

Bhikṣuṇīs in Theravāda

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Introduction

During the past several months I have been in communication with the Committee of Western Bhikṣuṇīs discussing various matters concerning bhikṣuṇī ordination. Ven Jampa Tsoedron asked if I would like to contribute something for the Seminar on bhikṣuṇīs from the Theravāda perspective.

By way of introduction, I am the abbot of Santi Forest Monastery,¹ ordained in the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. In the last year, I have been one of a team of Sangha members of all traditions who have set up the Australian Sangha Association (ASA).² This is, we believe, the first Sangha organization in the world to be established on purely non-sectarian grounds that guarantees an equal voice to nuns of all traditions.³ While the ASA has explicitly stated its support for nuns of all kinds and traditions, I should stress that the opinions in this essay are my own, and the ASA has not yet formulated a policy on bhikṣuṇī ordination in Theravāda or Tibetan traditions.

Theravāda

‘I will not pass away, O Evil One, until I have bhikkhu disciples... bhikkhuni disciples... layman disciples... laywomen disciples who are accomplished, disciplined, skilled, learned, expert in the Dhamma, practiced in accord with the Dhamma, properly practiced, living in accord with Dhamma, who, having learnt from their own teacher, expound, teach, declare, set out, explain, analyse it and make it clear; who are able to refute in accord with Dhamma other teachings that appear, and then teach the wonderful Dhamma.’⁴

This passage, translated from the Pali Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, records a conversation which took place between the Buddha and Mara shortly after his enlightenment. It is but one of many statements made in the texts which emphatically affirm that the presence of a bhikkhuni Sangha is a vital limb of a truly successful and complete Buddhist community. Such statements are found, not just in the Theravāda scriptures, but in various places throughout the scriptures of the schools. For example, the same episode is recorded in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya:

‘Mara, as long as my disciples have not become wise and of quick understanding, as long as the bhikṣus, the bhikṣuṇīs, and the lay disciples of either sex are not able to refute their adversaries according to the Dhamma, as long as my moral teaching has not been spread far and wide among gods and men, so long will I not pass away.’⁵

I believe we must take such statements seriously as the mainstream presentation of how the Buddha wanted his dispensation to be, right from the start.

Although my ordination lineage stems from Theravāda, in recent years my own path has been to seek the common heritage of Buddhist traditions, and so my opinions on some matters, including bhikṣuṇī ordination, differ from the Theravāda mainstream. I believe it is important to acknowledge that within any tradition, even one with a reputation for conservatism and orthodoxy such as the Theravāda, there will be a wide diversity of opinions on many matters.

Here I will not repeat the basic history of the introduction of the bhikṣuṇī lineage into Sri Lanka, which is well known. It should be stressed, however, that Saṅghamittā bhikṣuṇī will always be remembered in the hearts of Sinhalese Buddhists as she brought from Bodhgaya to Sri Lanka the sapling of the Bodhi tree, which became the central devotional focus of Sinhalese Buddhism. Thus for the Sri Lankans, the bhikṣuṇī

lineage is intrinsically linked with their own sense of identity as Buddhists, which has no doubt been a major factor in the relative acceptance of bhikṣuṇīs in modern times in Sri Lanka as compared to other Theravāda countries.

Textual and archaeological evidence confirms that the bhikṣuṇī lineage was also introduced into Burma.⁶ There are unconfirmed reports that it was also introduced into Thailand by the Burmese. By around the 11th Century AD the bhikṣuṇī order was becoming extinct in both Burma and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless it remains indisputable that the bhikṣuṇī lineage is intrinsic to the Theravāda both in its Vinaya texts (the so-called ‘two-fold Vinaya’) and in history.

In the late medieval period, however, the absence of the bhikṣuṇīs has meant that Theravāda has redefined itself as consisting of the four-fold grouping: bhikkhus, sāmaṇeras, laymen, laywomen. This redefinition has by now become intrinsic to mainstream Theravāda’s sense of self-identity, replacing the Buddha’s ‘four-fold assembly’ (*catuṣpariṣad*) of bhikkhus, bhikṣuṇīs, laymen, and laywomen. Thus Thai monks recite in the introduction to their Patimokkha each fortnight that there is no need to teach the bhikkhunis ‘because they do not exist any more’.⁷ Similarly, for example, the Myanmar official Sangha legislation defines the ‘Sangha’ as male-only:

1.2 (a) "Sangha" means all monks who have attained the noble monkhood by the Ñatticatuttha-upasampadā Kammavācā and who have the same religious vows and precepts.⁸

At their worst, the Theravādins will go so far as to imprison bhikṣuṇīs, as in the case of Bhikkhuni Saccavādī (Daw Thisavati). Born on 14 May 1965, Daw Thisavati graduated from the then Rangoon Arts and Science University in 1986 with a Burmese literature degree, also winning several gold awards for her artistic talents. Despite her worldly success, her experience in a meditation retreat led her to ordain as a nun in 1986. In 1988, she sat for the junior theological exams, and came first in the country. In 1991, she sat the senior exams and came first again. In 1993, she passed her Dhammācariya exams with distinction. She went on to study Buddhist theology in Sri Lanka, graduating with a Masters degree. Then in 2003, she continued to study for a PhD in Philosophy, specializing in the development of the category of mental concomitants (*cetasikā*) in Theravāda Abhidhamma.

She repeatedly applied to the ecclesiastical authorities in Burma (Sangha Mahā Nāyaka Council) for bhikkhuni ordination in accordance with the Vinaya, but was refused each time. So she received her higher ordination in Sri Lanka on February 28, 2003, becoming Bhikkhuni Saccavādī. In December 2004, she returned to Burma in order to attend the World Buddhist Summit, which was intended to be a global showcase for Buddhism (although, as it happened, political controversy meant many of the participants pulled out at the last minute.) According to her friend, fellow nun Daw Uttama, Bhikkhuni Saccavādī was refused entry to the Summit. However, she remained in Burma because her father was ill. During this time she was summoned for questioning by the government-backed Sangha Mahā Nāyaka Council.

The arrest came on May 27 2005, after her father’s death. Bhikkhuni Saccavādī was charged under Burma’s criminal code, Section 295 for ‘abusing religion’, and Section 295(a) for ‘desecration of religious buildings and property’. An alternative source, from Saccavādī’s friend Bhikkhuni Guṇasārī lists the Section as 395 (Ka), and describes the reasons of arrest as:

- a. Working for foreign human rights group [of] women for freedom of worship and freedom for equal opportunity for women. Causing disruption of peace within the country.
- b. Working to cause disharmony (schism) within the community of Sangha order in Myanmar and thus disrupt the peace and harmony of the community of Sangha and the general populace.⁹

Bhikkhuni Saccavādī was released after 76 days in a Burmese jail, and was released on the condition that she sign a paper saying she is not a bhikkhuni. She was then taken directly to the airport and returned to Sri Lanka.¹⁰

The imprisonment of bhikkhunis is not an isolated incident. Yeo Kwang Sunim tells us the story of the attempts of Thai women to ordain as bhikkhunis.:

In 1928, two daughters of the outspoken political critic Narin Klung, Sara and Jongdi were ordained as bhikkhuni and samaneri respectively along with a number of other women. His house, which he gave to the Bhikkhuni Sangha, became known as Wat Nariwong. Due to their father's political conflicts, the daughters were arrested and most of their Sangha disrobed, while the two sisters were taken to prison, where the elder sister (the bhikkhuni) was disrobed by force. When they were freed they maintained their monastic life, but changed the colour of their robes. Their Sangha ended when one day the elder bhikkhuni sister was snatched by someone on horseback while she was out on alms round. Due to the negative reaction to that event within the Sangha, the then Sangharaja of Thailand passed a law forbidding any and all Thai Bhikkhus from ordaining women as either *sāmaṇerīs* [novice nuns keeping 10 precepts], *sikkhamānās* [trainees for full ordination], or *bhikkhūṇīs* [fully ordained nuns].

Nevertheless, there is significant room for differing opinions within Theravāda. The Burmese government in the 1970s was recommended to re-introduce the bhikkhuni order (there were Burmese bhikkhunis up until at least the 11th century). A Senate select committee in Thailand has also recently recommended in favour of bhikkhunis. In fact, the official website of the Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya Foundation, which is a University under Thai Royal Patronage, on a page from the 'Office of the Prime Minister's Secretariat' positively acknowledges the existence of bhikkhunis:

However, a group of Sri Lanka Bhikkhunis were invited over to China in B.E. 976 where they established a Bhikkhuni lineage there. This lineage has been kept alive until today. Afterward, they spread to many neighbouring countries, i.e. Japan, Korea, etc. Bhikkhuni strongholds can now be found in Taiwan monastery [sic] and Korea. In B.E. 2531 (1988) His [sic – read Hsi] Lai Temple, a Chinese monastery in Los Angeles, U.S.A., provided ordination for 200 women from various traditions and countries to strengthen the institution of fully ordained Buddhist women. In the last two decades, Buddhist women have expressed clearly their desire to participate at all levels in Buddhism. Considering that women from [sic] half of the world population, this trend should have a positive effect towards the development of Buddhism.¹¹

Special mention should also be made of Jetavana Sayadaw, the teacher of the most renowned Burmese monk of modern times, Mahasi Sayadaw. In the 1950s Jetavana Sayadaw published in Pali a commentary on the Milindapañha, in which he supported the re-introduction of the bhikkhuni Sangha in Burma. In recent years significant numbers of senior Theras of the Theravādin tradition have voiced their support for bhikṣuṇīs, and this number will surely grow.

Even in the last decade, I have witnessed a tremendous shift in the thinking of the monks from my tradition, the Western monks of the Thai forest tradition. In the early 90's, the question of bhikṣuṇīs was not discussed, and the mainstream position was basically accepted, that there simply are no bhikṣuṇīs. But by now, it seems to be fairly well accepted that bhikṣuṇīs exist, although opinions are still divided as to whether this is a good thing or not.

One of the most serious questions for Theravādins is the issue of whether Mahāyāna can be regarded as a legitimate form of Buddhism at all. Theravādin bhikkhus often believe that Mahāyāna monks and nuns are not really ordained; that is, they are not truly bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. This is for many reasons: Mahāyāna monks and nuns recite Sanghakamma in a different language (but the Buddha said we should learn Dhamma in our own dialect); they do not keep Vinaya (but in fact the Mahāyāna Sangha keep the same major rules as the Theravāda and simply interpret some minor rules differently); or they do not follow ordination procedure properly (but the crucial element in upasampadā is the 'motion and three announcements' that constitutes the Sanghakamma; if minor details are changed this does not affect the validity of the ordination). Since 'Mahāyāna' is not really Buddhism and since 'Mahāyāna' monks and nuns are not really bhikkhus and bhikkhunis it follows that it is impossible to reintroduce the Theravādin bhikkhuni tradition. I believe this position, which may not be clearly articulated, is crucial in addressing the problem. What is needed is education. For my part, I will contribute below my analysis of the historical connections between the traditions as a way of underlining the common ground. But this area also needs work by both the Mahāyāna traditions, to explain how their lineage is based on orthodox Vinaya principles (we all believe our own tradition is orthodox, and don't feel the need to justify this to others!), and also by the Theravādins, who must be willing to listen.

Parampara: Ordination lineages in the three traditions

Pre-sectarian Buddhism

It is doubtful whether the various Buddhist communities, passing down their texts in oral tradition, ever shared a universal original Vinaya that was literally identical. But it is reasonable to assume that the earliest Buddhist monastics possessed a Vinaya that was fairly uniform, and which in most respects corresponds to the common elements in the Vinayas existing today. This was studied and practiced by all monks and nuns from the time of the Buddha for about 100 years.

The Second Council

Inevitably, differences in practice gradually occurred. About 100 years after the Buddha's passing away, this caused a crisis in the Sangha that was addressed at the 'Second Council', held in the Vajjian Republic in the city of Vesali. It seems this was in the time of King Kālāśoka of Magadha.

The main issue was whether it was proper for Buddhist monks to use money. The Vinaya accounts, with the exception of the Mahāsaṅghikas, mention a total of 'ten issues' (with some differences), but these were of secondary importance. The monks of Vesali, known as the 'Vajjiputtakas' ('Sons of the Vajjis') took to going into the towns with their bowls to collect money. They were opposed by the monks from the west and south; in the Theravāda Vinaya these are called 'Pāveyyakas' ('those from Pāvā'). There was a great debate, attended by 700 monks. The Council appointed a group of eight monks, four from each side, to compare the practices of the Vajjiputtakas with the Buddha's words in the Suttas and Vinaya. They ultimately upheld the opinions of the Pāveyyakas. This makes it clear that, even though the monks and nuns at the time might differ in practice, they all upheld the same teachings and code of conduct, and this was a standard that was acceptable to all. Notice that the differences arose because of geographical separation, and were resolved by going back to the common source.

The Mahāsaṅghika Schism

All the Vinayas agree that the dispute at Vesali was resolved without schism. But some years later there was another dispute, not about Vinaya, but about doctrine. Accounts are varied, since this issue is not discussed in the basic Vinayas, but in later sectarian histories. But it seems that a certain teacher (called Mahādeva by some) taught five ideas that were unacceptable to many monks and nuns. There is no need to go into details here about what these ideas were. It is enough to notice that the difference was largely about the nature of an arahant (enlightened disciple). Was an arahant really completely free of all worldly attachments and ignorance, or might he still be subject to some subtle imperfections?

It is not clear whether there was an actual Council at which these issues were discussed, or if there was, where it might have been. But it does seem likely that the event preceded the time of King Asoka, since the existence of various schools seems to be suggested by his inscriptions, and is confirmed in several of the later accounts. This time the disputing parties could not agree, and the first schism resulted. The group that questioned the arahant's perfection was the majority, so they were called the 'Mahāsaṅghika'. It is not clear whether they were the majority of the whole Sangha, or just the majority at the meeting that resulted in schism.

There is no really convenient name for the other group, which upheld the arahant's absolute purity. The sources, both Southern and Northern, usually call them the *Theras* ('Elders'). This, however, has the defect of implying that they are identical with the Theravādins of Sri Lanka. But the Theravādins are simply one branch of this ancient school, and many other schools may claim to stem from this school with equal justification.¹² Indeed, the Sri Lankan school is often, if not usually, called by different names – Vibhajjavāda, Mahāvihāravāsin, Tambapaṇṇīya, Tāmraśāṭīya, etc. Until the sub-commentarial period, the word 'Theravāda' is found rarely even in their own accounts; and the earliest usages are decidedly ambiguous.

For example Asoka's son Mahinda, just after ordination, is said to learn the entire 'Theravāda', including Tipitaka and commentaries;¹³ here Theravāda is identified with the textual tradition, obviously meant to

authorize the Sri Lankan Pali texts, despite the obvious anachronism (since the commentaries were not composed until much later than Asoka).¹⁴ In this text the various other Vibhajjavāda schools such as Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Kaśyapīya, etc., had not yet split off from this ‘Theravāda’. But at Mahāvamsa 5.10 we find ‘Theravāda’ used in opposition to all the other schools, including Dharmaguptaka, etc.¹⁵ So the term which earlier embraced all the Vibhajjavāda became narrowly associated with just one of the Vibhajjavāda schools, namely the Sri Lankan one. There is no question that the Sri Lankan school can claim to be a legitimate successor to the early Sthaviras or Theravādins, but the exclusive use of this term by the later Sri Lankan tradition hides an implicit claim that the Sri Lankan school is their *only* legitimate successor. Wishing to avoid playing these party games, I will use the Sanskrit form, *Sthaviras*, to denote the early school that split from the Mahāsaṅghikas, and Mahāvihāravāsins (‘dwellers at the Great Monastery’) to refer to the Sri Lankan school. This term has the advantage of being an authentic ancient name used by the school themselves,¹⁶ which is quite precise and free of ambiguity. It is worth noting that the Pali Vinaya explicitly identifies itself as a ‘Vibhajjavāda’ text of the Sri Lankan ‘Mahāvihāravāsins’:

Ācariyānaṃ vibhajjavādānaṃ, tambapaṇṇidīpapasādakānaṃ; mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ, vācanā saddhammaṭṭhitiyāti.

This recitation of the teachers of the Vibhajjavāda, the inspirers of the Isle of Tambapaṇṇi, Dwellers at the Great Monastery, is for the maintenance of the true Dhamma.

This statement is found in the *uddāna* or summary verse at the end of the Samuccayakkhandhaka.¹⁷ This simply confirms that the Pali Vinaya, while finalized in its present form by the Mahāvihāravāsins of Sri Lanka, was believed by them to belong to the Vibhajjavāda.

Some scholars try to connect the events of the Second Council with this schism, and say the Mahāsaṅghikas are the same as the Vajjiputtakas, and the Sthaviras are the same as the Pāveyyakas. This idea is based upon certain statements in the Pali commentaries and some Northern sources, all of which are sectarian records dating from many centuries after the fact. However, some features of the existing Vinayas have been adduced as additional support for this idea. For example, the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya deals with the Second Council quite quickly, and only mentions one issue, rather than the ten of the other schools. Some have seen this as an attempt to skim over an embarrassing episode in the school’s history. But the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya regularly abbreviates, especially narrative portions.¹⁸ This is a feature of the literary style of the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya, not a sectarian bias.

In fact, the evidence of the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya speaks against any connection with the Vajjiputtakas. The main idea proposed by the Vajjiputtakas was that it was proper for a monk or nun to use money; but the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya has exactly the same rules as the Theravāda and all other schools regarding the use of money. Indeed, in their account of the Second Council the Mahāsaṅghikas openly criticize the Vajjiputtakas. Further, in the Vinayas of both the Mahāsaṅghika and their branch the Lokuttaravāda, trainees for bhikkhuni status are expected to keep eighteen rules, rather than the six in other schools, and among those eighteen, prohibitions against using money are mentioned twice. Thus, in this respect, the Mahāsaṅghikas had stricter prohibitions against the use of money than the other schools.

Further Doctrinal Schisms

Following this first schism, both schools proceeded to splinter and fragment, resulting in a proliferation of schools. They are traditionally numbered as ‘eighteen’, but if all the schools mentioned in various texts and inscriptions were added up, they would nearly double this. We won’t even begin to try to trace the development of all ‘eighteen’ schools here, but will concentrate on those that are specifically relevant for the Vinaya traditions.

The schisms of the Mahāsaṅghika schools are not particularly relevant for a Vinaya discussion, as we only possess a complete Vinaya of the parent school, the Mahāsaṅghika itself, in Chinese translation. In fact, Frauwallner argues that the other Mahāsaṅghika schools barely have any existence of lasting independent value, and in all discussions fade into the background.¹⁹ Perhaps they were mere local variants of the main Mahāsaṅghikas, and may not have had an independent Vinaya tradition. The exception is the Lokuttaravāda, whose Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya has been discovered in manuscript and published. This is very

similar to the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya in Chinese, but sometimes gives the text in full where the Mahāsaṅghika abbreviates.

Soon after the first schism, the Sthaviras split over a doctrinal issue. It seems the first schism was over the question of the 'person'. The Suttas frequently refer to 'persons' (*puggala*), which taken literally might seem to contradict the core doctrine of 'not-self' (*anattā*). Most schools took such sayings to be merely a linguistic convenience, but one group, called the Puggalavāda ('the doctrine of the person'), asserted that the 'person' was a subtle entity that existed outside the five aggregates. The parties were unable to agree, and schism resulted. The Puggalavāda, though reviled by other Buddhists, had their own long and successful career in Indian Buddhism. Like the Mahāsaṅghika, several sub-schools emerged, but again Frauwallner argues that these had scarcely any independent status in the main history. Although none of their primary literature survives, there are four Puggalavāda treatises existing in Chinese translation, from which we are able to ascertain that they had a scriptural collection comparable to the other schools.

The next schism probably happened soon after. The question was a subtle philosophical point about the nature of time and impermanence. One group maintained that 'all dhammas – past, future, and present – exist', and they called themselves the 'Sarvāstivāda' ('the doctrine that all exists'). The other group maintained that we must 'distinguish' between the past, future, and present, and they became known as the 'Vibhajjavāda' ('the doctrine of distinguishing'). The Sarvāstivāda went on to become the most influential of all the schools of Buddhism in India. The sources are not consistent as to whether the Puggalavāda or Sarvāstivāda schism was earlier. But the Sarvāstivādin Abhidhamma work the *Vijñānakāya* contains a critique of the 'person' doctrine which is similar to that held by at least one Vibhajjavāda school (the Mahāvihāravāsin's Kathāvatthu). This suggests they shared this anti-personalist thesis before their schism.

Notice that each of these schisms resulted from distinct and important doctrinal disputes. The Mahāsaṅghika schism concerned the nature of the perfected individual, a crucial soteriological question. The Puggalavāda schism concerned the most characteristic Buddhist doctrine, not-self. The Sarvāstivāda schism concerned another key doctrine, impermanence, a topic of pressing concern for a young religion struggling to survive after the death of its founder. The next set of schisms that we shall consider seem to spring, not from doctrine, but from geography.

Geographical Schisms

Now, this was around the Third Century BCE, the era of King Asoka. Under the patronage of that great Buddhist monarch, Buddhist missionaries travelled the breadth of the Indian subcontinent, taking with them the Dhamma of tolerance and compassion. It seems that the Vibhajjavādins were among the most successful missionaries.

The most persuasive analysis of the various records was made by Frauwallner. He argues for a broad similarity between the records found in the Sri Lankan chronicles, the Asokan inscriptions, and various Northern records, particularly those of the Chinese pilgrims. According to Frauwallner, this correspondence suggests that the schools we identify as the Vibhajjavāda may be connected with either personal names or place names found in these records. These were sent out in a concerted missionary effort in the time of Asoka, based in the city of Vidiśā.²⁰

Thus the Kaśyapīya school seems to be connected with the Kassapagotta of the chronicles and the Kāssapagota, whose name is one of three found on a reliquary in Vidiśā. The Haimavata school is also mentioned in these same reliquaries, and would result from a mission sent to the Himalayan region.²¹

The chronicles tell us the story of Majjhantika's mission to Kashmir.²² The Sarvāstivādin sources claim the same Madhyāntika as their patriarch, and tell of his mission in closely similar terms.²³ As is well known, Kashmir was the headquarters of the later Sarvāstivāda.²⁴

Another mission by a certain Mahādeva (not to be confused with the reviled Mahādeva who allegedly caused the Mahāsaṅghika schism) went to the Mahisa country. Frauwallner suggests that this may be connected with the founding of the Mahīśāsaka school. He cautions that this identification remains tentative, since the location of Mahisa is uncertain, although it seems to be in the Andhra region

(northern Deccan),²⁵ and, while the Mahīśāsaka are in later times attested across a wide area, their original home is not known. Thus it is not possible to confirm any definite geographical relationship between the two. Nevertheless, given the overall pattern of correspondences that are emerging, it is certainly possible. Dutt, following Przyluski, develops the idea that the Mahīśāsakas are originally descended from Purāṇa, the dissentient arahant of the First Council story, who, while acknowledging the authority of the Council, preferred to remember the teachings as he had heard them. Apparently, the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya treats Purāṇa as the second most senior arahant, following Aññā Koṇḍañña, and says that the teachings were recited once more for Purāṇa's benefit. He accepted them after adding seven minor Vinaya regulations concerning food. If it is true that the Mahīśāsakas stem from this time, it is one of the oldest schools. Dutt comments that 'this school agreed with the Theravādins in fundamental doctrines and disciplinary rules.'²⁶

Perhaps the best attested group of Vibhajjavādins was led south by Asoka's son Mahinda and daughter Saṅghamittā, to the distant island of Sri Lanka, where they were received with joy. The headquarters of a vigorous new Buddhist culture were established in Anuradhapura at the Mahāvihāra. This tradition is today usually called the 'Theravāda' ('doctrine of the elders'). But to avoid the confusion I noted above – the lazy but common error of identifying the Sri Lankan school with the parent school, the Sthaviras – I will throughout refer to this school as the 'Mahāvihāravāsins' ('dwellers at the Great Monastery'). The Mahāvihāravāsins have to this day maintained their collection of Suttas, Vinaya, Abhidhamma, and commentaries in the Pali language.

As recorded in the Sri Lankan chronicles, another Vibhajjavādin mission travelled to Aparantaka in the west of India (Gujarat). This was under a monk called Yonaka Dhammarakkhita, a most intriguing name. *Yonaka* is related to 'Ionia', and is used in Indic texts for any Westerner, especially the Greeks. Alexander the Great had led his Greek army into north-west India only shortly before Asoka. He built several cities called 'Alexandria', one of which was Yonaka Dhammarakkhita's home town.²⁷ Thus he was probably of Greek origin.

The second part of his name is just as interesting. The words *rakkhita* and *gupta* have exactly the same meaning: 'guarded'. Thus some modern scholars (Frauwallner, Przyluski) have seen a connection between this 'Dhammarakkhita' and the 'Dharmaguptaka' school: the Dharmaguptakas were a branch of the Vibhajjavāda that followed Yonaka Dhammarakkhita into the west.²⁸

The Greek connection seems to be reinforced in the Milindapañha, which famously records (or reinvents) a dialogue between the Greek king Milinda (Menander) and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. The Pali version of this records that Nāgasena, after his initial training, travelled 'a long way' to the East to the Asokārāma in Pāṭaliputta in order to receive teachings from a certain 'Dhammarakkhita'.²⁹ This episode does not appear in the Chinese translation. It is generally agreed that the Pali version has been subject to elaboration, some blatantly unhistorical.³⁰ There is another point where the text mentions five rivers: in the Chinese, four of these are from the north-west of India, but in the Pali, all are in the eastern districts.³¹ Since the Milindapañha is set in the North-west, it seems that the Chinese is more plausible here, and the Pali editors wanted to bring the action back further east, to lands they were more familiar with, and which had a long association with the Buddhist heartland. It is no coincidence that Asoka is invoked, and that it is here under Dhammarakkhita that Nāgasena becomes an arahant. It appears that the Pali, while celebrating the spread of the Dhamma to foreign lands, still holds the old places dear, and brings its hero back into the heartland for the crucial event of his enlightenment. Thus the insertion of the Dhammarakkhita episode is probably also to make the connection with the 'Greek Dhammarakkhita' – who better to teach the teacher of the Greeks, Nāgasena? The absence of Dhammarakkhita from the Chinese would reinforce the impression that this difference is sectarian (and might suggest that the Chinese text, whose school is unknown, is not Vibhajjavādin).³² It is unlikely that 'Dhammarakkhita' could have been alive in the time of both Asoka and Milinda, though McEvilley thinks it is just possible.³³ But given the lack of concern for historicity displayed by the Pali editors, this does not affect the identification of the two Dhammarakkhitas. The point of this digression from our main argument is simply to reinforce that 'Dhammarakkhita' remained a revered elder for the Mahāvihāravāsins, and is in no way connected with any heresy or schism.

Examination of the texts and ideas of this school confirms its close relation, amounting to virtual identity, with the Mahāvihāravāsins. The classic Mahāvihāravāsin source for the doctrines of the schools is the

Abhidhamma Kathāvatthu. This lists literally hundreds of points of contention between various schools. The schools themselves, however, are not named in the text, and to find out who held these views – or at least, who the Mahāvihāravāsins believed held these views – we must turn to the commentary. In its introduction, the commentary classes the ‘Dhammaguttikas’ as one of the branches of the Mahīśāsakas, and hence they are reckoned among the 17 ‘schismatic’ or ‘heretical’ schools. But in the body of the commentary, there is not a single mention of the Dharmaguptakas as holding any one of the so-called ‘heretical’ views discussed there. Thus we can conclude that the mention of the Dharmaguptakas in the introduction tells us that the Mahāvihāravāsins knew of the school, but had probably lost contact with them by that time. The condemnation is entirely general, and is merely a sweeping sectarian dismissal of all different schools. There are no specific grounds in the Mahāvihāravāsin’s own scriptures for concluding that the Dharmaguptakas held any dissentient views.

Information about the Dharmaguptaka’s views can be found in Vasumitra’s Samayabhedoparacanacakra. This source dates from around 400C.E., and is thus later than the Kathāvatthu. Since none of these points are ascribed to the Dharmaguptakas in the Mahāvihāravāsin sources, it is quite possible that the variations arose gradually, during the centuries since the separation of the Vibhajjavāda schools. According to Dutt, Vasumitra ascribes the following views to the Dharmaguptakas:³⁴

1. Gifts offered to the Saṅgha are more meritorious than those offered to the Buddha.
2. Gifts made to a stupa are meritorious.
3. The liberation of the disciples and the Buddhas is the same, though the path may differ.
4. Those outside Buddhism cannot gain the five special knowledges (*abhiññā*).
5. The body of an arahant is without defilement.

The first three of these would be acceptable to Mahāvihāravāsins; the fourth would not; the fifth, while being too obscure to actually make much sense to anyone except an abhidhammika, would conflict with the Mahāvihāravāsin interpretation, which holds that the body of an arahant can become the object of defilements for others. In addition the Abhidharmakośa of Vasubandhu (vi. 27) says that the Dharmaguptakas held, in agreement with the Mahāvihāravāsins and against the Sarvāstivādins, that realization of the truths happens all at once (*ekabhisamaya*).

It will take us too far afield to examine in detail the actual texts of the Dharmaguptaka, but a quick survey is enough to reinforce the impression of their closeness with the Mahāvihāravāsin. Regarding the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, Pachow in his survey of the pāṭimokkhas states: ‘the Dharmaguptaka follows very closely the Pali text in most cases, not merely in numbering the series but also in contents, except the [*sekhiya*] section, in which it adds 26 prohibitory rules regarding the Stupa.’³⁵ (The special concern of the Dharmaguptakas for stupas agrees with point 2 above). Similarly, the Dharmaguptaka version of the Brahmajala Sutta is very close indeed to the Pali, with only trifling variation in the sequence and wording of the 62 heretical views discussed there.³⁶ This discourse is particularly important in this context, as it specifically discusses heretical views. Moreover, the 62 views were crucial to deciding the identity of the heretics as condemned at the Third Council, where Moggaliputtatissa upheld the Vibhajjavāda as the true doctrine of the Buddha. Finally, Frauwallner in his discussion of the sole surviving Dharmaguptaka Abhidharma work, the Śāriputrābhidharma, shows the relation between this work and various Mahāvihāravāsin Abhidhamma books, including the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, Vibhaṅga, Dhātukathā, and Paṭṭhāna. He sums up by saying: ‘While mainly based on old transmitted material, even this is organized in a different way as compared with the other schools we have discussed [namely, Mahāvihāravāsin and Sarvāstivāda]. It contains little in the way of innovation or doctrinal evolution.’³⁷ Thus, while admitting that there are several significant divergences in the field of Abhidhamma, there is clearly a common source. Again, there is no reason why such differences as exist should not have emerged in the long period of Abhidhamma development that took place after the separation of the schools.

So it seems that the split between the Mahāvihāravāsins and the Dharmaguptakas was due to neither Dhamma nor Vinaya, but mere geography. The Dharmaguptakas were the north-western branch of the Vibhajjavāda, and the Mahāvihāravāsins or Theravādins were the southern branch. But the affinity between these schools could even overcome such vast distances, for the Sri Lankan chronicles record that Yonaka Dhammarakkhita and many of his followers travelled to Sri Lanka for the inaugural blessing ceremony for the Great Stupa.³⁸ This is not the treatment we would expect for a schismatic heretic, but for a respected Elder of the tradition.

China

The Dharmaguptakas in the west were ideally situated to spread further along the Silk Road to China. Traffic along this central Asian trade route was brisk and diverse, and Buddhists of various types soon made their presence felt. Buddhism arrived in China about 500 years after the Buddha's passing away. It seems that the Dharmaguptakas were among the first to become established there, and the first to set up a Vinaya lineage. The ancient Chinese imported and translated at least five full Vinayas, the most popular being the Dharmaguptaka and the Sarvāstivāda.

The Chinese commentator Tao Xuan (596-667 CE) recorded that in the early days the Sangha in China had practiced according to different Vinayas, but there had been a desire to unify and standardize conduct, so just one Vinaya was chosen to be binding for the whole Sangha. There was some debate over which should be adopted. But eventually it was agreed that, since the ordination lineage stemmed from the Dharmaguptaka, all should follow the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. Until this day, the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya remains the accepted code of discipline for all Sangha in the Chinese and related traditions, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan. It is worth noting that up until this time, practice had been based on various Vinayas, especially the Sarvāstivāda, which means that ordinations would have been often carried out according to the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. So the existing Chinese lineage stems from a unification of the Dharmaguptaka with the Sarvāstivāda, which were clearly not felt to be incompatible. In the current situation, this underscores the relationship between the Chinese lineage and the Tibetan, which was based on the Mūlasarvāstivāda. While I have never seen any evidence that the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya was ever used as the basis for an ordination lineage in China, there is no doubt of the doctrinal closeness of this school with the Sarvāstivāda.

In the first period of Chinese Buddhism the ordination lineage was established for monks only. There were as yet no bhikkhunis, so the complete four-fold spiritual community envisaged by the Buddha had not yet taken root. The first nuns were ordained halfway through the fourth century. But this ordination was given by the monks only, and some felt that this was not strictly in line with the Vinaya. The nun Sengkuo reports that around 433 CE a group of bhikkhunis arrived on a ship from Sri Lanka. Bhikkhuni ordinations were carried out by these Sri Lankan bhikkhunis together with the Chinese bhikkhus, guided by the monk Saṅghavarman. He is known to have translated a Bhikkhuni Vinaya *kammavācā* text of the Dharmaguptaka school, so it seems likely that the bhikkhuni ordination was carried out in accordance with the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. Here is a translation of the texts from the relevant Chinese histories:

Eminent Monks of the Liang dynasty by Hui Jao: the life of Saṅghavarman³⁹

Saṅghavarman (in Chinese named Zhang-Kai) was an Indian by birth. As a young man he renounced society and was well-known and respected for his morality (Vinaya) and virtue. He was particularly knowledgeable in the Tripitaka and specialised in the Saṃyuktābhidharmahr̥dayaśāstra (雜阿毗曇心論).

During the tenth year of the reign of emperor Yuan-Jia, Saṅghavarman travelled across quicksand to the capital city. He showed a solemn and refined personality. Both Taoist hermits and ordinary people regarded him with unusual honour, which led them to follow his teachings. He was known as a Tripitaka master. During the early period of the emperor Jing-Ping, a government official named Xu-Sang donated his house to build a temple. It was named Ping-Liu Temple after him. Later, Ven. Hui-Guan regarded Saṅghavarman as pure and perfect in his conduct according to the discipline of a monastic. He requested him to dwell at this temple in honor of his virtue and character. Ven. Saṅghavarman with Ven. Hui-Guan built another three layers of the stupa, and this is how the structure is today. Ven. Saṅghavarman was sincere in his practice and recited sutras day and night with great diligence. Monastics gathered around him for his teachings and to practice the path he taught. During this time Buddhism flourished among the people in China.

The Tripitaka master Saṅghavarman, having great wisdom in regards to the Vinaya, intended to arrange the full Bhikkhuni ordination for nuns [with the two assemblies]. The nuns seeking reordination included Ven. Hui-Guo from the Ying-Fu Temple. At that time the two-fold assembly

was not yet completed, but the study of the Tripitaka was familiar among the monastic community.

Not long after the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Ayyā Sārā⁴⁰ arrived at Nanking, Ven. Sanghavarman was requested as the teacher (*ācariya*) by the Sangha to continue teaching the Tripitaka. He indicated the continuity of the lineage and demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the Tripitaka.

At that time a monk called Hui-Yi from Qi-Huan Temple (Nibbana Temple) went to the capital city Nanking and accused Ven. Sanghavarman of promoting distorted teachings with the wrong meaning. They debated face to face many times. Ven. Sanghavarman brought forth evidence for his interpretations that Ven. Yi could not refute. Ven. Yi acknowledged this evidence, after which changed and softened his attitude towards Ven. Sanghavarman's. He praised Sanghavarman's views and followed his teachings willingly. Moreover, he summoned his disciples including Ven. Hui-Ji to assist in the full Bhikkhuni ordination in which several hundred nuns received the two-fold assembly ordination.

At the time of the Song dynasty the mayor of the city Peng named Yi-Kang honoured Ven. Sanghavarman as a saint for setting a good example in Vinaya. Yi-Kang arranged a big offering. At that time the four fold assembly of the Sangha was flourishing at the capital city Nanking.

Ven. Hui-Guan believed that Ven. Sanghavarman had surpassing understanding, comprehension, and memory of the Saṃyuktābhidharmahṛdayaśāstra. Although at this time the Tripitaka had been translated, it had not yet been formally written down. Promptly, that same year in September, scholars were convoked to Chang-Gan Temple to translate the text. Ven. Hui-Guan requested Ven. Sanghavarman to lead the group of translators. Sanghavarman examined the research thoroughly with great dedication and wrote down the translation himself. Later on, he continually edited the translation of the 分別業報略 (Karmaphalanirdesa-sūtra), the 勸發諸王要偈, and the 請聖僧浴文.

As his determination to spread the Dhamma was strong, Ven. Sanghavarman had the desire to travel and teach without being tied down to one place. After he had transmitted the sutras, he took leave and returned to his native country, India. The people together begged him to stay but their efforts were in vain as none of them could convince him to remain. At year 19, during the time of emperor Yuan-Jia, Ven. Sanghavarman accompanied a merchant ship abroad. There is no record about how his life ended.

Lives of the Bhikkhunis by Bao Chang, Liang Dynasty: A biography of Bhikkhuni Seng-Guo of Kuang-Ling city⁴¹

Bhikkhuni Seng-Guo; Original lay family name Zhao, first name Fa-You; born in Ji region, Xiu-Wu city.

From her birth she had a sincere, honest, pure, and simple nature. As a baby girl when her mother breast fed her she would not suckle after midday. Her parents were both surprised and joyful about her exceptional qualities. When she grew up, even though her mind was devoted to Buddhism, there were many obstructive conditions that made it too difficult for her to ordain.

Only at twenty seven did she finally receive permission to renounce and follow her teacher Hui-Cong in Kuang-Ling city. Seng-Guo was firm in her practice of Vinaya, and her meditative insight was clear. Often when she entered samadhi she would sit from sunset to dawn, or from dawn to sunset. Her breath was soft like cotton, and she was always abiding in a pure state of mind. Her silhouette was like a dried out tree. Still those with little faith doubted her.

In the sixth year of emperor Yuan-Jia, a foreigner shipowner, called Nandi, brought Bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka. They arrived at Song capital city and the bhikkhunis resided at Jing-Fu temple. Soon after they arrived, they [the Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis] asked Ven. Seng-Guo: 'Have any foreign

nuns arrived here before?’ She answered: ‘Never!’ Again they asked: ‘When the first Bhikkhunis here received ordination, where did you receive the ordination from the two assemblies?’ She answered: ‘[The precepts] were received from the monks alone.’ The reason they ordained them with only the monks’ assembly was to give women the chance to ordain and inspire them with respect for living within the Vinaya - it was a skilful means. For example, Mahāprajāpati, after accepting the eight garudhammas, was therefore allowed to ordain. The 500 Sakyan women then followed Mahāprajāpati as upajjhāyinī and ordained. This is the earliest example.

Although Ven. Guo gave such an answer to the Sri Lanka nuns in her own mind she had doubt. Therefore she went and consulted the Tripitaka master, who gave the same opinion. But still she asked: ‘Should I renew the ordination?’ He answered: ‘Virtue, concentration, and wisdom are all gradual practices. So to renew the ordination would be better.’ Not until the year 10 (433 C.E.) did the ship owner, Nandi, again convey eleven Bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka, including Bhikkhuni Ayyā Sārā. By that time, the Bhikkhunis who had arrived previously could already speak the Song language [Chinese]. They requested Ven. Sanghavarman to set up the ordination altar at Nan-Ling temple. In succession, more than 300 Bhikkhunis took re-ordination.

During the eighteenth year of the reign of emperor Yuan-Jia, at age 34, once she meditated for several days. The Karmadana deliberately touched her and announced that she was dead. He was shocked and informed the temple administrators. They investigated her together. Ven. Guo’s body was cold but her muscles were still firm. However, her breath started to move slightly. As soon as they began to move her body she opened her eyes, smiled and talked as usual. Therefore, the people with little faith were surprised and became devoted to her. There is no record about her later life.

Lives of the Bhikkhunis by Bao Chang, Liang Dynasty: A biography of Pu-Xian Temple Bhikkhuni Bao-Xian⁴²

Bao-Xian; Lay family name Chen; Chen city citizen.

At age sixteen her mother passed away. In memory of her, Bao-Xian did not eat rice for 3 years, surviving on beans and taro. She did not wear silk fabrics or cotton; neither did she use a bed and woven mat.

Aged nineteen she renounced and resided at Jian-An Temple. Her conduct in developing her practice was very refined; she had a broad understanding of meditation and Vinaya. Emperor Wen of the Song dynasty paid respects to Bao-Xian by making offerings of clothing and food requisites. Subsequently, emperor Xiao-Wu honored her with an allowance of ten thousand chen monthly. When emperor Ming ascended the throne, he received her with great respect and offerings. By the first year of emperor Tai-Shi she was made abbess of Pu-Xian Temple by imperial decree. In the second year of Tai-Shi's reign she was again honored by imperial decree being made a Sangha judge in the capital city of the province.

She was a greatly impressive, determined character, with brilliant judgement, as if she had psychic powers. Skilled in the logic of debate, she was certainly capable of releasing any person who was wrongly accused. Her temperament was upright and forthright, she would never compromise on what she knew was right.

In the early peaceful period of the Jin dynasty [335-342 C.E.], the nun Jing-Jian was the first Chinese Bhikkhuni. Initially, they received the ordination from the monks only. The nuns Hui-Guo and Jing-Yin from Ying-Fu temple once questioned Ven. Gunavarman regarding this, Ven. Gunavarman said: ‘In this country, in this territory there is no two-fold assembly. However, receiving the ordination from the monks only is adequate.’

Later, nuns Hui-Guo and others encountered foreign Bhikkhunis when they arrived [in China], Ayyā Sārā and others. In the eleventh year of the reign of emperor Yuan-Jia [434 C.E.] they re-received full ordination at Nan-Lin Temple from Ven. Sanghavarman. This does not mean that the

former one-fold assembly ordination was not allowable. It is said that re-ordination was for the sake of improving their Vinaya. Later, many of those who were interested re-ordained.

However, problems arose when they ordained without investigating. In the time of emperor Yong-Hui, in the second year of his reign [650 C.E.], Vinaya master Ven. Fa-Ying at Jin-Xing Temple started to explain the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. That day there were more than 10 nuns wishing to receive ordination again. Bhikkhuni Bao-Xian dispatched the head of the Sangha Bureau with an order to assemble the nuns in the Dharma hall. They made an announcement with the wooden knocker and commanded that all nuns not be allowed to receive a second ordination without official approval. [The problem arose because] some of those who were ordained, when investigated, were not old enough to be ordained. Their upajjhāyinīs were told to assemble in advance and confess in front of the Sangha. In future those seeking reordination were made to report to the Sangha Bureau to check that they were qualified. Ven. Bao-Xian also requested a person to supervise and examine the candidates to ascertain whether they are able to re-ordain. If they disobeyed or resisted, it was commanded to dismiss them and not [allow] them to remain in the community. After this, the wave of re-ordination was controlled.

In her duties as a Sangha Judge she was incorruptible and discerning. She gave comfort to the multitude and bestowed kindness on disciples. She was sober, with few desires, and was highly respected in the world. In the first year of the reign of emperor Sheng-Ming, aged 77, she passed away.

Thus the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya lineage of China has had historically very close links with Sri Lanka. Indeed, the Chinese canon contains a Sri Lankan Vinaya commentary (similar to the Pali *Sāmantapāsādikā*), and also a Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka school that was brought from Sri Lanka. It is not sure whether the Sri Lankan nuns were from the Theravāda (Mahāvihāravāsins) or not. By that stage, two other schools had emerged in Sri Lanka: the Abhayagirivāsins and the Jetavanīyas. These had separated from the Mahāvihāravāsins, with mutual acrimony that suggests that personal politics played a role. The Sri Lankan texts existing in Chinese translation (the Vinaya commentary and the *Vimuttimagga*) are not exactly the same as their Mahāvihāravāsin counterparts, so it is possible that the Sri Lanka-China connections were from one of the other schools, probably the Abhayagirivāsins. But this does not affect the question of ordination lineage, since the Abhayagirivāsins and the Jetavanīyas both stemmed from the Mahāvihāravāsins. In later days they were quietly re-admitted into the fold, so the Theravāda we know today is in fact a re-union of the three ancient Sri Lankan schools, just as the Chinese lineage stems from the reunification of the Dharmaguptaka and Sarvāstivāda. Such examples show how the Sangha can put aside ancient disputes and rivalry in the name of harmony.

Tibet

Some time around the late 780s, the first Tibetan monastery of Samye was built, but there were only Indian monks. The so-called 'Dharma King', Tride Songtsen Ralpachan, chose seven men for ordination as a trial to see whether Tibetans were capable of maintaining the Vinaya tradition. The ordination and training were carried out under the great Indian pundit Śāntarakṣita, who had ordained and studied at Nalanda, and whose treatise the *Tattvasaṅgraha* shows his fluency in the teachings of all the schools. This experiment was deemed a success and many other ordinations followed.

For their textual source, the Tibetans used the huge Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. As the name suggests, they were closely related to the Sarvāstivāda, and also stemmed from the ancient Sthaviras. Their Vinaya became very popular in the later period of Indian Buddhism, possibly because it incorporates many sutras and stories as well as the common inheritance of Vinaya material. This was the only Vinaya translated into Tibetan, and in fact King Tride Songtsen decreed that only the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya lineage should be established and practiced in Tibet. There are a few references to the order of bhikkhunis in Tibet, but clearly they did not survive.

We have already noticed the close connections between the Sarvāstivāda and the Dharmaguptaka in China. There is also a surprising affinity between the Sarvāstivāda and the Mahāvihāravāsin lineages. The accounts of the Second Council refer to a number of leading monks who represented the 'rigorist' party. One of these was Sambhūta Śaṅavāsin, a disciple of Venerable Ānanda. He appears as one of the eight

judges of the Second Council according to the Mahāvihāravāsīn,⁴³ Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Mahīśāsaka Vinayas (he also appears in Mahāsaṅghika sources, but not in their Vinaya). But, while the Mahāvihāravāsīns have little else to say about Śaṅavāsīn, the Sarvāstivāda regards him as one of their great patriarchs. He features in many stories, and in his old age he ordained Upagupta, the most famous of all the early Sarvāstivādin teachers. Thus the Mahāvihāravāsīns and the Dharmaguptaka acknowledge Śaṅavāsīn as belonging to their own group at the Second Council, even though he was a leader of the Sarvāstivādīns. His town, Mathura, went on to become one of the great centres of the Sarvāstivāda. The influence of this lineage is still alive today. Go to visit a Myanmar temple, and look carefully for a statue of a monk eating from his bowl, all the while looking over his shoulder. This curious image is no Theravādin monk: he is none other than Upagupta. His worship is widespread in folk Buddhism throughout northern Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, which suggests an early northern movement of Sarvāstivāda through those areas that are now Theravādin.

But the affinities are even closer than this, for another great teacher renowned in the Sarvāstivāda is credited with playing a key role in the founding of Sri Lankan Buddhism. The Theravāda Vinaya commentary records that when King Asoka's son Mahinda took ordination, his preceptor was Moggaliputtatissa, but his teacher (*ācariya*) was Majjhantika.⁴⁴ This Majjhantika, sometimes also said to be Śaṅavāsīn's preceptor, is famed in all traditions as the missionary who brought the Dhamma to the Kashmir region, where the Sarvāstivādīns were to become such a vigorous force. Thus a founding patriarch of the Sarvāstivāda was the teacher of the founder of the Sri Lankan Theravāda of the Mahāvihāra.

In later years there was some direct exchange between Sri Lankan and Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan canon includes several translations of the Buddha's first sermon, one of which was made from a Pali original.⁴⁵ Indeed, the oldest existing Pali manuscript stems not from Sri Lanka, but from Nepal, containing several pages of the Theravāda Vinaya dealing with settlement of disputes and other matters.

Ordination Lineages

I think we need to remind ourselves that we can never be certain about the question of ordination lineages. The whole matter is barely mentioned in the Pali Vinaya. The Theravāda tradition, as far as I know, preserves little to nothing of the history of its own ordination lineages. This tells us nothing of the validity of the Theravāda ordinations, only that the Theravādīns were not interested in documenting the lineages.

The Buddha evidences a common-sense, pragmatic approach to Vinaya, and it is contrary to the very essence of the Vinaya to insist on details of procedure if this demonstrably causes harm. A good example of this is found in the Uposathakkhandhaka, dealing with the fortnightly recitation of the *pāṭimokkha*.⁴⁶ Normally, such recitation requires a group of four or more bhikkhus, and all those present in the monastery should attend.⁴⁷ But there is an extensive discussion of '50 cases of non-offence', where the *uposatha* is carried out by a group of four or more resident bhikkhus, who 'perceive' (*saññī*) that the Sangha is complete, whereas in fact there are other resident bhikkhus not in attendance:

Idha pana, bhikkhave, aññatarasmim āvāse tadahuposathe sambahulā āvāsikā bhikkhū sannipatanti cattāro vā atirekā vā. Te na jānanti "atthaññe āvāsikā bhikkhū anāgatā"ti. Te dhammasaññīno vinayasaññīno vaggā samaggasaññīno uposathaṃ karonti, pāṭimokkhaṃ uddisanti. Tehi uddissamāne pāṭimokkhe, athaññe āvāsikā bhikkhū āgacchanti samasamā. Uddiṭṭhaṃ su-uddiṭṭhaṃ, avasesaṃ sotabbaṃ. Uddesakānaṃ anāpatti.

And here, monks, in a certain monastery on the *uposatha* day many resident bhikkhus gather, four or more. They do not know: 'There are other resident bhikkhus who have not come.' Perceiving [that it is in accordance with] Dhamma, perceiving [that it is in accordance with] Vinaya, perceiving that the chapter is in harmony, they perform the *uposatha*, they recite the *pāṭimokkha*. While they are reciting the *pāṭimokkha*, then other resident bhikkhus come, the same number. What is recited is well-recited, what remains should be heard. There is no offence for the reciters.⁴⁸

Similar statements recur throughout this section, and are repeated in the Pavāraṇakkhandhaka.⁴⁹ What such passages imply is that, even in certain cases where the detailed requirements for a *saṅghakamma* have not been formally satisfied, the validity of the act will still stand, as long as those performing the *saṅghakamma* believe they are doing it correctly. This corresponds with a common principle in contemporary law, where, for example, a clause is often included in corporate constitutions to the effect that, even if the committee is elected incorrectly according to the details of the procedure, the decisions and acts made by that improperly appointed committee still stand. This kind of safeguard is a simple application of common sense. It is not meant to justify sloppiness with procedures, but to acknowledge the reality that procedures are not always followed perfectly, yet associations still need to function.

Now, these passages do not occur directly in the context of ordination. But the contexts where they do occur – the Uposathakkhandhaka and the Pavāraṇakkhandhaka – are the two places in the Vinaya where *saṅghakamma* is discussed in most detail. It is normally understood that general requirements for *saṅghakamma* as defined in these places are also required in other places, even where this is not spelled out in the text. For example, the requirement for a monastic boundary (*sīmā*) is found in the Uposathakkhandhaka.⁵⁰ This chapter follows the Mahākhandhaka, where the ordination procedure is laid down, but there is no mention of *sīmās* in the context of ordination, here or elsewhere in the Pali Vinaya. Yet the traditions insist very strongly that a properly defined *sīmā* is necessary for ordination, to the extent that sometimes *sīmās* are used solely for that purpose. So if the traditions insist on generalizing from the Uposatha- and Pavāraṇakkhandhakas in the case of *sīmās*, it is not unreasonable that they should do so in other cases as well.

If this principle is accepted, it suggests that as long as those performing the ordination do their best, and believe that everything is in accordance with Vinaya, then the act can stand. In fact, this is the only reasonable position. There is no bhikkhu alive who is able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that his ordination stems from an unbroken transmission reaching back to the Buddha. We have some knowledge of our own ordination, but really, beyond that we rely entirely on faith. If we are looking for historical records, then we will find that the bhikkhuni lineages are attested for many hundreds of years in written records from China and Korea, so their ordination would seem to have stronger recorded basis than the Theravāda.

And it not as if the validity of Theravāda ordination is beyond doubt: the founding of the modern Thai Dhammayuttika order was precisely because it was feared that standards of Vinaya were so bad that no bhikkhus in Thailand at that time held a valid ordination. If this were true, then 95% of bhikkhus in Thailand (including myself!) would have an invalid ordination, and since most bhikkhus in Sri Lanka also derive from the Thai lineage (Siyam Nikāya), they would be in the same predicament. But the situation is even worse than this, for I have heard Vinaya experts of the Mahā Nikāya in Thailand question the propriety of the ordinations carried out in the beginning of the reform Dhammayuttika order, since the *upajjhāya* had less than ten *vassa*.

I don't say these things in order to induce fear in bhikkhus (a *pācittiya* offence!), but to point out how tenuous our very notions of ordination lineages are. This does not mean that things are hopeless, it just means that we have to take a reasonable, common-sense position. All we can do is to do our best. We find a good community of well-practicing bhikkhus, follow the training, and perform the ceremony as well as possible. If it somehow happened that the ordination lineage had been, unknown to us, broken long ago, what difference would it really make? Nobody insists that all bhikkhus must remain as novices forever. Why then do we take such a stand with the bhikkhunis?

Ordination of Nuns by Monks

Following this principle of taking a straightforward, pragmatic approach to Vinaya, we must acknowledge that there is a clear and explicit allowance in the Pali for bhikkhunis to be ordained by bhikkhus only, without requiring the presence of a community of bhikkhunis. Here is the passage from the Bhikkhunikkhandhaka:

Atha kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami. Upasaṅkamtīvā bhagavantam abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi. Ekamantaṃ thitā kho mahāpajāpatī gotamī bhagavantam etadavoca: 'kathāham-bhante imāsu sākiyānīsu paṭipajjāmi' ti. Atha kho bhagavā mahāpajāpatīm gotamīm dhammiyā kathāya

sandassesi samādapesi samuttejesi sampahaṁsesi. Atha kho mahāpajāpati gotamī bhagavatā dhammiyā kathāya sandassitā samādapitā samuttejitā sampahaṁsitā bhagavantam abhivādetvā padakkhiṇam katvā pakkāmi. Atha kho bhagavā etasmim nidāne etasmim pakaraṇe dhammim katham katvā bhikkhū āmantesi: ‘anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhūniyo upasampādetunti.’⁵¹

Then Mahāpajāpati Gotamī approached the Blessed One. Having approached and bowed down to the Blessed One she stood to one side. Standing to one side she said this to the Blessed One: “How, bhante, am I to practice with regard to these Sakyan women?” Then the Blessed One inspired, roused, uplifted and exhorted Mahāpajāpati Gotamī with talk on Dhamma, and having bowed down she left keeping her right side towards him. Then the Blessed One, having given a Dhamma talk, addressed the bhikkhus with regard to that reason, with regard to that cause saying: ‘I allow, bhikkhus, bhikkhunis to be given acceptance by bhikkhus’.

This is quite straightforward. After a substantial intervening section, there are further details on bhikkhuni ordination. Here we find the following:

Tena kho pana samayena bhikkhū bhikkhunīnam antarāyike dhamme pucchanti. Upasampadāpekkhāyo vitthāyanti, maṅkū honti, na sakkonti vissajjetum. Bhagavato etamattham ārocesum. “Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ekato-upasampannāya bhikkhunisaṅghe visuddhāya bhikkhusaṅghe upasampādetun”ti.⁵²

Now on that occasion the bhikkhus ask the bhikkhunis regarding the obstructive dhammas. The women seeking ordination were embarrassed and ashamed and were not able to answer. The Blessed One declared regarding this matter: ‘I allow, monks, by [a woman] who has been accepted on one side in the bhikkhuni Sangha and is purified [regarding the obstructive dhammas] to be accepted in the bhikkhu Sangha.’

Following this are the details for bhikkhuni ordination, the various procedures and statements. From here on, it is assumed that bhikkhuni ordination is normally done on both sides. There is mention of a bhikkhuni ‘accepted on [only] one side’, for example:

Ekato-upasampannā bhikkhunisaṅghe, visuddhā...⁵³

One accepted on one side in the bhikkhuni Sangha, and pure... ’

In the detailed definition of ‘bhikkhuni’ in the bhikkhuni Vinaya there is no mention of one accepted ‘on one side’:

Bhikkhunīti bhikkhikāti bhikkhunī; bhikkhācariyam ajjhupagatāti bhikkhunī; bhinnapaṭadharāti bhikkhunī; samaññāya bhikkhunī; paṭiññāya bhikkhunī; ehi bhikkhunīti bhikkhunī; tīhi saraṇagamanehi upasampannāti bhikkhunī; bhadrā bhikkhunī; sārā bhikkhunī; sekhā bhikkhunī; asekhā bhikkhunī; samaggena ubhatoṅghena ñatticatutthena kammaena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasampannāti bhikkhunī. Tatra yāyam bhikkhunī samaggena ubhatoṅghena ñatticatutthena kammaena akuppena ṭhānārahena upasampannā, ayam imasmim atthe adhippetā bhikkhunīti.⁵⁴

‘Bhikkhuni’ means: ‘she is an alms-food eater’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she has entered the life of alms-food’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she wears the patched robes’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘by designation’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘by her acknowledgement’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘[by saying:] come bhikkhuni!’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is accepted by going for the three refuges’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is auspicious’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is the essence’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is a trainee’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is an adept’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni; ‘she is accepted in harmony by both Sanghas with a formal Act with a motion and three announcements which is unshakeable and fit to stand’ – thus she is a bhikkhuni. Herein, whatever bhikkhuni is accepted in harmony by both Sanghas by a formal Act with a motion and three announcements which is unshakeable and fit to stand, this is what is meant by ‘bhikkhuni’ in this context.’

Neither is one accepted on ‘one side’ found in the shorter definition in the bhikkhu Vinaya:

*Bhikkhuniyo nāma ubhatosāṅghe upasampannā.*⁵⁵

‘Bhikkhuni’ means one fully accepted in both Sanghas.

Nevertheless, in the next line, in discussing the offences falling for exhorting bhikkhunis without permission of the Sangha, there is mention of bhikkhunis accepted on ‘one side’:

Ekato-upasampannam ovadati, āpatti dukkaṭassa

One exhorts one accepted on one side, an offence of wrong-doing.

So the bhikkhuni accepted on one side is occasionally acknowledged, but was certainly not mainstream. In all the contexts it appears, it clearly implies she is accepted in the bhikkhuni Sangha (*ekato-upasampannā bhikkhunisaṅghe, visuddhā...*). I do not believe there is any context, after the allowance for ordination on both sides, which acknowledges one ordained only by the bhikkhus. It seems that the normal process was that one would ordain in the bhikkhuni Sangha, then in the bhikkhu Sangha. Sometimes this process might be interrupted, for example if there were dangers preventing her from travelling to the bhikkhu Sangha for ordination. During this interval she would be accepted on ‘one side’.

Nevertheless, it remains the indisputable fact that the allowance for ordination by bhikkhus alone is there, and it is never rescinded. This contrasts with the situation in the bhikkhu ordination procedure. The first allowance is for the going forth and ordination by three refuges:

*Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, imehi tīhi saraṇagamehi pabbajjāṃ upasampadam.*⁵⁶

I allow, monks, the going forth and acceptance by these three goings-for-refuge

Later this is rescinded:

*Yā sā, bhikkhave, mayā tīhi saraṇagamehi upasampadā anuññātā, tam ajjatagge paṭikkhipāmi. Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ñatticatutthena kammaṃ upasampādetum.*⁵⁷

Monks, that acceptance by the three goings-for-refuge that I allowed, from today I rescind. I allow, monks, acceptance by a formal Act with a motion and three announcements.

Thus the situation for bhikkhus is perfectly clear, while the situation with the bhikkhunis is less definitive. The allowance for acceptance by bhikkhus only is clearly stated and never rescinded, but the text proceeds as if it no longer applied. I would understand this as most likely just a slight editorial sloppiness in treating the bhikkhuni procedure. It could not be argued that such an ordination by the bhikkhus only would be the ‘best practice’ according to the Pali Vinaya. But neither could it be maintained that it was unallowed.

Come, Bhikkhuni!

There is a peculiarity in the bhikkhuni ordination procedures as described in the Vinayas. When the bhikkhus were first ordained, the Buddha simply said ‘Come, monk!’ Later, he laid down the ordination by going for the three refuges. As time went on the ordination became more formal and ritualistic, as described in the first chapter of the Khandhakas.

But there is no complementary ‘Come, nun!’ ordination – or is there? The standard Vinaya definition of a bhikkhuni includes both a bhikkhuni ordained by saying ‘Come, bhikkhuni’, and also one by going for the three refuges.⁵⁸ But these procedures are completely absent from the account of the bhikkhuni ordination in the existing Vinayas. So embarrassing is this anomaly that the commentators Buddhaghosa and especially Dhammapāla feel forced to explain at length how these references don’t really mean there ever was a ‘Come, bhikkhuni’ ordination; after all, how could there have been, when there wasn’t?

But in the Therīgāthā, Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā says:

‘Bending my knee and paying homage, I made anjali in front of him.
“Come, Bhaddā”, he said to me: that was my full ordination’.⁵⁹

This verse is echoed by another in the Apadāna.⁶⁰ Buddhaghosa informs us that what the Buddha really said was ‘Come, Bhaddā; go to the nun’s quarters and get ordained there.’ So the text says ‘come’ and the commentator explains this as ‘go’; an ungentle soul might claim the meaning is exactly opposite.

Elsewhere, too, the ‘Come bhikkhuni’ ordination was remembered by the traditions. The Puggalavāda Vinaya treatise Lu Er-Shi-Er Ming-Liao Lun mentions the ‘Come, bhikkhuni’ ordination.⁶¹ The Avadānaśātaka features no less than seven ‘Come bhikkhuni’ ordinations: Suprabhā, Supriyā, Śuklā, Somā, Kuvalayā, Kāṣikasundarī, and Mukṭā.⁶² The Dharmaguptaka Vinaya mentions the ‘Come bhikkhuni’ ordination in its standard passage defining a bhikkhuni, much as the Theravāda.⁶³ This mention is repeated in a shorter Vinaya document of the same school.⁶⁴ The Vinaya Māṭṛkā Sūtra of the Haimavata school (one of the northern branches of the old Sthaviras) describes ‘Come bhikkhuni’ ordination like this: the Buddha says ‘Now listen! Rightly live the holy life in my Dhamma for the complete ending of suffering!’⁶⁵ A similar passage is found in the Ni Jie Mo (*Bhikkhunī Sanghakamma).⁶⁶ In the Dharmapāda-avadāna Sūtra, while the precise words ‘Come, bhikkhuni’ are not used, two stories depict the women saying they wish to ordain, and the Buddha simply responds by saying ‘Excellent!’, and with that their hair falls off and they become bhikkhunis.⁶⁷

Despite the denials by the tradition, and the omission from the ‘official’ account of bhikkhuni ordination, both the Vinayas and the voices of the nuns themselves tell us there was a going forth, not by accepting the dreadful burden of the ‘heavy rules’, but by the joyous calling out to live the holy life for the ending of suffering. The emotional difference between these passages and the ‘official’ account of bhikkhuni ordination is inescapable. While such matters can never be ‘proven’, it remains a possibility that this ‘Come bhikkhuni!’ ordination was, for the nuns as for the monks, the true first ordination. And regardless of whether ‘Come bhikkhuni!’ was the first ordination or not, these accounts remain as unimpeachable evidence of the enthusiasm with which bhikkhuni ordination can be received.

Conclusion

For me it is crucial that we base ourselves firmly on the mainstream position of compassionate understanding. Vinaya is a means for supporting practice of the Dhamma. If we interpret Vinaya as making an obstacle to practice, then I believe there must be something wrong with our interpretation.

One of the overall guiding principles, seen again and again in the stories behind the rule formulations, is that Vinaya must conform to the agreed ethical principles of the society in which it is practiced. Here we would do well to remind ourselves of the fundamental ethical principles embodied in the United Nations ‘Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’:

Article 1: Discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity.

Article 2: All appropriate measures shall be taken to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women...

Article 3: All appropriate measures shall be taken to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women.

As Buddhist Sangha, we should be the leaders in justice and fairness in the world. We should be setting the example for others to follow. I have given a great deal of my time and effort to help support the bhikkhuni movement, for I believe that in the future, any religion will have to manifestly practice equality for women. If we do not, Buddhism will forever remain marginal and culturally bound. When I spoke with my sister some years ago, she said that the lack of equality for women was what deterred her from being interested in religions. In our day, religious discrimination against women is associated with groups such

as the Taliban. If we do not demonstrate our public, practical commitment to full equality, we will be seen in the public eye as being in the same group. Complex and subtle arguments based on notions of ordination lineage may be persuasive to those of us who devote our lives to monasticism, but for the general public such arguments sound like empty excuses to justify discrimination.

I find it rather sad that bhikkhus often criticize those who speak out in favour of bhikkhuni ordination, as if the concern for gender equality was an alien, Western imposition into Buddhism. In fact, perhaps the earliest and most perfect statement on gender and spirituality in any spiritual literature is recorded in the scriptures of at least three ancient schools of Buddhism. It is claimed that women, with their ‘two-fingered wisdom’, are incapable of enlightenment. However, it was not the Buddha who said this, but Mara the Evil One. To this insult the arahant bhikkhuni Somā scornfully replied:

‘What does womanhood matter at all
When the mind is concentrated in samadhi
When knowledge flows on steadily
As one rightly sees into Dhamma?’

‘One to whom it might occur:
“I am woman” or “I am man”
Or “I am anything at all”
Is fit for Mara to address!’⁶⁸

¹ <http://santifm1.0.googlepages.com/>

² <http://asaweb1.googlepages.com/>

³ Here is the ‘Abstract’ of the ASA constitution. Full text at: <http://asaweb1.googlepages.com/abouttheasa2>

Representation: The ASA’s prime aim is ‘to serve as the representative organisation for the Sangha in Australia.’ (section 1a) It can do this through liaising with Governments (1c) and media. (1d)

All traditions: The constitution treats all traditions of Buddhism equally, and guarantees representation by Sangha from all three main traditions – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. (4a, 25c) By serving as a forum for discussion (1g), the ASA will promote respect and harmony among the traditions. (1i)

Membership: ‘Membership of the incorporation shall be open to any monk or nun ordained in the Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana traditions, or any other Buddhist tradition recognized by the Management Committee, who live a celibate life and who have resided in Australia for one year or longer.’ (4a) ‘Candidates for membership of the incorporation will be admitted to membership only after examination and approval of the credentials of the candidate by the Management Committee.’ (4b) All members have equal voting rights. (6a) Members are not liable for debts of the ASA, (8) and there are no membership fees. (11)

Balance of power: The ASA has two governing bodies, the Council of Elders and the Management Committee. Each of these is elected for a limited term, and has a defined role. This is to prevent any one person or group from assuming absolute power.

Management committee: The Management Committee ‘is solely responsible for the administration and management of the affairs of the incorporation.’ (12a) The Management Committee (and also the Council of Elders - see 13d, 13e, 13k) must have a fair distribution among the traditions, (12d) and must include both monks and nuns. (12e) No one may serve as the same office bearer on the Management Committee for more than two consecutive years. (12g) The Management Committee should meet at least every three months (14a), with a quorum of four. (14b)

Limits of power: ‘The Management Committee shall in no way interfere in the administration or internal affairs of any Buddhist organisation, group, or temple.’ (17b)

Council of Elders: There shall be a Council of Elders who will provide guidance on ‘matters bearing on peace and harmony, the honour and integrity of the Sangha, and the good name of Buddhism.’ (13a) ‘The term of appointment to the Council of Elders shall be six years. After serving a six year term, members of the Council of Elders may stand for re-election at a General Meeting.’ (13j) ‘To carry out the functions of the Council of Elders, the Council shall nominate a Working Group from among the Elders.’ (13g1) ‘The Working Group shall consist of six Elders, one monk and one nun from each of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.’ (13g2) The Council of Elders and its Working Group shall determine their own rules and scope of activities (including frequency of meetings, etc.) (13c, 13g4)

Teleconferencing: Given that the Australian Sangha is spread across such a distance, it is acceptable to participate in all meetings via telephone or video conferencing. (14b, 18d)

Definition of ‘Sangha’: All celibate monks and nuns ordained in a recognized tradition. (25d)

Lay people: May participate as ‘Friends of the ASA’, but do not have voting rights. (5, 6c, d)

Amendment: The constitution may be amended at a general Meeting. (25a)

Non-profit: Members may not receive any income from the ASA. (12k, 12l, 23)

Non-political: ‘The ASA must be non-political, ethnically neutral, and non-sexist in the determination of policy and in all activities.’ (1j)

⁴ DN 16.3.7-8

⁵ Dulva f.56^b; translated in W. Woodville ROCKHILL, *The Life of the Buddha*, Asian Education Services, 1992, pg. 34.

⁶ The following information is found in the article: 'Buddhist Nuns in Burma', Dr. Friedgard Lottermoser at <http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/Archive/L/Lottermoser/burmeseNunsLottermoser.html>

Historical Background of the Buddhist Nuns of Burma

The history of Southeast Asia is still a field wide-open to investigation in many respects. Some recently established facts may not yet have become common knowledge. According to research done by Luce and Than Tun, there is inscriptional evidence to show that there were bhikkhunis as well as bhikkhus in Pagan. Daw Mi Mi Khaing says that one bhikkhuni (rahan-ma, or female monk) was even a bishop! These reports were confirmed in a conversation I had in 1986 with a woman scholar, Daw Tin Tin Myint, who is head of the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Rangoon.

When Did the Bhikkhunis Come to Burma?

Pali tradition states (in the *Sāmantapāsādikā* 69.10, translated by N.A. Jayawickrama, p.61) that Emperor Asoka sent the monks Sona and Uttara to Suvannabhumi and that they established the Buddhadhamma there. On that occasion, 3500 noble men and 1500 women entered the Buddhist order. Suvannabhumi has been identified with Lower Burma. The city of Thaton has been identified with Sudhammanagara, the capital of a Mon kingdom of that time.

From archaeological remains, including stone inscriptions in Pali found in Lower Burma, we know that the Pyu people living there before the Burmese arrived were Theravada Buddhists. There is Chinese evidence to the effect that both boys and girls of the Pyu were educated in Buddhist monasteries and that "they left at the age of twenty, if they did not feel inclined to the religious mode of living on a life-long basis." This statement is very significant. Twenty years (after conception) is the age required for higher ordination according to the Vinaya. Bhikkhuni ordination may therefore have been available to Pyu girls. The monastic system of education applied to both boys and girls equally and may have resembled the system found in villages of Upper Burma even today. The Bhikkhuni Order may have been introduced into the Pyu kingdoms of Lower Burma from South India along with other features of Theravada Buddhism.

It is not quite clear how the bhikkhunis disappeared from Burma. Pagan was sacked by the Mongol emperor of China in 1298 A.D. After this, Burma was in a state of political unrest, split up under different rulers for several centuries. Some of these were antagonistic to Buddhism. The present area of the Socialist People's Republic of Myanmar is defined by the conquests of the Konbaung dynasty (1751-1885 A.D.) which was replaced by British colonial rule after three successive wars fought in 1824, 1852, and 1885, respectively.

The order of monks managed to survive all these trials, but not the order of bhikkhunis.

⁷ *Bhikkhuni nām'ovādo pana idāni tāsāṃ natthitāya natthi.* ('But there is not what is called the "exhorting bhikkhunis", because they do not exist now.')

⁸ Law Relating to the Sangha Organization: State LORC Law No. 20/90 of Oct. 31, 1990

⁹ http://groups.yahoo.com/group/myanmar_information/message/11891?viscount=100

¹⁰ Saccavadi; Dhammananda; Radio Free Asia, 'Burma Arrests Buddhist Activist Nun', 7-7-2005; Democratic Voce of Burma, 'Burmese Nun Detained for Religious Reasons', 29-6-2005. My thanks to Daw Khin Pyone for supplying this information. Thanks are also due to Amnesty International, who gave me news of Thisavati's release.

¹¹ <http://mahamakuta.inet.co.th/english/question.htm#34.%20Is%20it%20true%20that%20in%20some%20countries%20women%20can%20be%20ordained?>

¹² While earlier academic studies tended to accept the Theravāda's claim to be identical with the ancient Sthaviras, modern scholarship typically adopts a more balanced position. For example, CHOONG Mun-Keat (*The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism*, Harrassowitz Verlag 2000, pg. 3), following Master Yin Shun, says: 'Although it calls itself Theravāda 'the Teaching of the Elders' or Vibhajjavāda 'the Distinctionist Teaching', the Tāmrasāṭṭiya is actually a sub-school of the Vibhajjavāda, which in its turn is a derivative of the Sthavira or 'Elder' branch.'

¹³ *Sāmantapāsādikā* 1.52

¹⁴ This identification of Theravāda with a scriptural tradition (rather than specific doctrines or ordination lineages) continues today. The Myanmar Sangha Law says:

"Theravada" means the Pīṭaka such as Pali, Atthakatha and Tika which have been submitted to and reviewed by the Six Buddhist Councils commencing from the First Buddhist Council to the Sixth Buddhist Council. (Law Relating to the Sangha Organization: State LORC Law No. 20/90 of Oct. 31, 1990, 1.2 (d))

¹⁵ Here I give the text and translation of a standard Theravādin account of the schisms, taken from the beginning of Chapter 5 of the Mahāvamsa, the most important of the Sri Lankan histories. I use Geiger's translation, except that the names of the sects have been modified to agree with the forms found in the text itself.

1. yā mahākassapādīhi , mahātherehi ādito. katā saddhamma saṃgīti, theriyā'ti pavuccati.
2. eko'va theravādo so, ādivassasate ahu. aññācariyavādātu, tato oraṃ ajāyisuṃ.
3. tehi saṃgītikārehi, therehi dutiyehi te. niggahitā pāpabhikkhū, sabbe dasasahassakā.
4. akamsā'cariyavādaṃ te, mahāsaṃgītināmakā. tato gokulikā jātā, ekabbohārikāpi ca.
5. gokulikehi paṇṇatti-vādā bāhulikāpi ca. cetiyavādā tesveva, samatāsaṅghikā cha te.
6. punāpi theravādehi, mahiṃsāsakabhikkhavo. vajjīputtakabhikkhū ca, duve jātā ime khalu.
7. jātā'tha dhammuttariyā, bhadrāyānikabhikkhavo. channāgārā sammitiyā, vajjīputtiyabhikkhūti.
8. mahiṃsāsakabhikkhūhi, bhikkhū sabbattha vādino. dhammaguttiyabhikkhū ca, jātā khalu ime duve.
9. jātā sabbatthivādīhi, kassapiyā tato pana. jātā saṅkantikā bhikkhū, suttavādā tato pana.
10. theravādena saha te, honti dvādasī'mepi ca. pubbe vuttachavādā ca, iti aṭṭhārasā khilā.
11. sattarasāpi dutiye, jātā vasassate iti. aññācariyavādā tu, tato oramañāyisuṃ.
12. hematā rājagiriya, tathā siddhatthikāpi ca. pubbaseliyabhikkhū ca, tathā aparaseliyā.
13. vājiriyā cha etehi, jambudīpamhi bhinnakā. dhammaruci ca sāgaliyā, laṃkādīpamhi bhinnakā.

1. THAT redaction of the true dhamma, which was arranged at the beginning by the great theras Mahākassapa and others, is called that of the theras.
2. One and united was the Theravāda in the first hundred years. But afterwards arose other schools of doctrine.
3. The heretical bhikkhus, subdued by the theras who had held the Second Council, in all ten thousand,
4. founded the school which bears the name 'Mahāsaṃgīti' [=Mahāsaṅghika]. From this arose the Gokulika and Ekabbohārika (schools).
5. From the Gokulika arose the Paṇṇattivāda and the Bāhulika, from these the Cetiyavāda. (Thus) there are six, with the [Mahā]saṅghika,
6. and yet two more (groups) parted from the followers of the Theravāda: the Mahiṃsāsaka and the Vajjīputtaka bhikkhus.
7. And there parted from them likewise the Dhammuttariya and the Bhadrāyānika bhikkhus, the Channāgāra, the Sammitiya and the Vajjīputtiya bhikkhus.
8. From the Mahiṃsāsaka bhikkhus two (groups) parted, the bhikkhus who held by the Sabbatthavāda and the Dhammaguttiya bhikkhus.
9. From the Sabbattha sect arose the Kassapiya, from these arose the Saṅkantika bhikkhus, from these last the Suttavāda.
10. These are twelve together with (those of) the Theravāda; thereto are added the six schools named and these together are eighteen.
11. Thus in the second century arose seventeen schools, and other schools arose afterwards.
12. The Hemata and the Rājagiriya and likewise the Siddhatthika, the Pubbaseliya bhikkhus, the Aparaseliya,
13. and the Vājiriyā: these six separated (from the rest) in Jambudīpa, the Dhammaruci and the Sāgaliya separated (from the rest) in the island of Lanka.

¹⁶ See, for example, the introduction to the *Visuddhimagga*, where Buddhaghosa describes his work as *mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ desanānayanissitāṃ*, 'relying on the teaching method of the dwellers in the Great Monastery'.

¹⁷ Pali Vinaya 2.72. A variant reading for *vibhajjavāda* is *vibhajjapada*, but Oldenberg and Horner both confirm the reading *vibhajjavāda*.

¹⁸ See, eg., E. FRAUWALLNER, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Roma, Is. M. E. O., 1956 pg. 44 note 5.

¹⁹ E. FRAUWALLNER, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Roma, Is. M. E. O., 1956, pg 7-12.

²⁰ *Sāmantapāsādikā* 1.63ff

²¹ This finding is long established and was one of the bedrock discoveries of the early Indologists. For a recent discussion, see Alex WYNNE, 'How old is the Suttapiṭaka? The relative value of textual and epigraphical sources for the study of early Indian Buddhism.' at: <http://www.ocbs.org/research/Wynne.pdf>

²² *Sāmantapāsādikā* 1.64

²³ Eg. Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*, trans. by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, Motilal 2004, Chapter 3, pp 29-33.

²⁴ In this case, there is some ambiguity between the doctrinal and geographical schisms. It is possible, as argued by Wynne, that Majjhantika's school was originally Vibhajjavādin but later converted to the Sarvāstivāda doctrine; this would explain the existence of a separate Sarvāstivāda community from Mathura, which later came into conflict with the Kashmir school, and claimed to be the 'original': Mūlasarvāstivāda. Be that as it may, the connection of the Sarvāstivādin patriarch Majjhantika with this mission is unambiguous.

²⁵ The *Sāsanavaṃsa* makes this explicit: *Mahiṃsakamaṇḍalam nāma andhakarattṭham*

²⁶ Nalinaksha DUTT, *Buddhist Sects in India*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, pg. 123

²⁷ *Thūpavaṃsa* 20: *yonakarattṭhe alasaṇḍā nagarato yonaka dhammarakkhitatthero tiṃsa bhikkhu sahasāni* ('... from the city of Alexandria in the Yonaka country, Yonaka Dhammarakkhita and 30 000 monks...'). This refers to his visit to the opening of the Great Stupa in Sri Lanka.

²⁸ The commentaries treat the two words together, eg. *Dhammapāda Aṭṭhakathā* 257: *Dhammassa guttoti so dhammagutto dhammarakkhito*. In the records of the missions, there is perhaps even a suggestion of this very substitution happening to one of the other monks. To appreciate this, we must first remark on the habit of Pali to group several similar names. Thus in our current context we have several '-rakkhita': Yonakadhammarakkhita, Mahādhammarakkhita, Yonakamahādhammarakkhita, Mahārakkhita, and plain old Rakkhita. This seems too many for coincidence, and I suspect some confusion in the names. In *Mahāvaṃsa* 29, the passage on the return for blessing the Great Stupa, we find more of the same: Buddharakkhita, Dhammarakkhita, and Sangharakkhita. A few verses later we find -rakkhita replaced with -gutta: Cittagutta, Candagutta, and Suriyagutta. The last two seem especially artificial, 'Moon-guarded' and 'Sun-guarded'. Now this Candagutta (Moon-guarded) is said to return from Vanavāsa. But in the original mission, Rakkhita is sent to Vanavāsa. Is it possible to identify Rakkhita with (Canda-)gutta?

²⁹ This Asokārāma is, of course, the great monastery that was established by Asoka, and features as the main centre of activity for the ancient Sthaviras around the time of the Third Council. Yonaka Dhammarakkhita is depicted as flying there with his psychic powers, an act that inspired Asoka's brother Tissa to ordain as a monk. (Sāmantapāsādikā 1.55)

³⁰ Such as the mention of Milinda visiting the six heretical teachers who lived in the time of the Buddha.

³¹ <http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/milinda/ml-01.htm>

³² According to Thich Minh Chau: '...we cannot detect any characteristic in the Chinese text which helps classify it into one of the 20 Buddhist schools which sprang up after the demise of the Buddha.' But I think there are a few hints that point in a consistent direction: the Chinese, unlike the Pali, says Nāgasena is born in Kashmir; and the Pali version, contrary to the normal position of the school, accepts two unconditioned elements – Nibbana and space. There is, of course, one school that is based in Kashmir, accepts space as unconditioned, is not of the Vibhajjavāda, and whose texts are frequently found in Chinese translation: the Sarvāstivāda. Whether this is the school of the Chinese version of the Milinda or not, it remains the fact that the most striking and interesting aspect of the text is the very absence of marked sectarian characteristics, in sharp contrast with the Pali version.

³³ Thomas McEVILLEY, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, Allworth Press, 2002, pg. 378

³⁴ Nalinaksha DUTT, *Buddhist Sects in India*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, pg. 172

³⁵ W. PACHOW, *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa*, Motilal Banarsidass 2000, pg. 39

³⁶ See CHENG Jianhua, *A Critical Translation of Fan Dong Jing, the Chinese Version of Brahmajala Sutra*. (This was formerly available online, but I can currently only find an imperfect version at:

<http://dhamma.ru/forum/viewtopic.php?t=63&view=next&sid=aa5e5aa01b0555d6458e9dea3df32c91>)

³⁷ E. FRAUWALLNER, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, State University of New York Press, 1995, pg. 116

³⁸ See above note from the Thūpavaṃsa. The event is earlier recorded in Mahāvamsa 29: *Yonanaḡarā'lasandāso, yona mahādhammarakkhito; thero tiṃsa sahasāni bhikkhū ādāya āgamā*.

³⁹ CBETA, T50, no. 2059, p. 342, b11-c7. The Liang Biographies (lives of the Buddhist monks) was completed by Huijiao (497-554) in the Liang dynasty. Translated from the Chinese by Bhikkhuni Samacittā, edited by Bhikkhu Sujāto.

⁴⁰ 鐵薩羅, *tie-sa-luo*. It is not sure how this name should be reconstructed. *Sa-luo* probably is a phonetic representation of *sārā*, or perhaps *sarā*, although it should be noted that the character 薩 at that time was probably pronounced *sat*. The first element is usually interpreted as a phonetic character and the whole rendered (implausibly) as *devasārā* or (more plausibly) *tessarā* (this name does not seem to be attested in Pali, but is apparently known in Sinhalese with the meaning 'swan'). However, the character 鐵 does not seem to be used anywhere else phonetically, but rather in its meaning of 'iron'. The Pali for iron is *ayas*, which would give us *ayassārā*. This is an implausible name, but the usual term of address for Bhikkhunis is *ayyā*. I suggest that the Chinese translator mistook the honorific (which, if these were the first Sinhalese bhikkhunis, he would have been unfamiliar with), and when the nun was referred to as 'Ayyā Sārā' (Venerable Sārā) he thought they were saying the nearly identical-sounding *ayassārā*.

⁴¹ CBETA, T50, no. 2063, p. 939, c6-p. 940, a3

⁴² CBETA, T50, no. 2063, p. 941, a8-b2

⁴³ Pali Vinaya 2.298

⁴⁴ Sāmantapāsādikā 1.51: *Majjhantikattherena ācariyena upasampādesi*.

⁴⁵ See Norman Joseph SMITH 'The 17 Versions of The Buddha's First Discourse' (Proposed Submission to Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (JIABS)), 2001

⁴⁶ My thanks to Venerables Brahmāli and Santidhammo for pointing this out.

⁴⁷ Pali Vinaya 1.105

⁴⁸ Pali Vinaya 1.128

⁴⁹ Pali Vinaya 1.165

⁵⁰ Pali Vinaya 1.105, etc.

⁵¹ Pali Vinaya 2.256

⁵² Pali Vinaya 2.271

⁵³ Eg. Pali Vinaya 2.274

⁵⁴ Pali Vinaya 4.214

⁵⁵ Pali Vinaya 4.52

⁵⁶ Pali Vinaya 1.22

⁵⁷ Pali Vinaya 1.56

⁵⁸ Pali Vinaya 4.214, quoted above.

⁵⁹ Thī 109

⁶⁰ Apadāna Therī 2.3.44

⁶¹ T24, no. 1461, p. 668, c21

⁶² T04, no. 200, p. 238, b25 ff. Also see T53, no. 2122, p. 557, c21, etc.

⁶³ T22, no. 1428, p. 714, a17

⁶⁴ T40, no. 1808, p. 499, b12

⁶⁵ T24, no. 1463, p. 803, c1-2

⁶⁶ T40, no. 1810, p. 540, c24

⁶⁷ Willemen, pp. 13, 68.

⁶⁸ SN 5.2/SA (T 99) 1198/SA (T100) 215