Śrāvaka Ordination in a Mahāyāna Embrace: Triple Platform Ordination in Chinese Buddhism

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The use of Chinese tradition *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations to revitalize female monastic lineages in other traditions has led to disputes as to their Mahāyāna status. Here we examine the Chinese Buddhist triple platform ordination in terms of its Mahāyānic features using a polythetic rather than monothetic definition of what constitutes Mahāyāna Buddhism. Our examination of these ordinations' organizational structures, preceptors and preceptees, and daily lifestyle, as well as the rites themselves for each of the three ordinations and the instructive lectures that accompany the rites, reveals that the Mahāyāna spirit pervades and embraces the entirety of these ordinations.

Keywords: Chinese Buddhism, ordination, Mahāyāna, triple platform ordination, monasticism, *bhikkhunī* ordination

THE DISPUTED STATUS OF MAHĀYĀNA ORDINATIONS

The Mahāyāna first appeared in Sri Lanka during the fourth century CE, according to Walpola Rahula's *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, when "the king ... is said to have suppressed Vaitulyavāda, keeping heretics in check with the assistance of his minister Kapila, who was evidently well-versed both in the law of the Buddha and in that of the land."[1] Not long thereafter, Buddhaghosa claimed that those very same heretics advocated a range of perverse views and practices, and according to the *Nikāyasaṅgraha* they claimed the "false teachings" of the Sanskrit Vaipulya-*piṭaka* as the word of the Buddha, "composed by the heretic

1. Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period, 3rd Century BC–10th Century AC* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: M.D. Gunasena, 1956), 87.

brahmanas called Vaitulyas who had assumed the garb of bhikkhus in order to ruin Buddhism during the time of Asoka."[2] Not a particularly auspicious start for the then-fledgling Mahāyāna in being accepted by mainstream Buddhist traditions.

A millennium and a half later, some of the criticisms of lineages that are being used against the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination in South Asia are still reading from the same playbook. Part of the criticism of such ordinations is expressed with the claim that these new "Mahāyāna nuns" are ordained by "Mahāyāna monks," where the ordination's association with "Mahāyāna" is used to imply that the monastic ordination should therefore be considered invalid or a corruption of Theravādin tradition.[3] (Underlying this argument is a broader nationalist and xenophobic resistance in which we see a clash of cultures in the modern globalized Buddhist sphere,[4] though we will not focus on that here.) More progressive figures, particularly scholars, have with more nuance countered that this critique is invalid, as the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* ordinations themselves are based on one or other of the early Indian *vinayas* and are therefore not Mahāyānic per se. Seeger succinctly sums up this position when he states:

> At this point, however, it must be noted that Mahāyāna did not develop its own *vinaya* texts but used *vinaya* texts of pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, of which Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka are only two. The designation "Mahāyāna monks," which is widely used in the Thai nun ordination controversy, therefore disguises the problem at the core of the disagreement about nun ordination, namely the interpretation of the *Vinaya*.[5]

2. Ibid., 89.

3. For example, Tessa Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147, 168, 181; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 397–398; Hiroko Kawanami, "The Bhikkhunī Ordination Debate: Global Aspirations, Local Concerns, with Special Emphasis on the Views of the Monastic Community in Burma," *Buddhist Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2007): 226–244; Ann Heirman, "Buddhist Nuns: Between Past and Present," *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions 58* (2011): 620–621.

4. Heirman, "Buddhist Nuns," 616.

5. Martin Seeger, "The Bhikkhunī-Ordination Controversy in Thailand," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (2006): 162.

We can also see the implied hard separation of mainstream and Mahāyānic ordinations in Heirman's description of the problem when she appears to "link" the *bhikṣuṇī* and Mahāyāna ordinations, with the latter being "added" to the former, rather than considering that Mahāyānic content is actually contained within the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination itself.[6] That is, if the mainstream *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations can be shown to have no Mahāyāna content, then there is no reason to not accept their validity in reviving a *bhikkhunī* lineage.

Many have pointed out the irony that the source of these present-day revived *bhikkhunī* ordination traditions is China (via Taiwan), which itself established its *bhikṣuṇī* ordination tradition through nuns from Sri Lanka. Chinese Buddhist monastic ordinations are threefold. In addition to the equivalent *śramaṇera* (沙彌) / *śramaṇerika* (沙彌尼) and *bhikṣu* (比丘) / *bhikṣuṇī* (比丘尼) ordinations that are also found in non-Mahāyāna Buddhist cultures, there is also a third rite, that of Mahāyāna bodhisattva ordination. While these three ordinations are conferred in three distinct rites, does this mean that they are hermetically sealed from one another? That is to say, while it is true that, strictly speaking, *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* monastic ordinations in China are based on the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* tradition, is it really such a simple matter that the elements of monastic ordination and Mahāyāna ordination can be clearly separated and demarcated from one another? Does the fact that the set of *prātimokṣa* precepts conferred in the *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations are from Dharmaguptaka texts necessarily entail that the actual entire *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* ordination processes themselves follow—in the letter and the spirit—this ancient Indian non-Mahāyāna sect? Does the use of, or being based upon, a non-Mahāyāna *vinaya* text equal a non-Mahāyāna ordination rite? However, as we shall demonstrate in this paper, Mahāyāna elements pervade the entirety of Chinese Buddhism, and the first two rites of novice and full ordination are no exception. A closer understanding of the entire process of ordination is required, not just from the perspective of the texts and precepts received, but the rites themselves. We will here only confront the argument that the Dharmaguptaka ordination

6. Heirman, "Buddhist Nuns," 619: "An additional obstacle, at least for the Theravāda nuns, is that the Dharmaguptaka nuns also follow the Mahāyāna tradition, and thus the bodhisattva vows and bodhisattva ordination are linked to it. The latter ordination is added to the traditional vinaya ordination."

as used in present-day Chinese and Taiwanese ordination systems are non-Mahāyānic in content due to being based on the *vinayas* of mainstream non-Mahāyāna schools in India. The whole host of other "major technical issues," as Heirman rightly calls them, are beyond the scope of our study here, such as whether a Dharmagupta *bhikṣuṇī* ordination can be used to re-establish a Theravādin *bhikkunī* lineage, or the fact that many East Asian orders of nuns do not follow the practice of the probationary period before full ordination. We shall, however, return to some of these larger considerations in our conclusions that shall follow to point out that this should still be no obstacle for the revival of *bhikṣuṇī* lineages in Buddhist cultures where they have either perished or never existed by using the traditions from Chinese traditions based on the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* system.

In order to establish the Mahāyānic content of contemporary Chinese Buddhist ordinations, this paper will examine the triple platform ordination (三壇大戒) as it is practiced in Taiwanese Buddhism. Our case study is the ordination practices of Fo Guang Shan (佛光山, hereafter FGS), which was in fact one of the very monastic institutions that has been instrumental in the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination in Theravādin South Asia, through ordinations at Los Angeles in 1988 and Bodh-gayā in 1998.[7] Our main case study will be the triple platform ordination held at Fo Guang Shan's branch in the Southern Hemisphere, Nan Tian Temple (南天寺) in Wollongong Australia, in November 2004. The founder of Fo Guang Shan is Venerable Hsing Yun (星雲), who has a strong connection to *vinaya* traditions. Not only was he ordained at Baohua Shan (寶華山), that classical center of Chinese Buddhist *vinaya* and the Vinaya tradition (律宗) for the past several centuries, but as a young monk he also participated in several triple platform ordinations there as monastic support staff and studied at the nearby Qixia Monastery Vinaya College (棲霞寺律學院),[8] which is less than 10 km to the west. As such the ordination process of this monastic order should be quite representative of contemporary Chinese Buddhist ordinations as a whole.

I must disclose from the outset that the material presented here does not primarily derive from textual sources and interviews as an

7. Kawanami, "The Bhikkhunī Ordination Debate," 227.

8. Chi-Ying Fu, *Handing Down the Light: The Biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun* (Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2004), 20, 29–31.

outside scholar to these rites. Much of the relevant material of these ordinations is typically not recorded or otherwise made public, and Buddhist monastic ordination rites have, from ancient times, proscribed participation by anyone other than the preceptors and preceptees themselves. In the contemporary Chinese tradition, this fact has already been pointed out in Welch's classic study half a century ago, when he states:

> Whereas the other parts of the ordination could be witnessed by outsiders, these vows were administered on the secluded ordination platform (*chieh-t'ai* [*jietai* 戒台]) and all outsiders were barred. Prip-Møller, one of the few foreigners who has witnessed it, writes: "That which was seen here is probably the most solemn ceremony with the Buddhist ritual, conducted in a spirit of devotion on the part of all the participants which is so wholehearted as to be seldom seen in the temples."[9]

In addition to citing Prip-Møller, Welch also refers to the earlier fieldwork of Reichelt and De Groot, though points out numerous glaring inconsistencies in the information provided by all three that make their testimony quite suspect.[10] It is worth noting that Welch's observations, even while excluding witnessing the rites proper, took place at Baohua Shan in Jiangsu Province, at a time only a few years earlier than Hsing Yun's own ordination and later involvement there.[11] This makes comparisons between Welch's observations and our own at Fo Guang Shan appropriate.

When these lay Western scholars witnessed the ordination rites to varying degrees, quite possibly in a manner wherein they were not entirely clear as to what was occurring, it was as outside spectators. For

9. Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950*, Harvard East Asian Series, vol. 26 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1967), 291.

10. Ibid., 286. He explains the discrepancies and confusion in 503n53: "According to Prip-Møller and Reichelt, the 250 vows were taken during the sramanera ordination and the fifty-eight vows of the Fan-wang ching were taken during the bhiksu ordination." Also, "De Groot states that the begging bowls, clothes, and other regalia were given to the ordinands during the bhiksu ordination." De Groot also confuses tonsure and the five precepts with monastic ordination.

11. Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 286–301. Welch also notes that Qixia was also a "reputable monastery" of similar significance to Baohua Shan (p. 296).

this study here, the material is from having directly witnessed these ordination platform rituals first as a preceptee, which included the entire training regimen, and then subsequently as a witness when I served as an attendant to one of the preceptors. In addition, I shall rely on originals of the various ordination ritual procedure manuals (儀軌) in Chinese and English (which I assisted in translating in the months before the ordination), as well as a publication known as the *Ordination Records*, copies of which were given only to participants of the event and not publicly distributed as far as I know.

This kind of "retrospective fieldwork" relies more upon recollection of events after the fact rather than field notes of observations and interviews taken at the time and is emic due to my participant-observer status. Using this approach here is in many ways similar to that of Buswell in his 1992 work, *The Zen Monastic Experience*, based on his five years as a monk in the Korean Son (Zen) tradition, and also more recently Dreyfus's *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* in 2003, which provides rare glimpses of Tibetan scholasticism from his own fifteen years within the tradition.[12] Buswell in particular discusses some of the advantages of this approach as against that of normative academic ethnography in the context of monasticism, which are worth repeating here.[13] In his role as a monk among monks, he does not need to pay informants for personal interviews and can overcome many monastics' reticence to talk about their lives as spiritual practice to outsiders, that is, those who do not share the religious vocation. Fraternal conversations between monastics may also avoid answers and responses in which the subject is consciously shaping their words in the light of what they themselves think the interviewer wishes to hear. An anthropologist or ethnographer from outside the community will likely enjoin their subjects with a particular theory or hypothesis in mind that they wish to prove (or disprove), which will in turn focus their lens of attention. As an insider using participant observation, one's attention is the same as other subjects' in the group (of which they are a member) and as such

12. Robert E. Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2003).

13. Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience*, 14–16.

is in a far better position to know their experiences as they live them.[14] They also share a common cultural language, that of Chinese monasticism, which increases mutual understanding, unlike an etic observer who may struggle with the rich terminology of monastic life even as a native speaker of Chinese without years of living in monastic environments.[15] This is seen in Buswell's prioritizing of insider status when he states: "I would even go so far as to say that only by living together with the monks as a monk does the researcher have much hope of gaining an accurate picture of the monks' lives and the motivations that underlie it."[16] All monastics have different motivations, as he himself admits, and therefore this bold claim should be made with due care. As Buswell, like myself, was not a native to the Buddhist cultures in which we participated, the very real cultural gap between the observer and their subject needs to be acknowledged. However, this criticism applies to both etic and emic approaches to any cultural knowledge and ultimately comes down to how well the researcher knows their subject.

Regarding one of the most common criticisms of emic studies, that the scholar is there to support the tradition in question, promote its good qualities and hide the bad, carry out apologetics, and so on, whether consciously or unconsciously, I would like to echo Dreyfus's acknowledgement of the autobiographical limits of such retrospective fieldwork: "I have made no pretence of being objective," nor attempt to paint a "rosy picture" of monastic life, writing as an apologist.[17] Yet having so said, I feel the need to restate that the vast majority of material used is not a description of my personal monastic "experiences," which are most opaque to external verification, but material that does in fact have an objective element, for example, the content of ordination manuals, including liturgical content and ritual elements, excerpts

14. Johannes Fabian, "Ethnography and Memory," in *Ethnographic Practice in the Present*, ed. Marit Melhuus, Jon P. Mitchell, and Helena Wulff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 18.

15. I have known other Western scholars, specialists in contemporary Chinese Buddhist monastic culture, who still struggle with terminology for monastic names, titles, and forms of address, daily and calendrical ritual events and paraphernalia, monastery spaces and buildings, and so forth. It typically takes postulants the several years of Buddhist college education to be educated in this cultural language.

16. Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience*, 15–16.

17. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 3–4.

from preceptees' daily journal entries, organizational structures, and so forth. Much of this was printed or could also be seen and heard by anyone else present at the time, and very little if anything is drawn purely from memory. The main advantage of the emic participant observer was therefore *access* to this material, which unfolds in a space restricted to the preceptors and preceptees of the ordinations themselves, rather than some internal personal and subjective content.

This difficulty in direct access to the ordination rites and their surrounding activities can be further seen in the general absence of such studies within recent research on modern Chinese Buddhist *vinaya* and monasticism as a whole. Bianchi and Campo have, for example, given us an excellent account of the revival of *vinaya* and ordination traditions in twentieth and early twenty-first century PRC.[18] From this account, we can see how the discontinuity of these traditions, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, was subsequently followed with a strong revival in more recent times. Backed by Buddhist leaders as well as government support, it had the stated goal of bringing nation-wide standardization and unity in both theory and practice for monastic discipline. It was paralleled with broad changes to monastic qualifications and education, partly so as to eliminate perceptions of monastic corruption and immorality through purity and orthodoxy within the *saṅgha*. While these valuable studies analyze one of the most historically significant periods of Chinese Buddhism, they do not provide us with much insight as to the actual procedures and rituals of *vinaya* ordination itself or its doctrinal content. Other studies have focused on developments in Taiwan, such as the work by DeVido and Cheng. They have paid critical attention to the strength of the *bhikṣuṇī* traditions there, particularly as they relate to the transplanting of women's ordination from Taiwanese monasteries and nunneries to Buddhist cultures that have long lacked them in South Asian Theravādin and

18. Ester Bianchi, "Yi jie wei shi 以戒為師: Theory and Practice of Monastic Discipline in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Buddhism," *Studies in Chinese Religions 3*, no. 2 (2017): 111–141; Ester Bianchi, "Transmitting the Precepts in Conformity with the Dharma," in *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, ed. Ji Zhe, Gareth Fisher, and André Laliberté (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 152–170; and Daniela Campo, "A Different Buddhist Revival: The Promotion of Vinaya (*jielü* 戒律) in Republican China," *Journal Of Global Buddhism* 18 (2017): 129–154.

Tibetan-Himalayan Buddhist communities.[19] We do not see, however, the very rites that all these *bhikṣuṇīs* undergo in this process of transplantation from one soil to another. This study here aims to fill this lacuna and provide a clear and thick description of the content of these ordinations processes, as well as an analysis of their Mahāyānic elements.

As for the structure of our material here, after a brief note on the classical foundations and traditions behind them, we shall investigate the organizational and operational structures, which include the preceptors, preceptees, and support staff, as well as their daily lifestyle and schedule. Next is a detailed examination of each of the rites used for the three platforms, that is, for *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā, bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī*, and bodhisattva ordination. Lastly, we shall touch upon the *vinaya* teachings and thought promulgated during the ordination period. Throughout this my goal is to achieve two things in particular: first, to simply present the content of the triple ordination in terms of the texts, rituals, and practices and their underlying thought; and second, to show the Mahāyāna embrace that permeates all three ordinations, not merely the bodhisattva ordination proper. From this, we may return to the question of whether such an ordination by "Mahāyāna monks" results in "Mahāyāna nuns," as we examine the very question of what actually constitutes a "Mahāyāna ordination."

1. Defining a "Mahāyāna Ordination"

The triple platform ordination under examination is performed by Chinese Buddhist traditions, which by and large have been viewed, both internally and externally, as being strongly Mahāyānic in character. The individual platforms themselves, in terms of the ordinations that they impart, however, can be clearly and readily separated into those pertaining to non-Mahāyānic sets of precepts and associated status, that is, novice *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī*, and that of Mahāyānic bodhisattva precepts and status. As mentioned previously, some critics refer to the first point when they claim that anyone (most notably *bhikkhunīs*) ordained via the triple platform method is therefore a Māhāyānikā, given that the entire Chinese tradition is

19. Elise Anne DeVido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012); Wei-Yi Cheng, *Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: A Critique of the Feminist Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

Mahāyānic and carried out by those who themselves espouse the way of the bodhisattva. Others, however, including defenders of the legitimacy of those (again mostly *bhikkhunī*) preceptees, rely on the second point to affirm the preceptees status as ordained celibate monastics via the Dharmaguptaka ordination in the first and second rites. By this line of thought, the third rite of bodhisattva ordination would also not be seen to inherently negate the rites of the former two platforms.

Within this impasse of positions, to which both sides are rather unwilling to give much ground, there is an implied question: What makes an ordination a Mahāyāna ordination? This question has already been asked, in a rather broader sense, by Silk in his "What, If Anything, Is Mahāyāna Buddhism?"[20] Silk's inquiry into this problem through monothetic and polythetic typological definitions can provide us with a sharper tool for analysis of the status of the triple platform ordination, and our study here can provide an example of how such an approach may have practical application. As Silk points out, when focusing on a question such as what constitutes a "Mahāyāna ordination," we are simultaneously distinguishing this notion from other forms of ordination. As we define the former, we are implicitly classifying a wider range of associated concepts.[21] Typically, the "other" of the "Mahāyāna" has appeared under a few different terms, such as "sectarian Buddhism," "Nikāya Buddhism" and "Śrāvakayāna," the now largely outdated polemic term "Hīnayāna," and the more recent notion of "mainstream Buddhism," showing how "at least most of the conceptualizations of Mahāyāna Buddhism so far [are] that it is one pole of a binary set."[22] This binary positioning of the Mahāyāna in general does also appear to be apparent in the ways in which ordination is perceived and conceptualized, particularly by opponents to validity of *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations.

Further adding to the confusion of ordination status, I believe, is the common failure to differentiate between the notions of what we may call doctrinal schools, such as "*vāda*" (說), and monastic lineages

20. Jonathan Silk, "What, If Anything, Is Mahāyāna Buddhism? Problems of Definitions and Classifications," *Numen* 49, no. 4 (2002): 355–405.
21. Ibid., 355.
22. Ibid., 356.

of *vinaya* ordination, such as "*nikāya*" (部).[23] In some cases, there may be an overlap between a given *vāda* and a *vinaya* lineage, such as in the case of the Theravāda: all Theravādin traditions use the same basic Pāli *vinaya* and uphold the same basic philosophical tenets.[24] While this matter is discussed by Silk in considerable detail, it may be particularly relevant to also include a third distinction that is also often conflated, that of vehicle,[25] that is, "*yāna*" (乘), referring to the ultimate goal of religious practice. After all, Mahā-yāna is, in the most literal sense, neither a *vāda* as a doctrinal system nor a *nikāya* as a lineage of ordination, as we presently understand the relationship between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna at the time of its formation.[26] As such, this affects the way in which we may contrast a Dharmaguptaka or Theravādin *bhikṣu*/*bhikṣuṇī* ordination with the third altar bodhisattva rite. The very question of a *vāda*, or school of doctrinal thought, is still then distinct from the *nikāya* into which one takes full monastic ordination and the *yāna* upon which the individual practices, which is only explicitly given in the third platform and does not apply to the first two ordinations.

Defining the "Mahāyāna" in "Mahāyāna ordination" is then crucial. As Silk also points out, here, a lexical definition is required, rather than a stipulative definition.[27] That is, I do not seek to make a declarative statement about what constitutes Mahāyāna in order to ascertain which ordinations, or parts thereof, are Mahāyāna and which are not. Rather, I draw from an understanding of the Mahāyāna in order to examine ordinations and their constitutional elements. Silk, well aware

23. Ibid., 363. I also concur with Silk against de la Vallee Poussin, in that the term "sect" is an inappropriate translation for "*nikāya*," given the classical Western/Christian connotations of the former. For Buddhism, effectively the *nikāyas* as a whole constitute the *saṅgha* (church?), thus leaving no opposition between church and sect.

24. We will set aside the issue of those, shall we say, sub-*nikāyas*, found in places such as Thailand, which may or may not accept the ordinations of other sub-*nikāyas*, despite the use of the same set of Pāli texts and commentarial (*vāda*) interpretation (in the pre-modern period).

25. I find the metaphorical term "vehicle" a rather bland translation for Sanskrit "*yāna*." However, given that it has become the standard English translation, with few if any rivals, it will have to suffice for the present.

26. That is, the Mahāyāna did not form as a distinct and separate *nikāya*, but rather within the already established *nikāyas* of the time.

27. Silk, "What, If Anything, Is Mahāyāna Buddhism?," 384.

of the restrictions that binary definitions have about conceptualization of these categories, considered that essentialism was largely at the heart of the problem: "One problem is that this type of definition aims at identifying an essence. These definitions aim to locate one or a very few characteristics that are definitive. And this is very problematic."[28] Such definitions indicate both qualification for inclusion into a class, as well as exclusion.[29] By essence, Silk states, "we ordinarily assume that we can do this by locating the definitive features or characteristics of the object of our definition, the feature or group of features which are necessary and sufficient to determine membership in the class."[30]

The debate concerning whether or not the triple platform ordination is Mahāyānic, and hence invalid in Theravādin terms, seldom if ever makes explicit the essence of what constitutes the Mahāyāna. For this reason, at least, it is absolutely critical to move away from a monothetic definition to a polythetic definition of the class known as Mahāyāna.[31] For a monothetic approach, if we rely upon a single essence or essences all of which must be necessarily featured in order to qualify, there will be great difficulties in that individual texts, rites, or the like are partial and never intend to act as all-inclusive summaries of the Mahāyāna. For example, if we consider a particular doctrinal position, say, "all *dharmas* are empty," as a necessary requirement for the class Mahāyāna, we may find that a bodhisattva ordination rite may not even mention this, as it is concerned with precepts and the ethics of action rather than philosophical points of view. Or, a text such as the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, so often considered quintessentially Mahāyāna, does not mention bodhisattvas or the bodhisattva path at all. If the way of the bodhisattva is a necessary essence of the class Mahāyāna, then this text of Nāgārjuna would not qualify. Yet, both "all *dharmas* are empty" and the bodhisattva path are examples of teachings commonly considered as Mahāyānic. If we apply a polythetic definition, both of these teachings, as well as other typically Mahāyānic concepts, doctrines, practices, rites, and so forth, can all be considered as elements. The difference is that, in a polythetic class,

28. Ibid., 385.
29. Ibid., 385.
30. Ibid., 385.
31. Ibid., 385–387.

> to be considered a member of the class each object must possesses a large (but unspecified) number of features or characteristics which are considered relevant for membership in that class. And each such set of features must be possessed by a large number of members of the class. But—and this is the key—there is no set of features which must be possessed by every member of the class. There is no one feature or set of features necessary and sufficient for inclusion in the class.[32]

It then just remains to be decided which features or characteristics are under consideration. When considering each of our three platform rites as well as the entire triple platform ordination as a whole through a polythetic approach, our analysis will lead less to an answer of "yes" or "no" as to Mahāyāna status and more to a sliding scale or degree to which these features are present. We may in turn divide these features into those which are common to all participants, irrespective of the individual rites proper, and those features that only apply to specific platform rites. This distinction is necessary for our polythetic definition, lest we simply and naïvely wish to argue that the first two rites are in no way Mahāyānic because they are novice and fully ordained monastic rites, and that that the third rite is entirely Mahāyānic as it is a bodhisattva ordination. As we are about to see, the actual details of the entire process of the triple platform are far more complex than that. It is to these concrete specifics and details rather than the abstract that we must now turn.

2. Organization and Operational Structures and Traditions

Contemporary triple platform ordination practices are the result of a long history of tradition. *Vinaya* texts were brought from greater India to the various states of what now make up present day China and then translated into the language of Han Chinese, starting from the dawn of the fifth century. For some time several different traditions' *vinayas* were used for *śramaṇera, śramaṇerikā*, *bhikṣu*, and *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, until the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* (四分律) became established as the standard system in use.[33] In terms of bodhisattva ordination, there has

32. Ibid., 387.

33. Ann Heirman, "Vinaya: From India to China," in *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, 167–202 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007).

been a long, ongoing debate between the two traditions based on the *Brahmājāla-sūtra* (梵網經) and the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (瑜伽師地論), respectively. In this case example here, the *Brahmājāla-sūtra* is the point of reference for the rite proper, but both bodhisattva precept texts are taught to the preceptees (戒子) in lecture format.

Actual ordination rites in China, such as that used by Fo Guang Shan, follow a tradition that flows from Daoxuan (道宣), the Nanshan Vinaya tradition (南山律宗), through revival by Jianyue Duti (見月讀體) in the Ming then Qing periods.[34] In the Qing and early Republic, the monastery Baohua Shan (寶華山) in the eastern province of Jiangsu became an important center for *vinaya* orthodoxy. Welch states that "[e]very region had one or two monasteries where it was considered particularly desirable to be ordained, but the prestige of [B]ao-hua Shan was nationwide."[35]

Chinese ordination rites are some of the largest scale activities that monasteries can possibly undertake, perhaps only comparable in resources utilized to the "Water and Land Dharma Service" (水陸法會). Due to spanning several weeks to several months, the need to host preceptees often numbering in the hundreds, as well as dozens of elder preceptors and specialist senior monastics in addition to support staff in the kitchens and so forth, the majority of smaller and even medium-sized monasteries are unable to hold such ordination rites without external assistance. FGS is a very large monastic system comprising the main monastery itself along with several hundred monasteries and temples worldwide and is therefore one of the few Taiwanese Buddhist organizations that can manage a triple platform ordination independently without need of cooperation from monasteries outside its own order. Other monasteries typically work together to run such an event, following the various lines of affiliation of Taiwanese monasteries.

FGS typically holds a triple platform ordination event once every three to five years. This provides enough time between events to develop a critical mass of students in their own monastic training colleges (see below) to make each event worthwhile. For the past few decades, events have often alternated between being hosted at the

34. Huaiyu Chen, *The Revival of Buddhist Monasticism in Medieval China* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 93ff.; Campo, "A Different Buddhist Revival," 133, 138; Bianchi, "Transmitting the Precepts," 153.
35. Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 286–289.

main monastery headquarters in Kao Hsiung, Taiwan, and another large branch temple abroad (e.g., Hsi Lai in Los Angeles, Nan Tien in Wollongong, etc.). Notification of each event is given no less than one year in advance, and an ordination committee is established, with members being comprised of the elders and senior monastics (especially ritual specialists) at FGS headquarters, as well as administrative staff at the host location and other nearby monasteries.

3. Preceptors and Preceptees

The principle actors of the ordination are the preceptors and preceptees. In conformity with the *vinaya*, the former consists of "three teachers" (三師) and "seven witnesses" (七證), a total of ten each for both the *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations. Novice ordination requires just three, and the bodhisattva ordination strictly speaking has three bodhisattvas as preceptors.

The former three teachers are typically very senior, elder monastics, assigned the respective roles of *śīla upadhyāya* (得戒阿闍梨/和尚), *karma ācarya* (羯磨阿闍梨), and instructing *ācarya* (教授阿闍梨). The former is the preceptor proper, the second leads repentance and ritual practices, and the latter gives lectures and instruction. In the FGS tradition, for the *bhikṣus*, the three are typically former and present head abbots of FGS, until recently including Hsing Yun himself. For the *bhikṣuṇīs*, they are the most senior of the FGS nuns. The two sets of seven witnesses typically consist of senior monastics and/or ritual specialists, including those from local temples when held abroad. A fairly senior ritual specialist monk serves as the master of ceremonies (開堂和尚), and another monk known for strict practice is the discipline master (糾察). For FGS, all the above are usually FGS monastics, though at times non-FGS elders from affiliated monasteries may be honored with these roles. Finally, there are a number of guiding venerables (引禮), one for each group (堂) of eighteen or more preceptees, in turn comprised of two classes (班, which we will explain below).

Preceptees typically number around two hundred in FGS ordination services, with a male to female ration of approximately 1:5. At the 2004 ordination at Fo Guang Shan's Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong, for example, there were 196 novices, 41 male and 155 female.[36] This in turn

36. This is based on the list of names and photographs on pp. 14–24 of the *Records* (Fo Guang Shan Board of Religious Affairs, *Fo Guang Shan Nan Tien Temple*

reflects the main source of preceptees, that is, FGS Buddhist colleges, where a majority of the preceptees have studied or are still studying at the time of ordination. Ages range from twenty to over sixty, with the younger novices (under thirty-five) who are the majority typically still Buddhist college students. The average age is around thirty-five years old.[37] The novices typically enter the Buddhist colleges as lay students and may seek tonsure at opportunities given several times per year. The selection process is largely in the hands of the college teachers, to be ratified by senior monastics. If accepted for tonsure, they then continue their studies as novices until a triple platform ordination is held. There is the possibility that between tonsure and full ordination they may participate in one of the biannual short-term monastic retreats where they receive novice ordination but do not return to lay life with the rest of the short-term monastic retreat participants. Older preceptees above age thirty-five are typically already serving at various offices in the monastery, having often undertaken cursory training at a college, as the college only (formally) accepts students aged eighteen to thirty-five years old. Over the years, the number of Taiwanese preceptees has gradually fallen, while those from abroad, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and a few Western nations, have proportionally increased. Ethnically, the vast majority are of Chinese heritage. There are a few exceptions, such as women from non-Chinese traditions seeking *bhikṣuṇī* ordination to return back to their home countries to transplant the ordinations there, plus a handful of non-Chinese preceptees who have joined and will stay with the FGS order itself. For FGS ordinations, approximately 10 percent of participants are from affiliated monasteries.[38] While the FGS *śīla upadhyāya* acts in this role for the ordination of those from affiliated monasteries, they still retain their original relationship to their "master" (師父) at their home monastery (本寺) and are not then drawn into the FGS monastic family.

Full Ordination Records [Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Publishing, 2004]). However, on pp. 80 and 185 it states 206. The second number may possibly be based on earlier registered participants, rather than actual turn out.

37. Ibid., 80, 185.

38. Based on dharma names (which indicate lineage affiliations) of preceptees in ibid., 14–24.

4. Daily Lifestyle and Schedule

The daily lifestyle and schedule are critical parts of the ordination, as it is for monastic life in general.[39] The preceptees are all vetted well in advance of the event, during the application process. For FGS, preparatory talks are also given to the preceptees before the event formally begins, stressing the importance of what is a profound life choice for the preceptees.[40] Once they arrive at the monastery hosting the particular event with the usual formalities monastic visits entail, the strict disciplinary requirements, which are some degrees tighter than the discipline of the usual Buddhist college, are immediately put into effect. Symbolic of this, the abbot or abbess of the hosting monastery or temple presents the discipline master with a bound bundle of willow wands, each as thick as a finger.[41] Traditionally these were used to strike the preceptees as punishment for not keeping discipline, but FGS no longer ascribes to such corporeal punishment during ordination or elsewhere in monastic life. The preceptees' possessions are kept to the barest minimum, essentially monastic clothes, shoes, and paraphernalia for the ordination itself; basic toiletries (including razors); and pens and paper for taking notes during lectures, digital devices not being permitted.

The preceptees are organized into "groups" (堂), each led by a guiding venerable, with each group having two "classes" (班) of nine (seldom more) preceptees.[42] Each class has a designated "class leader" (班首), usually reflecting the preceptees' more senior position in the Buddhist college or, for those who are not yet ordained, recent graduates. The first four class leaders from the male and female sides respectively, eight preceptees in total, will step forward and act as representatives for the invitation elements of the rites (see below). After the

39. A day to day record of activities for the 2004 Nan Tien Temple ordination can be found in ibid., 75–98 and 185–203.

40. Preceptees are again interviewed formally after arriving at the location but before the ordination officially begins, but this is largely a formality, as the effective vetting process has already taken place well before this. See ibid., 26.

41. See ibid., 27.

42. Welch seems to only mention "*t'ang*" (堂), which he calls "classes," differing from my usage here which matches that of the *Records*, 14–24. The *Records* does not mention "classes," however, but we can see it as "sub-group" in the preceptees' diaries, 204ff.

leaders, the other eight class members are neatly ordered from tallest to shortest.[43] Shared rooms are also allocated according to group and class, with four to ten (seldom more) preceptees per large room. For all activities, rituals, classes, morning and evening shrine hall services, meals, and monastic chores, the preceptees will line up and be otherwise arranged by their class (and group) order. Effectively spending their time 24/7 together, tight bonds of monastic ordination fraternity and sorority are thus made, and the preceptees call each other "ordination brothers" (戒兄), a relationship even tighter than monastic kinship of "brothers" (師兄) under the same master, which lasts throughout their monastic careers.[44]

Discipline is held to a strict standard of a traditional Chinese Buddhist perception of *vinaya*. Unlike typical Chinese monastic life in which the evening "medicine meal" (藥石) is a full meal, no solid meals or food are taken after midday. Long periods of silence are maintained, especially during the period from evening through the night up until after breakfast the next day. General physical deportment (威儀) is constantly being drilled and corrected, such as the correct way to walk, stand, sit, or lie down; how to don, wear, and remove robes; and the wearing and usage of bowls and sitting mats. The preceptees are under the constant watchful eyes of the guiding venerable for their own and others' groups, and the discipline master supervises over all of them.

As for the daily routine,[45] wake-up for FGS triple platform ordinations is around 5 a.m., followed by morning chanting service (details below), then breakfast. After brief cleaning chores, which are rotated through the groups and classes, morning sessions begin, typically either ritual rehearsal or lectures on the precept content. Lunch, which finishes before noon in accord with *vinaya*, is followed by a short rest period, and then the afternoon sessions are again either ritual practice or further lectures. The late afternoon is given over to monastic chores, ranging from cleaning to gardening or kitchen work. In accord with standard Chinese Buddhist practice, while no solids are eaten after midday, there is the evening meal called "medicine meal"

43. See Welch's comment on selection in *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism,* 289.
44. The masculine term is used in Chinese for both the monks and nuns, as it is in the monastery in general.
45. Details of the 2004 Nan Tien ordination schedule can be found in the Appendix of the *Records*, 237–241.

(藥石), which consists of soup or other liquids. This is followed by evening lectures or repentance service, before evening service, and a return to dormitories with lights out to end the day at 10 p.m. The time before sleep is the period when most preceptees will fill in their daily journals, which are passed over to their guiding venerables for brief comment. Each day, particularly inspiring entries will be chosen and pinned to the notice board in the preceptees' dormitory common area for the edification of their ordination brothers. Short breaks in the otherwise busy schedule are filled with group time led by each group's guiding venerable, which involves practical encouragement, informal instruction, and further drilling.

In addition to these scheduled activities, throughout the entire ordination process preceptees are expected to memorize what Welch describes as "a great deal of liturgy."[46] This includes the mantras and *dhāraṇīs* known as the ten minor mantras (十小咒) used during traditional morning chanting service, several sutras such as the *Heart Sutra* (心經) and *Amitābha-sūtra* (佛說阿彌陀經), the pithy verses of the *Daily Vinaya* (毘尼日用), and, in the case of FGS, various creeds and statements of faith in the FGS tradition. Much of this has already been memorized by the preceptees during their time studying at the Buddhist college, particularly for the senior students, or even as a lay person. The preceptees have a check list, each item of which is checked off when they find their guiding venerable and recite the text or item in question from memory in their presence. Despite there seeming to be some urgency in memorizing such material, it is noted that failure to do so seems to entail neither punishment nor disqualification from the ordination itself. It appears that the preceptees are themselves driven to memorize the content as a form of recitation contemplation to strengthen their own practice.

In terms of Mahāyāna content, we see the pervasion of such material throughout the daily schedule. For example, the morning service includes recitation of the very long Śūraṃgama Mantra (楞嚴咒) from the *Śūraṃgama-sūtra* (楞嚴經), a Mahāyāna text containing *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines that was extremely influential in the later Chan tradition. The evening service is based around the chanting of the *Eighty-Eight Buddhas' Repentance* (八十八佛懺悔) along with the *Smaller Amitābha Sutra*, the *Praise of Amitābha* (彌陀讚), and reciting the name

46. Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism,* 290.

of Amitābha, essential to the mainstream Pure Land tradition. It is thus clear that Mahāyāna sutras form the core of both these daily services. They also both end with a particularly Mahāyānic form of taking refuge in the three jewels, which is taken from the "Pure Practices" chapter (淨行品) of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (華嚴經), with each refuge featuring the phrase "vow that all living beings" (當願眾生) as the second of its four lines.

This latter text is the same source as much of the material in the *Daily Vinaya* (which the preceptees aim to memorize, above), which consists of a series of several dozen verses and mantras, each of which is associated with a daily activity that the preceptees will perform throughout their daily lives during the ordination. For example, there are verses to be recited at rising in the morning, donning their robes, taking meals, when walking, and so forth. Most of these verses also have the phrase "vow that all living beings" as the second of four lines. For example, the verses recited after finishing a meal: "After finishing the meal, I vow that all living beings, will accomplish their task, and fulfill the *buddhadharma*" (飯食已訖, 當願眾生, 所作皆辦, 具諸佛法). These vows are effectively bodhisattva-type *bodhicitta* aspiration vows for the benefit of all sentient beings, and they include "awakening to all-knowledge" (一切智覺), that is, vowing that all living beings will attain buddhahood. *Bodhicitta* is part of the preceptees' daily *vinaya*.

The remainder of the mealtime chanting, the Offering Mantra (供養咒),[47] largely consists of chanting while mentally making offerings of the food to representatives of the three bodies of the buddhas, that is, Vairocana as the *dharmakāya*, Rocana as the *sambhogakāya*, and Śākyamuni as the *nirmāṇakāya*; along with the four great bodhisattvas, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Samantabhadra, and Kṣitigarbha; all other buddhas and bodhisattvas; and finally the doctrinal heart of much of East Asian Mahāyāna, namely, *mahāprajñāpāramitā*. After breakfast and lunch, the preceptees also line up in the courtyard by group to chant: "Precepts are the root of unsurpassed *bodhi*, one should uphold the pure precepts single-mindedly" (戒為無上菩提本, 應當一心持淨戒), again alluding to a specifically Mahāyānic goal of their

47. While this is called a 咒 in Chinese, often a translation of "mantra," it does not derive from any known Sanskrit text (whether translated or transliterated). It has become "mantra" in its English translation common usage.

ordination—"unsurpassed *bodhi*" being that of the buddhas, rather than that of the two vehicles.

We can see how this formal bodhisattva content actually affects the preceptees from a sample of the daily journal entries that novices in the FGS Nan Tien ordination wrote daily, which have been collected and published in the *Ordination Records*. "Humanistic Buddhism is suitable for the Western countries; however, how can we combine the tradition and modern Mahāyāna Buddhism together?"[48] "All we can do is to follow the Inspiration to Pledge the Bodhicitta to make vows and resolve on practice and cultivation."[49] These examples are from dates before training and instruction for the bodhisattva ordination began, and so their lecture and ritual training has only been that for novice and *bhikṣu*/*bhikṣuṇī* ordination at this point. Of course, the majority of these preceptees are avowedly Mahāyānist, and more telling journal entries would be those from Theravādin traditions who are participating in these Chinese tradition triple platform ordinations. As I am unaware of whether or not the Nan Tien ordination had such preceptees, and the published diary entries are selections only, we are thus lacking direct evidence in this regard.

5. The Rites in General

The core of the triple platform ordination is the three distinct rites, each conveying a set of precepts or ordination.[50] The entire length of the ordination is thus broken up into three parts of roughly equal length, with each part focusing on and culminating in each of the rites proper. Therefore, before each of the rites themselves take place, the preceptors and guiding venerables have already led the preceptees through numerous sessions of instruction and rehearsal drills. As the general format of each of the ordination rites holds a good deal in common with other Buddhist dharma services (法會) that most of the preceptees are already familiar with through their Buddhist College education and/or previous participation as lay practitioners, the majority of the ritual elements that make up the ordination rites proper soon become well ingrained to them. For example, the shrine space

48. *Records*, 204–205.
49. Ibid., 207.
50. It is here that Welch's information becomes sparse due to the closed nature of the rites, as mentioned previously.

is divided into "west wing" (西單) and "east wing" (東單), the former for women and the latter for men; the central passage from the center shrine door through to the image of the Buddha is not to be crossed (穿堂), as it is reserved for the abbot/abbess or whoever is presiding over a given service; and so forth.[51]

While we will individually discuss in detail each of the three rites below, there are five common elements found throughout all three that we will first cover here in general. The overall structure of all three is broken into three sessions. The first two sessions are the invitation and repentance, which take place the day and night respectively before the third session, ordination, on the following morning. Each of these three sessions is in turn comprised of several smaller elements, which we shall cover here and in the following three parts of our study.

Perhaps the foremost common single action throughout all three rites is that of making prostrations (拜, with feet, knees, hands, and head to the floor), usually proceeded and followed by a bow (問訊, from the waist with palms joined). Both actions have very specific ways of being performed in Chinese Buddhism, with further nuances when performed under particular circumstances such as when also holding texts, incense, sitting mats, and so forth. Prostrations are carried out typically as either a single prostration or as a set of three, with a few occasions of sets of nine (three sets of three). In addition to prostrations to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, a number are made by the preceptees to the three preceptors, and also the guiding venerables. At rough count, the three rites have the preceptees performing over 50, nearly 150, and nearly 100 prostrations respectively, with a comparatively fewer number of bows. During rehearsals, the numbers may be significantly more, as the master of ceremonies and guiding venerables repeatedly drill the preceptees in not only prostrations, but how to prostrate while wearing multiple robes, carrying their bowl, and/or holding their sitting mat. Not only is perfection sought in the

51. See Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui* (Honolulu: Kuroda Institute and University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 89: "This binary system was adopted from a similar one used in the central government system, which divided official into two branches, civilian and military. Even the custom of administrators and chief officers forming two lines on either side of the Dharma hall as the abbot ascends the platform closely resembles the positions of military officers and civilian officials during an audience with the emperor in the imperial palace."

individual preceptees' prostrations and bows, the entire body of preceptees must act as one.

The second common element of all three rites is transference of merit (功德迴向). It is found twice in each of the three ordination rites, in each rite first at the end of the repentance before the ordination rite proper, and again at the end of the rite proper. Apart from the difference in the specific meritorious act which is being transferred, that is, "repentance" or "receiving the precepts," the remainder of the transference liturgy is identical, as follows:

> The merits of repentance / receiving the precepts are superior practices,
> We thus transfer all these unlimited merits.
> May all the sentient beings that are sinking in the mire,
> Swiftly be reborn in the *kṣetra* of the Buddha of Immeasurable Light!
> All buddhas in the ten directions of past, present, and future.
> All bodhisattva *mahāsattvas*, *mahāprajñāpāramitā*![52]

While the practice of transference or dedication of merit is often associated with Mahāyāna Buddhism, in a general form it is also found in non-Mahāyāna traditions. Here, however, it is unmistakably Mahāyāna in spirit and goal, as the buddha referenced is Amitābha (Immeasurable Light) and his buddha-field (*kṣetra*), and there are references to bodhisattvas and the teaching of the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*).

The third and fourth common elements are both forms of invitation (請), for the *śīla upadhyāya* and other preceptors (請戒師/請戒和尚), and again for the "holy ones" (請聖), namely the three jewels and dharma protectors. The invitation or reception of the preceptors involves the eight preceptee representatives (the first four male and four female class leaders), who proceed from the ordination shrine bearing incense, go to a nearby location where the preceptors await, and invite them with liturgical phrases as they offer incense and make prostrations. As the preceptors and representatives return to the ordination shrine followed by the eight representatives, all the preceptees within the shrine sing a "praise" (讚), which ends in three prostrations as they chant "Homage to bodhisattvas *mahāsattvas* who gather like clouds" (南無雲來集菩薩摩訶薩) three times. Such praises are typical at the start of most Chinese Buddhist liturgical services, and their content

52. 懺悔/受戒功德殊勝行, 無邊勝福皆回向. 普願沉溺諸眾生, 速往無量光佛剎. 十方三世一切佛, 一切菩薩摩訶薩, 摩訶般若波羅蜜.

expresses the invitation and arrival to the holy space of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other holy personages.

The invitation to the holy ones, that is, three jewels and dharma protectors, is somewhat longer, and is led by the preceptors who have now already arrived in the shrine. It is divided up into four rounds for the Buddha, dharma, *saṅgha*, and the various dharma protectors (護法), respectively, with each of these four rounds of invitation chanted three times, for a total of twelve invitations. Each begins with the preceptors standing and holding a small match-stick length piece of sandalwood (incense), as they open by chanting: "We welcome you with flowers, we welcome you with incense" (香花迎香花請), followed by chanting a kind of ordination lineage, a list of who's-who, for each of the four objects of invitation. For example, for the invitation to the buddhas we have Śākyamuni, Amitābha, Maitreya, and all the buddhas of the ten directions in past, present, and future. For the dharma, the *vinayas* and *prātimokṣas* of the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna traditions, the twelve-fold canon, and so forth are given. For the *saṅgha*, we have the names of several great bodhisattvas, such as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, Upāli the Vinaya Master, and other *vinaya* masters of old. In our FGS case study here, this invitation specifically includes the Chinese Nanshan Vinaya lineage, right up to Master Ruoshun (若舜) of Qixia Monastery (棲霞). Master Ruoshun (1879–1943) was the *śīla upadhyāya* for Hsing Yun himself,[53] and therefore the specific wording in the invitation thus calls upon an unbroken thread of *vinaya* transmission from the Buddha through to the preceptees. I assume that his mention is specific to this particular ordination lineage, and that other monasteries and *śīla upadhyāya*s would adjust this by indicating their own specific ordination lineages, all of which indicates the living nature of such ritual content. Lastly, the invitation to the dharma protectors includes the *devas* Brahmā, Śakra, and the Four Heavenly Kings; *nāgas*; monastery protectors; *vajra*-bearers; and a generic category of "seen and unseen spirits" (幽顯靈祇). While the figures so invited are not exclusively Mahāyāna, such as the Buddha's disciple and *vinaya* adept Upāli and so-called Hīnayāna *vinayas*, the majority, such as buddhas, bodhisattvas, and teachings referenced, are specifically Mahāyāna elements.

53. Hsing Yun, 參學瑣憶1 / 宗教人士 / 044 若舜老和尚 (Assorted Recollections of Study I, Religious Figures, 44. Old Master Ruoshun), http://books.masterhsingyun.org/ArticleDetail/artcle9927.

The fifth and last common ritual element found in all three ordination platforms is that of repentance. Typically this rite is performed the evening before each of the three ordinations proper, which is why we consider it here as a common element. The *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* and bodhisattva ordinations also have repentance elements during the ordination rite proper, which we shall detail individually in the appropriate subsequent sections. While each of the three repentances differ slightly, they all follow a very similar structure and content. First there is the purification of the altar and invitation to the *karma ācarya*, who leads the repentance (the other two *ācaryas* are not present). Four representatives (two male and two female) this time come forth, with two of them first bearing and later offering incense. After making homage to Avalokiteśvara, all the preceptees chant the *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī* for its purifying efficacy as the preceptors use leafy willow wands to sprinkle water from a special "pure vase" (淨瓶). The *karma ācarya* then gives a short discourse, which in the first ordination makes reference to several Mahāyāna scriptures. Next is a round of questioning, wherein the preceptees are to admit to any past transgressions that they may have committed with respect to precepts that they have previously received and upheld. Following this, the repentance proper differs slightly between that of the *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* ordination on one hand, and that for the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* and bodhisattva ordination. The former includes repenting slandering the three jewels, performing the five heinous transgressions, and other such very serious actions. Among them is the specifically Mahāyāna fault of "slandering the Mahāyāna scriptures and preventing others from the cultivation of *prajñā*." For the last two ordinations, a shorter repentance verse is used, which is a standard practice for all manner of general Chinese Buddhist repentance liturgies. It is repeated three times, with the last line changing each time:

> All the unwholesome deeds that I have committed in the past,
> Due to beginningless greed, hatred, and ignorance.
> Generated through my body, speech, and mind,
> I now confess them before the buddhas. (1) /
> I now confess and repent all my offenses. (2) /
> I now confess all such roots of offenses. (3)[54]

54. 往昔所造諸惡業, 皆由無始貪嗔痴, 從身語意之所生, 今對佛前求懺悔 (1) / 一切罪障皆懺悔 (2) / 一切罪根皆懺悔 (3)

The gist is repentance before the buddhas and bodhisattvas of all transgressions of the three karmas rooted in the three afflictions since time immemorial. While there is really nothing specifically Mahāyāna in this idea of affliction and transgression, it should be pointed out that the practice of repenting before images of buddhas and bodhisattvas is standard practice in Mahāyāna ethics literature,[55] as opposed to repentance before the living *saṅgha* community as found in the early *vinaya* ecclesiastical rites. The repentance service itself ends with a transference of merit, as previously described.

6. First Platform Rites—Śramanera/Śramanerikā Ordination

Having covered the common ritual elements, we now may move into the individual platform rites themselves and their unique elements. For the first platform (初壇), that of *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* ordination (沙彌/沙彌尼戒), many of the preceptees have already taken this ordination in the past, often due to having participated in short term monastic retreats of seven days, which involves the same ordination, either as preceptees or before coming to the Buddhist College. Or they may have participated in short term monastic retreats as guiding venerables or lay staff while students at the Buddhist College. Either way, it means that they often have some previously acquired familiarity with the content. This first platform is comprised of three sessions, each with numerous elements. It is carried out with the *śramaṇeras* and *śramaṇerikās* together, as there is essentially no difference in content

55. See, for example, the *Brahmājāla-sūtra* (CBETA, T. 24, no. 1484, p. 1006, c5–10); *Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva-sūtra* (CBETA, T. 13, no. 409, p. 677, c18–23); **Buddhasamādhisāgara-sūtra* 佛說觀佛三昧海經 (CBETA, T. 15, no. 643, p. 681, b29–c7); etc. This practice is itself also mentioned in the first ordination repentance here: "Those with moderate or lower capacities must follow the Mahāyāna Vaipulya teachings to establish the habit of practicing repentance in order to see that the three spheres are empty, (the three spheres being the actor, recipient, and object), and to cease being influenced by the six sense objects. You should seek a response within a definite time frame, e.g., set up a schedule to practice for seven days, fourteen days, or even for months or years, with the aim seeing an auspicious sign, for example seeing a buddha or bodhisattva, or the like. If you cannot obtain such a sign, you should work harder with even greater sincerity or practice for the rest of your life, with the determination of seeing the image which symbolizes that your negative karma has been eliminated or dissipated."

between the two (unlike the second platform, which has some distinctly different precepts and other requirements). A basic outline of the first platform is as follows:[56]

I Invitation for *Śramaṇera* and *Śramaṇerika* Ordination (初壇請戒)
- 1 Purifying the Hall and Assembly (淨堂集眾)
- 2 Inviting the Guiding Teachers (請引禮師)
- 3 Inviting the Preceptors (正請戒師)
- 4 Discourse from the Instructors (說戒開導)

II The Repentance Ceremony (初壇懺摩)
- 1 Purifying the Altar and Inviting the *Karma Ācarya* (淨壇請師)
- 2 Discourse from the *Karma Ācarya* (預為開導)
- 3 Examination and Revealing Offenses (審罪發露)
- 4 Repentance (懺悔)
- 5 Transfer of Merits (回向)

III *Śramaṇera* and *Śramaṇerika* Ordination Ceremony (初壇正授)
- 1 Gathering of Novices and Inviting the *Ācaryas* (集眾請師)
- 2 Inviting the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (正請戒師)
- 3 Discourse from the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (得戒和尚開導)
- 4 Inviting the Buddhas and Holy Ones (恭請佛聖)
- 5 Repentance (懺悔)
- 6 Questioning about Obstructions (總問遮難)
- 7 Taking the Triple Refuge (皈依)
- 8 Completing the Triple Refuge (結皈)
- 9 Discourse on the Forms of the Precepts (宣說戒相)
- 10 Transmitting the Robe, Almsbowl, and Sitting Mat (傳衣缽具)
- 11 Exhortation Teaching (教囑回向)
- 12 Transfer of Merits (回向)

The first session is the "request for ordination," which we have covered above under common ritual elements. It includes establishing the ordination perimeter (結界), requesting the guiding venerables for guidance, inviting the *śīla upadhyāya*, and finally requesting instruction from the three teachers. The invitation involves eight preceptee representatives (four class leaders each from the *śramaṇeras* and

56. Summarized from Fo Guang Shan Board of Religious Affairs, *First Altar—Śramaṇera and Śramaṇerika Ordination* 初壇儀範 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Publishing, 2004).

śramaṇerikās) taking incense and leaving the shrine to invite the three teachers, who wait seated just outside the shrine, to perform the rite. The instruction involves some general points, and after it is finished the three teachers retire for the session.

The second session occurs that evening, and is a distinct "repentance ceremony." The idea is to purify the mental state of the preceptee in preparation for the ordination itself, "as a washed cloth takes the dye." Again the shrine is first purified with the chanting of praises and the *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī*. The *karma ācarya* then leads the repentance, beginning with a catechistic talk on the ten unwholesome actions. Next, the preceptees are asked if they have committed any of the five heinous infractions or ten unwholesome actions. Straight after this is another set of confessions, which includes the question of whether they "have slandered the Mahāyāna scriptures and have prevented others from the cultivation of *prajñā*" (謗大乘經斷學般若). While "*prajñā*" is a quality extolled in all forms of Buddhism, its pairing with Mahāyāna scriptures gives the impression that it is referring to the more specific *prajñāpāramitā*. Together they amount to a specifically Mahāyāna requirement for this novice ordination. A passage on repentance is then recited, and soon the session finishes.

The third and last session is the *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* ordination proper, held early the next morning. The preceptees again gather in the shrine in their usual formation and invite the *śīla upadhyāya*, who gives a catechistic talk on the novice precepts. Chants to invite the Buddha, dharma, and *saṅgha*, as well as dharma protectors are made, followed by another short repentance. This repentance consists of the standard repentance verses that we mentioned above in common ritual elements. The preceptees are then asked if they have committed any transgressions that will bar them from ordination, and all answer "No." They then take refuge in the three jewels, in standard fashion. Next is the heart of the ordination wherein the ten *śramaṇera/śramaṇerikā* precepts are read, and the preceptees answer that, "Yes," they can uphold them. They are now formally novice monastics. As such, the paraphernalia of their new status, that is, the five-strip robe (五衣), seven-strip robe (七衣), almsbowl (鉢), and sitting mat (尼師壇/臥具), are given to them in order. For each of these four items there are three corresponding verses and mantras that are chanted for their transmission, for receiving them, and for using them (e.g., donning the robes, spreading the mat, etc.), respectively. Some of these verses

contain Mahāyāna content. For example, within the verses for donning the five-strip and seven-strip robes, we see the line "[I] vow to liberate sentient beings" (誓願度眾生). For the spreading of the sitting mat, we have literally, "[I] ascend to the pure ground" (登上清淨地), though this is not the usual expression for a "pure land" (淨土). The use of mantras for all of these items is another marker of Mahāyāna thought and practice.

A final exhortation from the *śīla upadhyāya* follows, which talks about five virtues (五德) that the novices should uphold, the fifth and last of which being: "Aim for the Great Vehicle and for the salvation of all sentient beings. One should cultivate the dharma vigorously, and keep as one's goal the attainment of buddhahood." The newly ordained *śramaṇeras/śramaṇerikās* are asked if they can uphold this, to which they answer in the affirmative. Effectively such a statement is the *bodhicitta* aspiration of the Mahāyāna path. With this, the first ordination rite ends with a standard dedication of merit (as above). From this point on, the preceptees are now addressed as "novice preceptees" (新戒), reflecting their newly attained *śramaṇera* and *śramaṇerikā* status.

7. Second Platform Rites—Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

The second platform (二壇) is that of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* ordination (比丘/比丘尼戒), also known as *upasampadā* (具足), which is entirely new to all of the preceptees. Again, many days to several weeks before this, they are drilled in the rites and also instructed in the relevant *vinaya* content. An additional challenge during the second platform is that it all takes place with the novices' two types of robes, sitting mat and almsbowl. Similar to the novice ordination, the full ordination is also comprised of three phrases for the *bhikṣus*, with an additional fourth for the *bhikṣuṇīs*. A brief outline of the three sessions and various elements is as follows:[57]

I Invitation for *Upasampadā* Ordination (二壇請戒)
- 1 Gathering of the *Śramaṇeras* and *Śramaṇerikas* (鳴椎集眾)
- 2 Inviting the Guiding Teachers (請引禮師)
- 3 Inviting the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (請戒和尚)
- 4 Discourse from the Instructors (說戒開導)

57. Summarized from Fo Guang Shan Board of Religious Affairs, *Second Altar—Upasampada Ordination (Full Ordination)* 二壇儀範 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Publishing, 2004).

II The Repentance Ceremony (二壇懺摩)
- 1 Purifying the Altar and Inviting the *Karma Ācarya* (淨壇請師)
- 2 Discourse from the *Karma Ācarya* (預為開導)
- 3 Questioning and Revealing Offenses (審戒發露)
- 4 Repentance and Transfer of Merits (懺悔回向)

III The *Upasampadā* Ordination (二壇正授)
- 1 Inviting the *Śīla Upadhyāya* and *Ācaryas* (集眾請師)
- 2 Introducing the *Śīla Upadhyāya* and *Ācaryas* (介紹十師)
- 3 Requesting the Precepts (正請戒師)
- 4 Praying to the Buddhas for Protection (祈聖加護)
- 5 Explanation from the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (壇主白法)
- 6 Inviting the Buddhas and Holy Ones (恭請佛聖)
- 7 Designating the Preceptees (安受戒者所在)
- 8 Questioning about Transgressions (教授出眾問難法)
- 9 Ascending the Altar (白召入眾法)
- 10 Formal Request for the *Upasampadā* Ordination (明乞戒法)
- 11 Motion by the *Karma Ācarya* (羯磨單白法)
- 12 Questioning about Obstructions (正問難法)
- 13 Teaching on Receiving the Precept Essence (開示納受戒體法)
- 14 Transmitting the Precept Essence (正授戒體法)
- 15 Discourse on the Forms of Precepts (宣說戒相法)
- 16 Transmitting the Four Daily Requisites (授四依法)
- 17 Final Exhortation (勸囑)
- 18 Transfer of Merits (回向)

IV The *Upasampadā* Ordination For *Bhikṣuṇīs* (比丘尼受戒法)
- 8 Questioning about Transgressions (教授出眾問難法)
- 9 Ascending the Altar (白召入眾法)
- 10 Formal Request for the *Upasampadā* Ordination (明乞戒法)
- 11 Motion by the *Karma Ācarī* (羯磨單白法)
- 12 Questioning about Obstructions (正問難法)
- 13 Teaching on Receiving the Precept Essence (明授戒體法)
- 14 Transmitting the Precept Essence (正授戒體法)
- 15 Discourse on the Forms of Precepts (宣說戒相法)
- 16 Transmitting the Four Daily Requisites (授四依法)
- 17 Final Exhortation (勸囑)
- 18 Transfer of Merits (回向)

The first two sessions are basically identical to the "request for ordination" and "repentance ceremony" for the novice precepts, and as such we will not repeat them here.

The third session is the "*bhikṣu*/*bhikṣuṇī* ordination," which again starts early the next day after repentance. The three teachers and seven witnesses are invited by the eight representatives as before and are introduced to the preceptees. The preceptees request the precepts from them and seek protection of the ordination site from the three jewels via chanting and *dhāraṇīs*. The *śīla upadhyāya* gives a catechistic instruction, and the Buddha, dharma, and *saṅgha* are invited to the shrine through chanting. From here, the *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* are physically separated. While there are slight differences in the content of their respective rites, they are similar enough to be broadly summarized together as follows.

The preceptees are taken group by group to an interview room, where they are queried by the instructing *ācarya* about any possible circumstances that may prohibit their impending ordination. Some issues concern unwholesome ethical actions, some are physical disabilities and diseases, and others concern social circumstances.[58] At this time, they also receive their third robe, with nine-strips (九衣), again with three verses and mantras for transmission, receiving, and donning. There is also some quite Mahāyāna content here, similar to that for the various items of paraphernalia in the first platform. During the transmission and donning of the great robe, we see the expressions "broadly liberate sentient beings" (廣度諸眾生) and "[I] vow to liberate sentient beings" (誓願度眾生), respectively, though no mantras are involved this time.

Still in their groups, the preceptees return to the shrine and "ascend the platform" (登壇). They are queried again about the obstacles to ordination, but this time by the *karma ācarya*. The *śīla upadhyāya* gives a discourse on the precepts. Each of the *pārājika* precepts (他勝處) are read out, and the preceptees respond to the question of whether or not they can uphold each precept with "Yes, I can." There are four *pārājikas* for the *bhikṣus*, and eight for the *bhikṣuṇīs*. They are then asked if they can uphold all the other precepts of all categories, but this is by category rather than for each individual precept, and again they respond,

58. Again, these are effectively formalities, as all practical vetting has taken place well before the start of the triple platform ordination even begins.

"Yes, I can." Appended to these is an instruction to follow the even more ancient four reliances (四依法), in the spirit of complete renunciation. The once-novices are now fully ordained *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*. As per the first platform, the rite ends with a final exhortation and dedication of merit.

The *bhikṣuṇīs* still have the task of receiving confirmation from the three teachers and seven witnesses of the *bhikṣu* assembly. This process continues late into the evening as the preceptees must go through in small groups at a time rather than as the entire contingent.

8. Third Platform Rites—Bodhisattva Ordination

The third and final platform (三壇) is bodhisattva ordination (菩薩戒). Here, the *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* are together again, there being no difference in rite or precept content between the two. One difference from the former two ordinations is that, strictly speaking, the *śīla upadhyāya* is Śākyamuni Buddha, the *karma ācarya* is Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, and the instructing *ācarya* is Maitreya Bodhisattva. In practical terms, however, the original three teachers still perform the role. An outline of the third platform is as below:[59]

I Invitation for Bodhisattva Precepts (三壇請戒)
- 1 Gathering the *Bhikṣus* and *Bhikṣuṇīs* (鳴椎集眾)
- 2 Inviting the Guiding Teachers (請引禮師)
- 3 Inviting the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (請戒和尚)
- 4 Teaching from the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (得戒和尚開示)
- 5 Teaching from the *Karma Ācarya* (羯磨和尚開示)
- 6 Teaching from the Instructing *Ācarya* (教授和尚開示)

II The Repentance Ceremony (三壇懺摩)
- 1 Purifying the Altar and Inviting the *Karma Ācarya* (淨壇請師)
- 2 Teaching by the *Karma Ācarya* (預為開導)
- 3 Examining the Preceptees (審戒法)
- 4 Questioning about Obstructions (問遮法)
- 5 Repentance and Transfer of Merits (懺悔回向)
- 6 Teachings on the Ascetic Practice (Incense Burns) (開示苦行)

III The Bodhisattva Ordination (三壇正授)
- 1 Preparing the Altar (敷座結壇)

59. Summarized from Fo Guang Shan Board of Religious Affairs, *Third Altar—Bodhisattva Ordination* 三壇儀範 (Kaohsiung: Fo Guang Publishing, 2004).

2 Welcoming the Most Venerable Masters (請師入壇)
3 Pay Homage to the Triple Gem (禮敬三寶)
4 Formally Inviting the *Śīla Upadhyāya* (正請戒師)
5 Discourse on the Precepts (開導戒法)
6 Inviting the Buddhas and Holy Ones (恭請佛聖)
7 Receiving the Four Kinds of Unfailing Faith (受四不壞信)
8 Repentance for Past Deeds (懺悔過法)
9 Making Vows (明發願法)
10 Transmitting the Precept Essence (正授戒體)
11 Explanation of Declaring the Forms of the Precepts (秉宣戒相)
12 Transmitting *Khakkara* Staff (傳授錫杖)
13 Conclusion and Transferring the Merits (結讚回向)

The first session is again a purification and invitation. The content here is obviously heavily Mahāyānic in content. For example, the preceptee representatives specifically request bodhisattva ordination: "Please extend your compassion to us all, and give us the most marvelous bodhisattva precepts. Permit the other *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, and I to study here and cultivate the bodhisattva path, and become awakened to the essential ground of the mind. May the merit generated by the fourfold universal vows be extended to all beings, to serve as their dharma nourishment!" Likewise the instruction from the preceptors, for example, the *śīla upadhyāya*, mentions that the preceptees will become "true sons and daughters of the Buddha," that they are on "the great path" toward "foremost *bodhi*," that they have "the faith of one who has set their mind on *anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi* and is practicing the great bodhisattva path," that "all sentient beings have buddha-nature," as well as the three bodies of all the buddhas, namely the "*dharmakāya*, *saṃboghakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*." Some of these core Mahāyāna ideas are explicitly cited from the *Brahmajāla-sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, the *Parinirvāṇa-sūtra*, and other texts. It is all fairly standard Chinese Buddhist material, dominated by Mahāyāna thought.

The second session includes repentance, like the first two platforms, but also features questioning on the purity of the preceptees' *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts as well as other possibly invalidating transgressions similar to before. We again, unsurprisingly, see more Mahāyāna doctrinal content, though from the *karma ācarya* this time. For example, he draws from the *Brahmajāla* and *Śūraṃgama* sutras to point out that the preceptees are "willing to take on the four universal vows, which act not only as a benefit to oneself, but also aim for enlightenment and

henceforth buddhahood," that the "The bodhisattva precepts come from a pure mind, if one has a corrupt and twisted mind, one is unable to receive the precepts," and "To realize ultimate *bodhicitta* and the true enlightened mind, one must answer these questions truthfully." After the repentance is the burning of precept scars (戒疤). In the past, this involved numerous sets of three cone incense burns on the scalp about 5 cm behind the hairline. However, in FGS and most Taiwanese ordinations, there has been a gradual move away from multiple sets to a single set of three on the scalp or inside the forearm, or even abandoning the practice altogether. In mainland China, such precept burns have been officially banned, though many monastics still practice them in private, non-officially sanctioned rites.[60]

The third session is the ordination rite proper. The process of the rite is much the same as for the second platform, up to inviting the three jewels and dharma protectors. After this is a declaration of four objects of unbreakable faith, that is, Buddha, dharma, *saṅgha*, and *śīla* itself. After another short and standard repentance, the preceptees make fourteen vows related to their determination on the bodhisattva path. This is led by the (present) *śīla upadhyāya*, who also leads the ordination proper which follows. Each of the ten major precepts (十重戒) from the *Brahmājāla-sūtra* is read, and the preceptees reply, "I can uphold it." The forty-eight minor precepts (四十八輕戒) are mentioned as a whole, but not individually. Constant reference to various Mahāyāna ideas are found throughout, such as the aspiration to full awakening, taking on the status of a bodhisattva, the four great vows, as well as various great bodhisattva figures and all the buddhas of the ten directions. Some of this is cited from a range of specific Mahāyāna texts, but most is simply stated as a given principle of common Mahāyāna knowledge. No further robes are conferred with this ordination, but instead the preceptees receive the *khakkhara* staff (錫杖), again with verses and mantras. The verse for transmission also follows the format wherein the second line states, "[I] vow that sentient

60. See Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 298–300; James A. Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 37, no. 4 (1998): 303–305. Benn (p. 295) also notes how this practice has been banned in mainland China. It continues in the Taiwanese traditions, however, though has been made voluntary. Contra Benn, incense cones are used, which is also seen clearly in the photos in *Records*, 93, 117.

beings," showing *bodhicitta* aspirational intent. The final ordination is finished with a standard dedication of merit. This contains a very long passage from the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, which talks about "eight remarkable qualities" that the preceptees will receive now that they have received the bodhisattva precepts. These include good rebirths, strength of compassion and wisdom, and the like. A repeated theme in these qualities is that their accomplishments will far surpass those of the two vehicles, that is, those on the paths of an *arhat* or *pratyekabuddha*. It is fairly standard Mahāyāna supremacism, sealing in place the significance of this final ordination over the preceding two platforms. They are finally exhorted to maintain this Mahāyāna *bodhicitta* aspiration in every thought and deed. So ends our material on the three platform rites proper.

9. Classes and Lectures on Vinaya Thought and Teachings

As we can see from the above, the rites of the three platforms are designed to conform to classical Chinese Buddhist understandings of *vinaya* and ordination. They are not a direct application of ordination procedures used in ancient India as described in the *vinayas* themselves. For each of the three platforms, preceptees have ritual manuals prepared for them by the organizing body, and preceptors also have their own versions. As for the actual precepts, their definitions, criteria for determining their purity or transgression, and so forth, these are not at all covered in the rites but in a number of classes and lectures held before each of the respective platforms. Largely these are taught by the instructing *ācarya*, though the *śīla upadhyāya* and *karma ācarya* often also take on teaching roles. In the case of the FGS ordination held at Nan Tien Temple, the majority of the morning classes were taught by the instructing *ācarya* for the first two ordinations and by the *karma ācarya* for the final ordination, with the *śīla upadhyāya* giving many shorter lectures in the evenings throughout. Additionally, other elder monastics gave individual lectures over the course of the ordination ceremony.[61]

Among the class materials provided were simple copies of the Dharmaguptaka *prātimokṣa* for *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* in Chinese (from a Tang dynasty version edited by Daoxuan), and for the final platform copies of the *Brahmājāla-sūtra* and bodhisattva precepts portion of the

61. See *Records*, Appendix, 237–241.

Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra. Most instruction consisted of lectures directly from the text as a form of oral commentary. At our case example, the *bhikṣu vinaya* was taught using a modern commentary by the twentieth century *vinaya* exegete Hongyi (弘一). All of this material is in Chinese, though a basic translation of the *prātimokṣa* in English was provided for the few preceptees who so required.[62]

The tension between ideals and practice looms large. Where the ordination event may advocate very orthodox and strict *vinaya* discipline on the one hand, the practical style of the monastic tradition in question may on the other hand be quite different. In our case example, there are comments within the ritual manuals which state that while these precepts are from the Buddha's time in ancient India, one must look at present, given circumstances to decide what to strictly uphold and when to advocate more skillful means. This is, in a way, effectively an admittance that a number of precepts are ultimately not upheld in the letter, but the fact that they are still included within the rite reflects an unwillingness to formally remove them or rewrite *vinaya* content per se. This is an important issue but really belongs outside of our discussion of the triple platform ordination as it is performed, so it will have to wait for another time.

It must be kept in mind that the preceptors are not *vinaya* scholars in either the traditional or academic senses of the term but monastics responsible for maintaining a living tradition. As such, while there are no scholarly writings on their views on monastic precepts that we can refer to and cite, there are still brief notes of their lectures that may be found in the *Ordination Records*, and some of these are worthy of mention here. From the *śīla upadhyāya*, we see an emphasis on the personal self-sacrifices that must be made for the bodhisattva path of Mahāyāna practice. "You have renounced and will be fully ordained as bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, and then you will take the Bodhisattva Precepts to become great Bodhisattvas. ... Buddhism has progressed to focus on the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva path because of the historical background and people's needs."[63] Throughout this instruction, we see that Chinese Mahāyāna is, quite naturally, the normative

62. This English translation was actually prepared by myself from the original Chinese *Four-Recitation Bhikṣu Prātimokṣa* 四分比丘戒本, with reference to the Theravādin *Pāṭimokkha*, for use during the ordination.
63. *Records*, 156a.

point of view.[64] Some of the other preceptors take a somewhat more doctrinal approach, however. The instructing *ācarya* states: "Practice with Bodhi mind! To take Bodhisattva Precepts means to practice based on Bodhi mind. Make the Four Universal Vows and initiate the Bodhi mind to help you spread the Dharma and benefit all sentient beings."[65] From the *śīla upadhyāyī*, we have the encouragement: "I hope that you all initiate your Bodhi mind and great vows as well as observing the supreme precepts as your guidelines in everyday practice. Take the duty as a Buddhist disciple to save sentient beings and propagate the Buddha's teachings."[66] Similarly from the *karma ācaryī*: "The Buddha path is sought among all sentient beings. A true Bodhisattva attains enlightenment through saving sentient beings and benefiting others."[67] The master of ceremonies echoes the same: "When the conditions are there, we should save all sentient beings. When the conditions are not there, we should practice for ourselves. ... We should never regress from our Bodhi mind. Let us all accomplish Buddhahood together."[68]

There are actually few technical *vinaya* details in the instruction lectures for the three rites. However, the basic notions of aspiration to buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings is a very strong connecting thread throughout all of these exhortations, that is, the traditional paired virtues of compassion and wisdom. Practice trumps theory here.

ŚRĀVAKA ORDINATION IN A MAHĀYĀNA EMBRACE

Having examined the content of the three platforms in terms of their organizational structures, participants, and mode of daily life, in addition to the content of the three rites proper and the formal disciplinary instruction that comes with them, we may now return to the question of their Mahāyānic nature. This will be undertaken keeping in mind the need for a polythetic definition, wherein rather than seeking for a singular "Mahāyānic essence," we will highlight the broad range of Mahāyānic features that appear throughout all aspects of the triple platform ordination in its entirety. In turn we can then reflect upon

64. Refer, for example, to ibid., 153a, 154a–b, 158a–b, 159a.
65. Ibid., 171b.
66. Ibid., 173b.
67. Ibid., 174a–b. Likewise for the instructing ācaryī, 176b.
68. Ibid., 177.

the significance of this for reviving South Asian nun's ordination lineages via the Chinese ordination rites.

The first common feature is related to the organizational and operational structures aspect of the triple platform. Not just in our case example here, that of Fo Guang Shan, but also in any other Chinese-tradition triple platform ordination, the monastery or monasteries organizing and/or hosting the event are avowedly Mahāyāna in tradition.

The second common feature pertains to the preceptors and preceptees. In our case example, the preceptors for both the male and female ordinations all hailed from the Fo Guang Shan lineage itself and therefore were fully ordained *bhikṣus*/*bhikṣuṇīs* and bodhisattvas. This point would remain the same even if, like many triple platform ordinations, the preceptors were drawn from a range of different yet affiliated monasteries.[69] There have been cases, however, whereby some of the preceptors for a triple platform ordination have not come from the Chinese traditions and have included Theravādin and Tibetan preceptors.[70] For the third rite, these human preceptors stand in for the three Mahāyānic preceptors of Śākyamuni and the two bodhisattvas.

Our third possible common feature of the "Mahāyāna" character of such ordinations is that of the daily lifestyle and schedule. "Lifestyle" is admittedly a vague term, and merely pointing to the fact that the preceptees engaged in chores as an example of "altruism," and hence, part of the "bodhisattva path," will not pass muster. So let us focus more narrowly on the daily schedule, which has at least two features of clearly Mahāyānic origin. The first is that of the daily chanting services, both in the main shrine and the meal liturgies, together making the "five shrine services" (五堂功課). These include a range of Mahāyāna sutras and mantras, in addition to Chinese indigenous praises and

69. To draw upon some examples, in 2011 the abbot of Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山), Ven. Guo Dong (果東), was invited as one of the seven witnessing preceptors; see https://www.ddm.org.tw/epaper/first/2011/ddm-20110803.htm. The triple platform ordination at Chung Tai Chan Monastery (中台山禪寺) included preceptors from a range of different monasteries throughout Taiwan; see https://www.chungtai.org.tw/dialogue/2011/2011-09/0903.htm.

70. An example being the famous 1998 triple platform ordination in Bodh-gayā, India, which was a strong attempt to bring full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination back to the Theravādin and Tibetan traditions. See Ven. Thubten Chodron's description of the preceptors: https://www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/the-international-full-ordination-ceremony-in-bodhgaya/.

forms of offering that very prominently feature buddhas and bodhisattvas. The second relates to the various verses from the *Daily Vinaya* (in turn from the "Pure Practices" chapter of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*), which the preceptees are supposed to be reciting and contemplating throughout the day as they memorize them. As noted previously, the majority of these verses include performing wholesome actions with the votive intention "May all living beings," etc., essentially a shorthand for *bodhicitta* vows.

Our remaining common features are the common elements of the three rites themselves. Therefore, our fourth feature is the transference of merit found at the end of each of the repentance rites and ordination rites proper. I am not arguing here that transference of merit itself is Mahāyānic, as it is found in Theravādin traditions, too.[71] The particular form that the transference verses take in the triple platform ordination is certainly Mahāyānic, with its references to liberating all sentient beings and rebirth in Amitābha's buddha-field.

The fifth common feature involves the invitations to the holy ones, that is, the buddhas, dharma, *saṅgha*, and dharma protectors. The buddhas and *saṅgha* include a range of Mahāyāna buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the dharma in this context includes Mahāyāna scripture. Only the invited dharma protectors would probably not raise eyebrows outside of a Mahāyāna context and would likely be acceptable by mainstream traditions.

The sixth common feature is the extensive use of the *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī*, which is used in the repentance rites before the three ordination rites themselves. I do not think we can simply claim that this *dhāraṇī* is equivalent to a protective *paritta* chant as found in the Theravādin tradition. Even if the preceptees (and probably the preceptors, too) do not actually understand the Sanskrit that lies behind the transliterated Chinese, it is fully understood to be a *dhāraṇī* of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara/Guanyin, the very archetype of Mahāyānic universal compassion and the skillful means with which to actualize such compassion.

A seventh common feature is the material found in the lectures that accompany the three rites. As we have noted above, the exhortation to undertake the Mahāyāna path of the bodhisattva is liberally

71. Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 124ff.

spread throughout a good deal of this formal lecture material, irrespective of which actual ordination the lecture may ostensibly be concerned with.

An eighth common feature found in all three rites is the verses wherein the robes, bowl, and staff are transmitted at the end of each rite. There is some variation here in details, but they can be grouped together in general.

Each of these eight common features is thus found in the entire triple platform ordination, and the preceptees engage in these features irrespective of which ordination rites they participate or do not participate in. Each of the three rites themselves has a number of other Mahāyāna features in addition to these eight. All the Mahāyānic features in the first two rites for *śramaṇeras/śramaṇerikās* and *bhikṣus/bhikṣuṇīs* are already included in the eight common features given above, with the sole exception of the second rite's reference to slandering Mahāyāna scriptures and obstructing others' cultivation of *prajñā*.

Our ninth feature, therefore, is found in the third rite for bodhisattva ordination. Unsurprisingly it contains a much stronger Mahāyāna emphasis, the core of which is receiving the bodhisattva precepts.

For a tenth feature, there is also the more general notion of *bodhicitta* that is mentioned on numerous occasions, whether simply as "aspire to *bodhicitta*" (發菩提心) or in the format of the "four universal vows" (四弘誓願), which includes "sentient beings are boundless, vow to liberate them" (眾生無邊誓願度) and "buddhahood is supreme, vow to attain it" (佛道無上誓願成).[72] This *bodhicitta* aspiration is found not only in the third platform rite, but also in the first platform: "before they take the Upasampada Ordination, they should observe the pure precepts, initiate the great Bodhi mind, save sentient beings, and continue the Buddha's teachings."[73]

Our eleventh and final feature is that of refraining from slandering the Mahāyāna scriptures. This is also found only in the first and third platform rites.

72. Inspired by the sutras, these four were first formalized by Tiantai Zhiyi (天台智顗), and later further popularized by their appearance in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (六祖壇經). They have since become ubiquitous in Chinese Buddhism, irrespective of one's lineage association.

73. *Records*, 199.

We can tabulate each of these Mahāyānic features against each of the three platform rites, as well as the non-ritual content, which together constitutes the entirety of the triple platform ordination process (see table 1). Where each feature appears it has been marked with "√," and "√√√" has been used to indicate that the feature strongly influences the particular platform without being a feature of it per se.

TABLE 1. Mahāyānic features of the triple platform ordination

Mahāyānic feature	Non-ritual activity	First platform	Second platform	Third platform
Organizational structure	√	√√√	√√√	√√√
Preceptors	√	√√√	√√√	√√√
Lifestyle	√	√√√	√√√	√√√
Transfer of merit		√	√	√
Invitations to the holy ones		√	√	√
Chanting *dhāraṇīs*		√	√	√
Bodhisattva path lectures	√			√√√
Verses for paraphernalia		√	√	√
Bodhisattva precepts				√
Bodhicitta aspiration		√		√
Not slandering Mahāyāna		√		√

Analyzing this tabulated data, we can see the value in a polythetic definition of what makes a Mahāyāna ordination. That is, there is not a single feature that is found in all elements, and only one feature, receiving the bodhisattva precepts proper, features in just a single element. The majority of features appear in some, but not all, elements. Furthermore, while the elements each share common Mahāyāna

features, they also differ to a degree, meaning their individual content and makeup is unique and particular.

We began this study by laying out two quite antagonistic attitudes with respect to the status of Chinese-tradition based ordinations. On one hand, certain conservative elements in (mainly Theravādin) traditions do not consider *bhikṣuṇīs* ordained in the triple platform ordination to have valid ordinations. The reasons given include the fact that the preceptors for such ordinations are avowed Mahāyānists and the claim that the ordinations are effectively Mahāyāna ordinations. The latter point seems to be maintained even when the newly ordained *bhikṣuṇīs* do not participate in the third platform of the bodhisattva rite. On the other hand, more progressive elements have strongly supported the legitimacy of such *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations. They base their position largely on the grounds that the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination takes place in the second platform rite, which is based on the non-Mahāyāna *vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka traditions. As such, it does not confer bodhisattva ordination and is therefore not Mahāyānic at all. To be perfectly honest, I am quite dismayed by the results of my own investigation. For many years I was also firmly in the camp of those who argued that because the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination took place in the second platform with its basis in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, it was effectively not Mahāyānic at all, and therefore criticisms of the preceptees becoming "Mahāyāna nuns" were mistaken, if not somewhat laughable due to their conflation of the distinct ordinations. But after this investigation it is seen that this the situation is not at all so simple.

There are, however, two follow-up questions that immediately come to mind: One, do the platforms as they stand fulfil the necessary conditions for novice and full ordination according to their respective lineages? Two, does the presence of Mahāyānic elements necessarily invalidate their non-Mahāyānic content in fulfilling the above conditions? An answer to the first question should be straightforward, and it seems a little surprising that a comparison between the rites as they presently stand and as they are presented in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* system has not, as far as I know, already been carried out. But this is also probably due to the difficulty in accessing the actual Chinese triple platform ordination ritual content, as we have emphasized throughout our study here. There is no space to undertake such a comparison here, but I suspect that the *Vinaya* would largely stipulate what is required, rather than what elements would invalidate it.

The latter, of course, could not mention anything about the invalidity of "Mahāyānic" content due to their relative historical locations. The second question would be far more subjective. No doubt conservative elements would still reject anything that has even the scent of bodhisattvas and multiple buddhas, and sectarian affiliations would play a strong part in acceptance or rejection. This is largely what we already see today. But I think those who reject the Chinese ordination systems due to their Mahāyānic association should be challenged on this and asked to explain exactly why this invalidates novice or full ordination.

Here, the polythetic nature of what constitutes "Mahāyāna" may play a critical role. As a hypothetical example, one may argue that as a "Mahāyāna ordination" it teaches that most cliched of Mahāyāna doctrines, the "emptiness of all *dharmas*," and because this teaching is not Theravādin orthodoxy, the ordination is therefore invalid. A counter would be to ask, but is the "emptiness of all *dharmas*" taught within the ordination? If it is not, then the criticism is invalid. On checking the content of the three rites, we find that this oft-cited signature Mahāyāna doctrine does not appear in the second platform ordination, and is mentioned in the first platform but not as a doctrinal condition for the ordination to take place. This kind of argument from specificity (these ordination rites) to generality (Mahāyāna as a whole) and back (these ordination rites) opens the door for all manner of gross generalizations and fringe content into an actual case or situation where it is not applicable. Other specific examples under the general "illegitimacy of the Mahāyāna" argument should also be checked as to whether or not they actually appear in each of the three platforms. If they are not present, then such content should not stand in the way of accepting the ordinations in the role of *bhikkhunī* ordination revival.

Beyond these two main questions that should be asked, there are many elements of the debate concerning the legitimacy of these ordinations for *bhikkhunī*, and we have only touched upon one aspect here, that is, the question of what constitutes a "Mahāyāna ordination." As such, our findings, which will perhaps be surprising and disappointing to some, are certainly no death knell for the revival movement. Clarifying exactly what is going on in each these ordinations can only help our understanding, and any progress must be based on correct knowledge rather than guesswork as to the content of the triple platform ordination.