flexible attitude in the ordination of nuns.¹⁵⁴ Even if he was not

¹⁵⁴ Some eight centuries prior to Eison, the Indian scholar-monk Guṇavarman 求那跋摩 (377–431), who came to China to spread Buddhism and translate its scriptures, showed a remarkably flexible attitude towards *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations. The following famous episode recorded in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 illustrates this attitude. A few Chinese nuns who had recently taken the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts from eight Singhalese nuns feared that their ordination was not valid. Their main concern was the number of witness-nuns, which had fallen short of ten, i.e. the quorum required in an orthodox dual ordination 二衆受戒. Accordingly, they asked Guṇavarman's help to arrange their re-ordination. The Indian Master gave, however, the following answer: 'Originally, the precepts are stated [or; generated] before a great assembly [of ten monks?].⁽¹⁾ If the preliminary part of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination 本事 [i.e. the ordination before the quorum of ten nuns] is not [possible], there is no impediment for [the validity of the] ordination [itself]. [This would be just] as in the case of [Mahāprajāpati] Gautami' (戒法本在大僧衆發。設不本事，無妨得戒。如愛道之緣。T 50. 341b2-3). The Chinese nuns, notwithstanding, insisted for a quorum of ten nuns. Guṇavarman had no other chance but to send for more nuns from India. He also asked the eight Singhalese nuns to learn Chinese properly so that they could perform the ordination according to all Vinaya requirements. Sadly, Guṇavarman did not live to see this happen. In 433, another eleven nuns from Sri Lanka finally arrived in China, and a full, completely Vinaya-proof ordination could be conducted. This actually marks the beginning of the orthodox *bhikṣuṇī* lineage in China.

The episode also appears in the *Biographies of Nuns* 比丘尼傳 with some variations. Here Nun Huiguo 慧果 asks Guṇavarman whether the lack of the first part of the dual ordination 本事, like in Mahāprajāpati's case, is still acceptable in their own age. Hearing the Indian Master's reply that no differences exist 無異 between the two situations, Huiguo points out that according to the Vinaya, the

preceptor will commit an offence if he ordains a *bhikṣuṇī* without the first part of the procedure. Not exactly, implies Guṇavarman. The preceptor, he answers, will be considered to have committed an offence only if he ordains a postulant who has not studied for two years as a novice in a community of nuns (有尼衆處，不二歲學，故言得罪耳。T 50. 937b28-29).⁽²⁾ (For the early history of *bhikṣuṇī* institutions in China, see Chikusa 2002; on this particular series of events, see p. 10; see also Li 2000, 183, citing from a paper by Bhikṣu Huimin which unfortunately was unavailable to me).

Daoxuan, the great systematiser of the Vinaya school, knows and speaks approvingly of this event. In the *Sifen lü shan fan bu que xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, he puts in Guṇavarman's mouth the following words: 'if a nun does not undertake the first part of the dual ordination 本法, she receives the precepts [i.e. becomes ordained, but] an offence is committed (尼不作本法者，得戒，得罪。T 40. 51c12-13). The text continues by implying that the first part of the dual ordination is nothing but a skilful means set in order to generate faith in the precepts. The act of receiving the precepts, i.e. the ordination itself, arises at the moment when the procedure is carried out before the great assembly, which most likely means here the quorum of ten witness-monks (先令作本法者，正欲生其信心，爲受戒方便耳。至於得戒，在大僧羯磨時生也。T 40. 51c14-15). Similarly, in the *Sifen lü shanbu sui ji jiemo shu* 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏, Daoxuan refers to Guṇavarman and declares: 'The precepts [taken by] nuns are generated in [= before] the great assembly [of ten monks]. Even if the first part of the dual ordination 本法 is not [performed] and [the precepts] are received directly from monks [alone], [the ordination] is, nonetheless, complete [or: achieved]. However, only a [minor?] offence is committed.' (尼戒大僧中生。假令不作本法，直從僧受，亦成，但犯罪耳。text cited in the *Sifen lü shanbu sui ji jiemo shu ji yuan ji* 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏濟緣記; *Manji zokuzō* vol. 64, p. 454a12-13)⁽³⁾

It is hard to know whether such historical episodes or Daoxuan's ideas were known to Eison and influenced him in one way or another. We have seen that the Japanese monk was familiar with Daoxuan's works and preached as well as commented upon some of them. The possibility of having come across relevant passages like those cited above is, therefore, quite high, but to the best of my knowledge, there is no positive evidence supporting this conjecture.

- (1) It is not very clear what the 'great assembly' 大僧衆 actually stands for here. Shih tr. 1968, p. 132, renders it as *grande communauté* (*Mahāsaṃgha, conçue abstraitement*). I see, however, no strong reasons

aware of the antecedents, we must not forget his determination and pragmatism in putting Buddhist ideals into practice. A man who had so boldly advocated and implemented the re-establishment of the *bhikṣu* lineage through self-ordination would not have been thrown into confusion when faced with the absence of a *bhikṣuṃī* assembly.¹⁵⁵

why this cannot be construed as referring to a concrete assembly of monks, most probably implying here the quorum of ten witness-monks (cf. also the usage of 大僧 in Daoxuan's works cited above, though admittedly his usage is not very clear either). Guṇavarman contrasts the absence of the first part of the dual ordination with Mahāprajāpati Gautami's ordination, which is technically known as the 'ordination received by accepting the Teacher's Doctrine' 師法受具. It refers to the fact that by accepting the eight weighty rules (or: eight rules of reverence), (see note 36 above) Mahāprajāpati and the 500 Śākya women obtained the status of fully ordained monastics. (For an example of the episode and how this was interpreted in Vinaya tradition, see the **Vinayamātrkā* 毘尼母經 T 24. 803a-b; for a recent monograph on Mahāprajāpati (Pali, Mahāpajāpati), see Dash 2008; on the various types of ordination, see Hirakawa 1999-2000, vol. 2, 167-176). Guṇavarman apparently was trying to say that although the dual ordination is technically preferable, when not feasible, the basic act of accepting the Buddhist precepts should or might be regarded as a valid form of ordination, a case illustrated by a famous and widely accepted case in the Saṅgha history, i.e. that of Mahāprajāpati.

- (2) We must add here that Guṇavarman was not an ignorant simply speculating on the matter. Amongst his translations, we also find the **Dharmaguṇṭa-kabhikṣuṇīkarman* 四分比丘尼羯磨法 as well as two texts on the lay precepts (T No. 1434; see also *Biographies of Eminent Monks Gao seng zhuan*, T. 50. 341a).
- (3) This is an exegetical opus compiled by Yuanzhao 元照 (1048-1116) on Daoxuan's *Sifen lü shanbu sui ji jiemo shu* 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏. The text of the latter is currently available as it appears cited in this work by Yuanzhao (see Ono 1964, vol. 4, p. 227).

¹⁵⁵ Let us recall here the words of Kakujo, which arguably also echo the feelings of his fellow-reformer Eison: ' [To] renew the discontinuation [of the lineage] and revive [its] extinction—how can [this] be against the intentions of the Buddha?' (繼

The profound significance of Eison's act is also highlighted by a miraculous event said to have taken place in 1251 when a monk changed his gender in order to help the newly formed lineage of *bhikṣuṇīs*, still in its infancy and needing more female members. The *Kan jin gaku shō ki* (pp. 23–24) tells us that '[The Sixteen Arhats 十六羅漢 protecting the Dharma] felt sorrow at the fact that the assembly of fully ordained nuns and novices¹⁵⁶ was not completely re-established and transformed a *bhikṣu* into *bhikṣuṇī*—an incomparable event surpassing the ordinary.' (悲大小尼衆都未再興, 變一比丘成比丘尼事, 奇特越常篇。)¹⁵⁷ The story, no matter what we may feel today about its veracity, is permeated with a spirit quite different from the more common motif of women first changing into men 變成男子 before attaining Buddhahood.¹⁵⁸

絶興廢 何背佛意?)(see citation above).

¹⁵⁶ 'Fully ordained nuns' and 'novices' render here 大尼 and 小尼 respectively. The meaning of the original terms is, however, rather controversial. For more details, see note 106 above.

¹⁵⁷ See also Minowa 2004, 71–72. The *bhikṣuṇī* lineage based on full ordinations continued all throughout the Middle Ages and Premodern period. The *Hokke-ji Tōtō betsujū kaizu* 法華寺東塔別受戒圖 (compiled in 1359) clearly shows that 'separate receiving of the precepts' 別受 was conducted before ten witnesses (see Ikeda 1986, 229–231; Matsuo 1995, 385–390). The same 'separate receiving of the precepts' is mentioned in documents dating to 1657 and 1683 (see Ikeda 1986, 238–243). Like in Eison's time, the confirmation by the assembly of ten monks, i.e. the second part of the dual ordination, was conducted at Saidai-ji 西大寺 (ibid., p. 243).

Hokke-ji continues its existence as a convent. (And in tune with the needs of our age, it has also become a famous sightseeing spot in Nara, featuring on almost any touristic guide of the ancient capital.) According to Ikeda (ibid., p. 243), at the time of the publication of his study, i.e. 1986, the ordinations for Hokke-ji nuns were actually performed at Saidai-ji. In a telephonic conversation with a member of the Hokke-ji staff (7 July 2007), it was confirmed to me that currently ordinations are no longer performed in the convent itself.

¹⁵⁸ A similar miraculous episode is depicted in Kakujō's biography in the *Ritsu on sō hō den* 律苑僧寶傳 (see Minowa 2004, 70–71). The change of gender is a fairly

common theme in Buddhist literature. The most common pattern is that of a woman transforming herself into a man, the latter being usually regarded as the gender conducive to Awakening. Many of the motifs and variations are discussed by Serinity Young (2004, 191-203). As also pointed out by the American scholar, the pattern of a man turning into a woman is much rarer (ibid. 201-203). No doubt, the reverse theme, far more common, is not very palatable to our modern tastes, but its presence in Buddhist literature cannot be denied and must be understood in its historical context. Apart from Young's excellent survey, see also Yoshida 2002 (especially relevant for our purposes here as it examines the Dragon's King Daughter in the *Lotus Sutra* and its reception in Japan, pp. 304-308). We also have a collection of translations from primary sources relevant to sex change in Paul 1985, Chapter 5 (see also Introduction).

Such stories, including the episode in Eison's account, form part and parcel of the Buddhist mythological or spiritual universe, but in a traditional context, they carry far more reality than a modern reader would be willing to confer to them. The change of gender was considered not only a possibility authenticated by scriptural testimony but also something which might occur in daily life. Relevant for our discussion here is the discussion dedicated to how gender changes should be dealt with when occurring at or around the time of ordination. We know that according to the Vinaya provisions, a woman has to answer before the ten witness-monks that indeed her gender is female. The purpose of such an enquiry is to prevent hermaphrodites, persons without clear sexual characteristics (i.e. what we would call today 'ambiguities in gender' such as congenital adrenal hyperplasia or androgen insensitivity syndrome?), etc. to join the Order. Failure to confirm her clearly feminine sexual characteristics is one of the stumbling-blocks disqualifying a woman from full ordination (on the stumbling-blocks, see note 26 above). This impediment is seen in many Vinaya traditions, but here it suffices to quote the *Fourfold Vinaya* which stipulates that a female ordinand should be asked 'are you a woman?' 汝是女人不? (T 22. 924c18-19; 925a10). Leaving aside the issue why such categories as hermaphrodites, etc. are not allowed to join the Holy Order in a religion allegedly professing universal salvation ..., a check of the ordinand's gender is, nonetheless, understandable. *Mutatis mutandis*, this bears some resemblance to the world of modern sport, which is, as we all know, periodically shocked to discover that allegedly female competitors are actually men or have ambiguities in gender. (The socio-cultural context of the comparison between the two worlds should not, however, be interpreted above this element of surprise.)

Eison continued to keep his interest throughout his life in the preservation and development of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage. In 1261, Hōjō Tokiyori 北條時頼 (1226–1263), fifth regent (執權 *shikken*) of the military government 幕府 ruling Japan, was so much impressed with Eison's personality that he asked the Master to stay and continue his activity in Kamakura 鎌倉, the new political centre of the country. Eison politely declined, however, citing his deep concern for the fate of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage as his main reason.¹⁵⁹

What is more mystifying, at least for me, is the fact that Vinaya literature contains provisions as how to deal with a gender change taking place at or around the time of the ordination. For instance, Guṇaprabha (*Vinayasūtra* cum *Vinayasūtra-ravṛtti*, p. 54, ll. 4–10, § 618) discusses the technical complications which might arise in the case of a change from a man to a woman in relation to ordination, to be more specific, whether this (fe)male is to be made a nun by dual ordination or if (s)he can be regarded a monk. What is important here is that the tone of Guṇaprabha's discourse is quite different from the holy narratives and edifying stories of gender stage. The topic is treated as if it were an unsurprising, or at least a possible, occurrence which had to be actually dealt with in the monastic communities of the age. Guṇaprabha also mentions that 'the [capacity for] moral restraint (*saṃvara*) of a person whose [change of] sexual organs [/marks](*vyañjana*) occurs three [times] does not develop' (*yasya trir vyañjanam parivartate, na tasya saṃvaro rohati*; *ibid.*, p. 54, l. 2, § 616). Without medically verifiable data, a definitive judgement is hardly possible as to what such a change of gender might mean. I would tentatively speculate that it may refer to sequential hermaphrodites.

It is even more difficult to know what to make of the male-to-female change in Eison's account in medical terms. In a broader perspective, however, its rarity as a theme in Buddhist literature arguably reflects the importance attached by the Japanese Master to the establishment of the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage.

¹⁵⁹ Eison's deep compassion and genuine desire to help the nuns is seen in many of his acts and thoughts (see Hosokawa 1987; cf. also Matsuo 1994). Another extraordinary decision in the context of the age was to bestow consecrations (傳法灌頂 *denbō kanjō*), one of the highest Esoteric forms of initiations, to no less than six nuns during his life (see Matsuo 2004, 21).

[Eison] respectfully said, ‘The monks will somehow manage [to continue the lineage], but this will not happen with the nunneries. It would be deplorable for the women’s [lineage of] Dharma to become completely lost. I shall, therefore, return [to Nara].’

(「僧ハナニトモ候ハンズレドモ、尼寺ガ叶マジキ、皆女人ノ法ガ失候ハンズルガ、不便ニ候程ニ上リ候ハンズル」と申テ候キ。 *Kōshō bosatsu go-kyōkai chōmon shū*, p. 214).¹⁶⁰

On his deathbed on the 25th day of the 8th month of Year 3 of the Shō’ō 正應 Era (1290), Eison looked back to a life stretching almost ninety years and rejoiced at the re-establishment of the Vinaya tradition and the growth of the five assemblies 五衆, i.e. monks, nuns, novice monks, probationary nuns, and novice nuns, all over Japan. This, the old Master said, was an achievement far surpassing his anticipations at the beginning of his long career.¹⁶¹ Indeed it was mainly Eison’s unflagging enthusiasm and effort which ushered a new age for all categories of monastics, especially for women. His Bodhisattvic determination in action and ingenious flexibility in interpreting the teachings did more for nuns than centuries of state patronage. The series of bold decisions and acts taken by Eison by the middle of the 13th century actually mark the initiation of the first clearly identifiable *bhikṣuṇī* lineage on Japanese soil. This re-invention of the tradition would also have lasting effects on the later history of its institutions. Though remaining a less conspicuous presence on the spiritual

¹⁶⁰ See also Matsuo et al. 2003, 138.

¹⁶¹ Eison’s last days are described in great detail in the *Saidai-ji Kōshō Bosatsu go-nyūmetsu ki* 西大寺行正興菩薩御入滅記. He apparently had his last long conversation (from which the detail above is taken) with the Elder Shōgen 證玄長老 of Tōshōdai-ji 唐招提寺 around 2 pm, a few hours before his death which occurred during meditation at sunset (see Matsuo 2004, 32-34).

arena, women had at last more recognition from their Saṅgha brothers and a monastic environment propitious for spiritual quest.¹⁶²

VII Concluding Remarks

Our story comes to an end here. The first seven hundred years of monastic institutions for nuns on Japanese soil can be best described as labyrinthine. This was not only because of the spectacular ups and downs of their development as well as the unexpected semantic expansion into such unique forms as 'home nuns'. It was also because the origins and threads of its lineages remain dimly lost along this path until Eison's audacious act of sacred (re-)creation in the 13th century. True, from a traditionalist perspective, the legitimacy of this lineage is a thorny issue as it actually had to be re-invented. 'Re-invention' is, however, a word reflecting modern perceptions. For Eison and his followers, there was sufficient scriptural basis for re-linking the thread of ordinations to its original Source. And in the context of the age, there was also plenty of 'transcendental' confirmation from the Source itself.

As argued above, we cannot rule out the possibility that the earlier centuries of Buddhism in Japan may have witnessed the transmission of legitimate monastic lineages from China or Korea. Another equally likely alternative, however, is that the first lineages may have been commenced under less orthodox circumstances such as incomplete quorums or self-

¹⁶² Hokke-ji was not the only nunnery which was revived and developed in this age. Many other convents were also established (the largest number being associated with the Vinaya and Zen traditions) and the nun communities grew again. An excellent discussion concerning nuns and convents in Mediaeval Japan is found in Ushiyama 2002. Equally outstanding is Hosokawa 1987, 100–168, which focuses on Chūgū-ji 中宮寺, Hokke-ji 法華寺, and Dōmyō-ji 道明寺, all nunneries associated with the Vinaya school during the Kamakura period.

ordinations. No clear historical evidence concerning the origin of the early lineages of *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations in Japan appears to exist. Actually, the picture emerging from the middle of the 8th century on is, on the one hand, a growing awareness of the need to establish orthodox ordinations and, on the other, increasing deprivation of official and monastic support for the nuns to achieve it. Combined with a host of other social and cultural causes, the latter trend will result into almost five centuries of chronic decline in the institutions and status enjoyed by nuns.

Eison's establishment of a *bhikṣuṇī* Order started from a bold decision of self-ordination. What distinguishes Eison is not only the fact that history has been more generous and has preserved far more records concerning this crucial act. It was also his unrelenting dedication and pragmatic flexibility to bring happiness to as many sentient beings as possible. This, admittedly, is a pan-Buddhist ideal, but far too often its de facto understanding has failed to include the female half of the Saṅgha. Given the climate of his epoch, Eison could have easily chosen to concentrate his efforts on monks only. He did not! Instead, the Japanese Master displayed true openness and skilful interpretation which make him at the same time remarkably modern as well as deeply committed to his spiritual tradition.

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¹⁶³ Traditional sources as well as editions of the Canon and series of Buddhist texts or *kundoku* translations are listed according to their original title or abbreviation, followed by the modern edition(s) used in this paper. For Pali sources, I have relied upon PTS editions, and the abbreviations follow the standard conventions. Apart from a few lexicographical and encyclopaedic sources (see Secondary Sources), all other references follow the author-date style. For reprints, the date of the original edition is given in square brackets. Titles of individual works from the *Taishō Canon* and *Pali Tipiṭaka* are not listed separately in the Bibliography.

¹⁶⁴ References to and quotations from original sources are given to volume, page, and more often than not, to line/column number. In the case of the *Taishō Canon*, I note the volume number, followed by a dot, and then by the page, segment, and column number. In editions with more than one segment per page, the former is likewise noted after the page number as 'a', 'b', and 'c' respectively.

Ch.: Chinese

Chronicles of Japan: see *Nihon shoki*

D: *sDe-dge Canon*. For the present study, I have used the following facsimile edition:

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Jp.: Japanese

KDK-YoBh (Japanese *kundoku* translation in the *Yogācārabhūmi* in the *Kokuyaku daizōkyō* 國譯大藏經 series)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND POSTSCRIPT

This essay was originally written for a presentation at the First International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Saṅgha: Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya and Ordination Lineages, held between 18 and 20 July 2007 at the University of Hamburg, Germany.¹⁶⁸ Its original title was 'Between State Control and Neglect: Nuns in Ancient and Early Mediaeval Japan'. I avail myself of the opportunity and express my sincerest gratitude to Dr Thea Mohr and Dr Carola Roloff (Ven. Jampa Tsedroen) who kindly invited me to this very important gathering, attended by monastics as well as scholars all over the world and honoured with the participation of His Holiness Dalai Lama XIV.

Academically, my heartfelt thanks go, first of all, to Dr Shayne Clarke (McMaster University) who most kindly read through the draft prepared for the Congress and made a number of very valuable suggestions. It is also

¹⁶⁸ The Congress has its own website (www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org) which provides information not only on the gathering in 2007 but also on later developments as well as related topics.

my duty and pleasure to thank to the following scholars (alphabetically listed) whose kind assistance benefitted me in various ways: Dr Shobha Rani Dash (Otani University), Dr Minoura Naomi (Otani University), Professor Dr Charles Muller (University of Tokyo), Dr Klaus Pinte (Ghent University), and Ms Satō Mona (Teikyō Kōtō Gakuin).

The first draft of the essay was prepared between April and July 2007. A few additions and revisions were made in the autumn of the same year, often as the result of my participation in the Congress, which helped me deepen my understanding of the Vinaya literature and monastic history. In a very broad sense, I feel, therefore, also indebted and grateful to all speakers at the Congress. Of course, when this indebtedness has been directly relevant to the present essay, my notes and Bibliography have recorded it by referring to the handout distributed at the Congress. It must be added here that a volume containing a selection of papers presented at the Congress is to be released by Wisdom Publications in 2010 under the title *Dignity and Discipline: The Evolving Role of Women in Buddhism*, edited by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen. I am not sure about its content, but I do hope that some, if not all, the contributions referred to in my notes and Bibliography will become accessible to the general public, too.

Unfortunately, a very tight schedule did not allow me to work on the essay until January 2010. The few weeks which I could devote in the winter and early spring of this year have been far from enough for re-writing this essay as it should have been done. Indeed more primary sources as well as secondary literature should have been consulted, checked, and re-checked. With no prospects of finding any spare time in the near as well as more distant future, I have, however, decided to let the paper see the light of the day as it stands now.¹⁶⁹ I am painfully aware that it is far from being

¹⁶⁹ I list below some relevant studies which have meanwhile come to my attention but whose findings could not be included and discussed in the present essay.

satisfactory. It is thus with all due apologies that I beseech the reader's patience when leafing through this very modest essay.

To be sure, Vinaya literature in general and the history of Japanese monastic institutions in particular are not exactly my cups of tea (or rather of diet pepsi, if allowed to choose ...). Incomplete in its coverage of primary sources and secondary literature as it may be, the present paper is, I dare hope, not entirely meaningless. If nothing more, the data which it presents often reflects the research done by generations of scholars, especially in Japan, research which may not be easily accessible in English to specialists and readers interested in other areas of Buddhist studies.

I am not sure whether my investigation can claim any degree of originality, but vanity (the devil's 'favourite sin!') makes me hope that at least the way in which this story is told may have some tiny merits. And to expose my vanity fully, I should also like to think that it may have more than mere academic relevance. While the main purpose of this paper is to shed light on events which happened many centuries ago, another underlying motive has been to connect this historical past to the present as well as to the future. I hope that this very modest contribution may join those voices pleading for the re-introduction of *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations in those Buddhist traditions which, sadly, have lost the sacred thread somewhere along the way.

In this sense, I shall be more than delighted to know that insignificant as it may be, this humble paper will be one amongst the many drops making up a great river passion and dedication for re-establishing fully recognised lineages of ordained nuns, a process not only in tune with the aspirations of our age but also with the basic spirit of a religion which for almost 2,500 years has not ceased to proclaim its wish for the happiness of all sentient beings. An equally long tradition of intricate precepts and regulations, undoubtedly all having some meaning at the time of their introduction, may sometimes paradoxically lead to the unhappiness of quite

a few sentient beings. Sadly and ironically, amongst such beings, one may also find pious women whole-heartedly dedicated to the practice and transmission of the Buddhist faith itself.

Of course, when speaking about the re-establishment of *bhikṣuṇī* lineages in the 21st century, a non-traditionalist will surely think, first and foremost, of arguments stemming from modern human rights. One must, however, remember that the Buddhist Saṅgha has its own paradigms, carefully and proudly set to a clock which has been ticking to its own rhythm for some two and a half millennia. Forcing this clock to adjust to a modern rhythm, especially when this is too abrupt and not fully supported by all its beneficiaries, may also violate human rights. If the argument from modern human rights is not acceptable to traditionalists (and usually, it is not), a more palatable approach is to look for some Vinaya stipulations and exceptions allowing to circumvent some other Vinaya rules and regulations. In this sense, the vastness of the Vinaya literature is a (Buddha-given!) treasure of hermeneutical opportunities.

Another possible bridge, also provided by the Buddhist tradition itself, is to engage in creative (re-)interpretation. Buddhism, as many other religious traditions, has repeatedly done this throughout its history, whether it has perceived it as such or not. Actually, some of its greatest philosophical and spiritual achievements have been triggered by or linked to such hermeneutical audacity. This may have appeared too daring to conservatives, but breaking conventions has likewise been a forte of (at least part of) this protean tradition which we call Buddhism. Modern scholars have identified and analysed a pattern called 'crazy wisdom' or 'holy madness', which has its well-deserved place and rationale in a variety of religious movements, Buddhism included.¹⁷⁰ If we accept such a pattern

¹⁷⁰ For a 'classical' discussion of the concept in the Indian tradition, see Georg Feurstein, *Holy Madness: The Outer Limits of Religion and Morality* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1991). For a comparativist contribution on the subject,

in theory and practice, there is then little need to plead for what one may label 'holy interpretation', a hermeneutical attempt to go beyond accepted horizons of understanding. And it is such an act of hermeneutical wisdom (even if it may have looked 'madness' to some), decidedly and consistently put into practice, in which people like Eison engaged. (As argued above, however, the whole process would have been depicted by Eison and his followers in different words.) Even if this is wrong from the obstinate perspective of literal or conservative understanding, I believe there can be no denial of the fact that Eison's holy interpretation, whether sacredly 'mad' or not, led to thousands and thousands of nuns being given a chance to attain the happiness which they choose and to work for the happiness of others.

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with many examples from the Western tradition as well as Postmodernist insights, see the brief but outstanding study by Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

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*Professor,
International College
for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*