

# 比丘尼傳承所面對的問題

## ——當代斯里蘭卡比丘尼運動中有關大乘佛教的顧慮

鄭維儀\*

### 中文摘要

本文將檢視當代斯里蘭卡的比丘尼運動中有關大乘佛教的顧慮。雖然自 1980 年代晚期起，有越來越多的斯里蘭卡尼僧受比丘尼戒，有關大乘佛教的顧慮仍然關係到比丘尼僧在斯里蘭卡所受到的認同。本文首先將介紹比丘尼僧團在斯里蘭卡的歷史，接著將約略討論三個有關大乘佛教的顧慮，也就是：經典權威、僧袍形式與後殖民焦慮。許多研究都認為，自十九世紀末葉以來，僧伽羅國族主義與上座部佛教似乎發展出一種密不可分的關係。本文也將檢視此種關係對比丘尼運動的影響。

**關鍵詞：**上座部與認同、佛教尼僧、比丘尼戒、斯里蘭卡佛教

---

\* 玄奘大學宗教學系助理教授

## **The Trouble with Bhikkhunī Ordination:** the Mahāyāna issue and the bhikkhunī movement in contemporary Sri Lanka

Wei-yi Cheng\*

### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper will examine concerns over Mahāyāna influence in the bhikkhunī movement in contemporary Sri Lanka. Although the number of Sri Lankan women receiving bhikkhunī ordination has increased steadily since the late 1980s, the concern over Mahāyāna influence remains an important factor in the legitimization of the nuns' bhikkhunī status in Sri Lanka. In order to understand the historical and political contexts behind those concerns, this paper will first give a brief introduction to the history of Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns' order, from its first introduction to the island to its recent revival. Secondly, this paper will discuss a few elements frequently cited by Sri Lankan Buddhists as the basis to refute Mahāyāna elements. The third part is the main theme of this paper: it will examine the postcolonial anxiety behind the concerns over Mahāyāna influence. Many argue that since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has developed a strong association between Sinhala nationalism and Theravāda Buddhism. I will argue that it is out of this association that Mahāyāna elements in the transmission of bhikkhunī ordination pose a challenge to many Sri Lankan Buddhists.

**Keywords:** Theravāda and identity, Buddhist nuns, bhikkhunī ordination,  
Buddhism in Sri Lanka

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Hsuan Chuang University,  
Taiwan

## Introduction

Concern over Mahāyāna influence is an important factor in the legitimization of bhikkhunī sangha in Sri Lanka. This paper is based on the data collected from my Sri Lankan fieldwork in 2002 and will discuss a few elements behind the concern over Mahāyāna influence. But first, I will give a brief introduction of the history of bhikkhunī sangha in Sri Lanka.

## History of bhikkhunī sangha

A bhikkhunī refers to a Buddhist nun who has received the higher ordination, *upasampadā*. Without the higher ordination, a Buddhist nun can only reach the status of *sāmaneri* (female novice), *sikkhamānā* (trainee nun)<sup>1</sup> or other non-Vinaya based nunhood statuses such as the *dasa sil mātā* (ten-precepts mother) in Sri Lanka.

According to the canonical tradition, the first bhikkhunī is the Buddha's aunt and stepmother, Mahā Pajāpati. It is said that the Buddha was reluctant to admit women into the Buddhist monastic order at first but after repeated pleas from Mahā Pajāpati, he yielded and admitted Mahā Pajāpati and other five hundred women into the sangha.<sup>2</sup> Bhikkhunī sangha thus began.

The transmission of bhikkhunī sangha to Sri Lanka appears to be a cherished memory in Sri Lanka's Buddhist history. A Sinhala chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, gives a lengthy depiction of the woman who transmitted bhikkhunī sangha to Sri Lanka. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, Buddhism was transmitted to Sri Lanka around 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. by monk Mahinda, son of Emperor Asoka of India. He successfully converted the Sri Lankan king Devānampiyatissa to Buddhism. And after hearing his sermon, a large number of Sri Lankan women (said to be five hundred), led by queen Anulā, expressed the wish to join Buddhist monastic order. Since bhikkhunī ordination requires both bhikkhu and bhikkhunī preceptors, Mahinda sent for his sister, bhikkhunī Sanghamittā, to come to Sri Lanka. So bhikkhunī

<sup>1</sup> For details on bhikkhunī ordination in Theravāda tradition, see pp.30-46, Wijayaratna, Mohan (2001).

<sup>2</sup> This story appears in the many texts. For English translation of the *Therīgatha* version, see p.16, Murcott, Susan (1991).

Sanghamittā and eleven other bhikkhunīs traveled to Sri Lanka and ordained Anulā and her following. The *Mahāvamsa* gives lengthy details of the arrival of Sanghamittā, her bhikkhunī sangha and the lavish royal patronage she and her bhikkhunī enjoyed.<sup>3</sup> This depiction alone seems to suggest that at one point in Sri Lankan history, bhikkhunī sangha flourished.

The arrival of Sanghamittā is warmly celebrated in Sri Lanka today, for she not only brought bhikkhunī sangha but also a branch of the sacred Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha is said to have gained enlightenment. The religious significance of the sacred Bodhi tree is especially paramount in Sri Lanka.<sup>4</sup> The arrival of the bhikkhunī sangha with the sacred Bodhi tree means that the historical presence of bhikkhunī sangha cannot be easily overlooked. Indeed, nearly all the Buddhist nunneries that I visited in Sri Lanka have a statue of Sanghamittā, and once every year, there is a Sanghamittā parade in celebration of the arrival of Sanghamittā with the sacred Bodhi tree.

There are other reminders of the historical presence of bhikkhunī sangha in Sri Lanka. Another Sinhala chronicle, the *Dīpavamsa*, records vivid activities of the bhikkhunīs. In the *Dīpavamsa*, a total of 72 *bhikkhunīs* are mentioned by name and thousands by number. Many of the mentioned *bhikkhunīs* are described as well-versed in Dharma and the Vinaya, spiritually-advanced and renowned preachers. This in addition to the archeological finds that support a flourishing bhikkhunī sangha up till the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Although both the bhikkhu and bhikkhunī orders disappeared around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, King Vijayabāhu restored the bhikkhu sangha in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century but no known effort has been made to restore bhikkhunī sangha.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until the Buddhist revival movement during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that the issue of a Buddhist nuns' order arose again. Although there

---

<sup>3</sup> Chapter XV-XIX, the *Mahāvamsa*. For English translation, see Geiger, Wilhelm (trans.) (2003 edition).

<sup>4</sup> Nissanka, H.S.S. (ed.) (1994).

<sup>5</sup> PP.68-75, Kusuma Devendra (1987). And for English translation of the *Dīpavamsa*, Oldenberg, Hermann (2001 edition), *The Dīpavamsa*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

were calls to restore bhikkhunī sangha by Sri Lankan Buddhists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, those calls seem to have received little attention.<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge, the issue of bhikkhunī ordination did not gain much attention or make significant progress until the involvement of Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) in the late 1980s. Because Sakyadhita publishes their literature in English and in the West, the bhikkhunī movement in Sri Lanka came to the attention of international community. Sakyadhita is a Buddhist feminist organization, and it encourages the establishment of bhikkhunī order in countries where it does not exist. With the input of foreign financial aid and feminist activists, there have been bhikkhunī ordinations occurring in Sri Lanka since 1998. But it would be a mistake to think that Sakyadhita is the only organization that sponsors bhikkhunī ordination there. Bhikkhu Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala, the abbot of the Golden Temple in Dambulla, for example, has been promoting the reestablishment of bhikkhunī sangha since the late 1990s. The bhikkhunī sangha under his leadership has from the very beginning aimed to be a Theravāda and Sri Lankan sangha. Despite all the obstacles there might be, it appears that by the time of my fieldwork in 2002, Dambulla bhikkhunī sangha has been firmly installed.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can confidently say that bhikkhunī sangha has reappeared on the soil of Sri Lanka.

Even though I say that “bhikkhunī sangha has reappeared in the soil of Sri Lanka”, the question of legitimacy lingers. During my short visit to Sri Lanka in early 2005,<sup>8</sup> I was told by informants that in spite of the growing number of Buddhist nuns receiving bhikkhunī ordination, bhikkhunī status is still not recognized by the government or by the majority of senior bhikkhus. There are many reasons for this,<sup>9</sup> but in this short paper, I will only discuss three factors behind the concern over Mahāyāna influence in bhikkhunī

---

<sup>6</sup> For details, see Bartholomeusz, Tessa J. (1994).

<sup>7</sup> PP.29-34, Cheng, Wei-Yi (2007).

<sup>8</sup> This paper is mainly based on my 2002 fieldwork findings, in which I conducted 26 full interviews with Sri Lankan nuns of different sanghas and localities. My short visit to Sri Lanka in early 2005 also provides additional information.

<sup>9</sup> For example, misogyny of the bhikkhu sangha is also an important factor in the resistance against the establishment of bhikkhunī sangha. But in this paper, I will only focus on the concern over the Mahāyāna influence.

ordination.

Concerns over Mahāyāna influence in bhikkhunī ordination can be traced back to the Vinaya. It is said that at the beginning of bhikkhunī sangha, nuns received higher ordination only from the monks. But because there were some private questions to be asked at the ordination, nuns felt embarrassed to answer those questions to the monks. Hence, the Buddha allowed the nuns to be ordained by the nuns first and then by the monks.<sup>10</sup>

Since bhikkhunī ordination requires both bhikkhu and bhikkhunī preceptors, and since until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, bhikkhunī sangha existed only in Mahāyāna traditions of East Asia, there comes the question of whether Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs can be the preceptors to Theravāda nuns. Two of the frequently cited reasons that I found in my 2002 fieldwork for not recognizing bhikkhunī ordination conducted by Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs are related to the scriptural authority and monastic robes.

### 1. Scriptural Authority

In terms of the scriptural authority, one of the biggest differences between Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism is that while the scriptures used by Theravāda Buddhists are in Pāli, Mahāyāna Buddhists use texts translated from Sanskrit scriptures. It appears to be a popular belief in Sri Lanka that Pāli was the language spoken by the Buddha and therefore Pāli scriptures are the orthodox and sacred Buddhist texts. Many of my Sri Lankan informants took pride in their country's preservation of the Pāli canon. Mahāyāna Buddhism, by using the heretical scriptures (i.e. Sanskrit or texts translated from Sanskrit) is not the "authentic" Buddhism. Given this background, how can bhikkhunīs of Mahāyāna traditions be qualified to ordain Theravāda nuns? Also, which school of Vinaya should the Theravāda nuns ordained by Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs observe?<sup>11</sup>

The first question was noticed by Buddhist feminists from fairly early on, and they usually argue that there is no essential difference between

---

<sup>10</sup> For details on bhikkhunī ordination in Theravāda tradition, see Wijayaratna, Mohan (2001).

<sup>11</sup> P.150, Wijayaratna (2001).

Mahāyāna and Theravāda bhikkhunī precepts. The Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha of Theravāda tradition contains 311 precepts. Bhikkhunīs of Chinese and Korean traditions, on the other hand, observe the Dharmagupta Vinaya, which contains 348 precepts for the bhikkhunīs. It may seem that bhikkhunīs of Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions observe different sets of Vinaya, but a close examination on the Vinaya reveals that two sets of Vinaya are fundamentally the same. In fact, it is argued that the Vinaya rules of all schools have the same origin in spite of variance in their doctrines. Therefore, Buddhist feminists often point out that the Dharmagupta Vinaya contains all the precepts in the Pāli Vinaya.<sup>12</sup> In other words, there should be no question regarding to Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs' eligibility in transmitting bhikkhunī ordination to Theravāda nuns, since Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs also observe Theravāda bhikkhunī precepts.<sup>13</sup> This argument, however, is refuted by most senior monks across Therāvada countries. For example, Kawanami notes in Myranma:

As we have already seen, Burmese monks on both sides of the debate have been united in their view that *bhikkhunīs* cannot be reinstated by reintroducing the Dharmaguptaka procedure preserved by a Mahāyāna tradition. In this, the anti-revivalists base their argument on the official teaching that once the *bhikkhunī Saṅgha* was extinguished, its revival is not possible. The pro-revivalists, though, insist on the possibility of reinstating the *bhikkhunī Saṅgha* through the 'single' ordination procedure that could be done without any outside interference.<sup>14</sup>

Understandably then, activists in the Sri Lankan bhikkhunī movement take pains to deny any possible identification with Mahāyāna Buddhism in bhikkhunī transmission. One way of doing this is to stress the "international" nature of bhikkhunī ordination that involves Mahāyāna preceptors. Taking the higher ordination organized by Taiwanese sangha, Foguangshan, in Bodhgaya in 1998 as an example; not only did the preceptors in this

---

<sup>12</sup> Kabilsingh (1984).

<sup>13</sup> PP. 236-257, Karma Lekshe Tsomo (1998).

<sup>14</sup> P. 234, Kawanami (2007).

ordination include senior bhikkhus from Theravāda countries, but also Theravāda participants did not undergo any procedure associated with the Mahāyāna tradition (namely the Bodhisattva vows).<sup>15</sup> By emphasizing the presence of Theravāda bhikkhus and their absence from Mahāyāna procedure, the nuns can claim that their higher ordination was of international nature rather than of Mahāyāna nature.

Moreover, the Theravāda lineage is especially emphasized. Even though some of my nun-informants once studied in overseas Mahāyāna sanghas or their higher ordination involved Mahāyāna preceptors, none identified themselves with the Mahāyāna lineage. In other words, in their perception, the role of Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs was limited to the Vinaya requirement for bhikkhunī preceptors or as the instructors of bhikkhunī precepts in the pre-ordination trainings, rather than being their Dhamma lineage predecessors. More importantly, even if a Sri Lankan nun receives higher ordination from Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs, it does not necessarily follow that she automatically perceives herself as a Mahāyāna Buddhist nun who observes Mahāyāna precepts. Maintaining Theravāda identity is so important for Sri Lankan Buddhists that a nun who receives higher ordination from Mahāyāna preceptors would still insist the orthodox authority of Pāli scriptures and observe Theravāda Vinaya. I had never met a Sri Lankan bhikkhunī who perceived herself as a Mahāyāna nun or gave Mahāyāna scriptures precedence over Pāli scriptures.

Therefore, a Sri Lankan bhikkhunī who had Mahāyāna bhikkhunī preceptor would stress that her higher ordination was of “international” rather than of “Mahāyāna” nature; by so doing, she could cling to her Theravāda identity. However, having said this, I also must note that not everybody agrees with this argument. Some Sri Lankan informants argued that those who had received higher ordination given by Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs must receive a second Theravāda higher ordination in order to claim Theravāda identity. However, as far as I know, the second Theravāda higher ordination is carried out only by a limited number of sanghas<sup>16</sup> and

---

<sup>15</sup> Li (2000).

<sup>16</sup> For example, the Dambulla Bhikkhunī sangha, see pp. 29-34, Cheng (2007).

not all Sri Lankan Buddhists (monastics and the laity alike) would consider the second Theravāda higher ordination as conferring the legitimacy of Theravāda status. By the time of writing this paper, the Theravāda bhikkhunī sangha in Sri Lanka is still by and large a sectarian movement.

## 2. Monastic robes

Another often expressed concern over the Mahāyāna influence is in the regard to the monastic robe. Some of my Sri Lankan informants stated that even those who had received higher ordination in “Mahāyāna” ordinations (including those being identified by nun-ordainees themselves as of international nature) all eventually converted back to Theravāda Buddhism, because those nuns all put on Theravāda robes upon their return to Sri Lanka. Statements as such reveal the importance of the style of monastic robes in the recognition of Theravāda integrity.

Pāli texts give detailed descriptions about Buddhist monastic robe:

According to the *Mahāvagga*, the monk’s costume comprised three pieces, or rather three robes: one with lining, to be worn as an outer cloak if need be, and called *sanghati*, one without a lining, called *uttarāsanga*, worn as a toga, and one used as underclothing, the *antarāvāsaka* .... Nuns also wore three robes similar to the monks’, with two extra pieces: a vest called *samakaccikā*, and a bathing garment called *udakasātikā* .... According to the *Vinaya* texts and some stories from the Nikāyas, the color of ascetics’ clothes was usually ochre or yellow. Therefore, the rag-robes, worn in the first years of [sangha] must have been that color; but there is no rule which lays down the correct color for robes in general. Some rules, however, do specify which colors are unsuitable.<sup>17</sup>

While Mahāyāna schools may develop widely different styles of monastic robes, as the result of the different culture and climate of each locality,<sup>18</sup> it is paramount in Theravāda tradition to wear the monastic robe in accordance to the Vinaya.

<sup>17</sup> PP.36-37, Wijayaratna (1990).

<sup>18</sup> For example, see pp.249-265, Wu-Yin, Bhishuni (2001).

Historically, Theravāda Buddhism developed different ways of wearing monastic robe. These differences in the robes are one of the key ways of distinguishing between various Theravāda sects. For example, when Copleston talks about the different Buddhist sects in Sri Lanka, he notes:

The Ramanya is a more recent branch still, and appears to be distinctly traceable to a desire to return to strict conformity with the principles of the books. I go on to state the respective peculiarities of the sects. That of Siam is distinguished from the two others by one marked outward difference — yellow robe is worn over the left shoulder only, the right shoulder remaining uncovered. The other two sects cover both shoulders. It is curious, considering with what extreme minuteness the Vinaya prescribes every point connected with the monk's dress, that each party should be able to defend its practice by appeal to the sacred literature. But so it is. The Siam party can point to the constantly recurring phrase, "Making the upper robe over one side," and can urge that the phrase is used in the very formula under which every one of them — whether of Siam or of Amrapura — has been admitted to the [sangha], and which is expressly ordered in the record of the original foundation . . . . . But the Burmese claim authority from the same scriptures for the decorous "covering of the whole body" from the phrase, "avasesam karitvā kāyaso".<sup>19</sup>

Hence, even though there are variances in wearing the monastic robe in the Theravāda tradition, the variances are usually small and mostly the result of the different interpretation of the scriptures. In other words, the correct style of monastic robe in Theravāda Buddhism symbolizes religious purity. The various styles of monastic robe in Mahāyāna traditions, that might deviate a great deal from the prescription in the Vinaya, understandably would signify religious heterodoxy in the eyes of Theravāda Buddhists. When Mahāyāna bhikkhunīs dress in their traditional robes and give bhikkhunī ordination to Theravāda nuns, this could no doubt be interpreted by some as contaminating Theravāda purity.

---

<sup>19</sup> P. 251, Copleston (1994).

### 3. Postcolonial Anxiety

The third factor regarding the concern over Mahāyāna influence has to be understood within the Sinhala nationalism context. That is, maintaining Theravāda integrity is crucial to Sri Lankan Buddhists because Theravāda Buddhism is considered an important national heritage to the Sinhala nation.

This can be seen from one example. Because bhikkhunī sangha was originally transmitted from Sri Lanka to China in 429 C.E., Sri Lankan feminists often use this event to argue for the legitimacy of receiving bhikkhunī ordination back from the Chinese sangha.<sup>20</sup> However, I found that not all Sri Lankan Buddhists agreed with this argument: many who were aware of this historical connection still rejected the legitimacy of bhikkhunī transmission from Chinese sangha on grounds of its Mahāyāna nature. Although reasons for the rejection vary, the identification of Theravāda Buddhism with Sinhala nation appears to be a common basis for reasoning.

This identification might be attributed to what Krishna calls “postcolonial anxiety”, the anxiety experienced by elites of former colonies who attempt to build a nation-state and to “recover” their national heritage that is supposed to have existed before the colonization.<sup>21</sup> In the case of Sri Lanka, it has long been argued that the pre-colonial form of Buddhism and Buddhist establishment were severely damaged by European colonizers.<sup>22</sup> In any case, Buddhism is often discoursed as one national heritage that needs to be “recovered”. In the attempts to construct a supposedly national heritage, anti-colonial activists during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century linked Buddhism with the interest of the Sinhala nation and thus developed a strong association between Theravāda Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism.<sup>23</sup>

This “postcolonial anxiety” does not cease with the independence of Sri Lanka. The association between Theravāda Buddhism and Sinhala

---

<sup>20</sup> For example, Goonatilake (2001).

<sup>21</sup> Krishna (1999).

<sup>22</sup> For example, Malalgoda (1976). However, Elizabeth Harris’ recent study argues that Sri Lankan Buddhism was ‘transformed’ with active participation of Sri Lankan Buddhists themselves and should not be considered as being ‘damaged’ by the British colonists (2006).

<sup>23</sup> For example, see pp.202-273, Gombrich & Obeyesekere (1988).

nationalism is frequently accused of contributing to the continuous violent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as a nation swamped with a great number of foreign NGOs, there have been concerns over foreign interference via NGO activities on the local culture and custom.<sup>25</sup> I heard similar opinions in my fieldwork too. Some Sri Lankan Buddhists voiced their worries about the purpose of foreign aid in the bhikkhunī movement, on whether Buddhist sponsors from the West and from East Asia might have ulterior motives (i.e. changing Theravāda Buddhism). It seems to me that the determination to maintain Theravāda, as well as Sinhala nation's integrity, is strong.

Some blame Sri Lankan chronicles for the construction of the association between Theravāda Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism.<sup>26</sup> Take the popular Mahāvamsa as an example. It states that when the Buddha was about to enter parinirvāna, he placed the responsibility of upholding the true doctrine on the Sinhala nation. It also states that Pāli scriptures were originally written down in Sri Lanka rather than in India, indicating the importance of supporting the right sangha (i.e. Theravāda Buddhism).<sup>27</sup> However, others point out that it is erroneous to accuse the Sri Lankan chronicles for the construction of the association between Theravāda Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism. Berkwitz furtherer suggests that Sri Lankan chronicles were not intended to be objective historiography<sup>28</sup> but rather to promote a specific Buddhist monastery (i.e. Mahāvihāra).<sup>29</sup> In other words, it was under the influence of European Orientalists during the late 19th century, partly out of the colonial administrative need to construct a past of the colonialized, that Sri Lankan chronicles came to be viewed as historical records.<sup>30</sup> As such, it becomes paramount for Sri Lankan

---

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Tambiah (1992).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Goonatilake, Susantha (2001).

<sup>26</sup> For example, Bartholomeusz (2002).

<sup>27</sup> Chapter VII & XXXIII, the *Mahāvamsa*, translated by Geiger, Wilhelm (2003 edition).

<sup>28</sup> Berkwitz (2004).

<sup>29</sup> Also see Collins (1990).

<sup>30</sup> PP. 87-106, Rogers (1990).

Buddhists to recover the pre-colonial form of Buddhism as described in the chronicles (i.e. Theravāda Buddhism).

For Sri Lankan feminists who wish to promote bhikkhunī ordination within this context, one common strategy is to utilize textual sources. As noted earlier, feminists<sup>31</sup> may use the Sri Lankan origin of Chinese bhikkhunī sangha to legitimize the transmission of bhikkhunī ordination from the Chinese order.<sup>32</sup> Others may use the canonical source to argue that the Buddha has declared that bhikkhunī sangha is an integral part of the wholesome Buddhist society, and therefore it is necessary for a Buddhist country (i.e. Sri Lanka) to establish bhikkhunī sangha.<sup>33</sup> By utilizing textual sources, it is possible to argue for the legitimization of bhikkhunī status.

### Conclusion

I have discussed three factors behind the concern over Mahāyāna influence in the bhikkhunī movement in contemporary Sri Lanka: scriptural authority, monastic robe and postcolonial anxiety. All three factors are connected with one and another, for the association between Theravāda Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism has made it crucial for Sri Lankan Buddhists to maintain Theravāda tradition, and to do so the safeguarding of the right scriptures (i.e. Pāli scriptures) and the right style of monastic robe is imperative.

During my short visit to Sri Lanka in early 2005, some non-bhikkhunī nuns complained to me that their number is declining, because more and more nuns have gone to bhikkhunī ordination. I also saw newspaper reports of bhikkhunīs giving prayers to the tsunami victims. Kawanami estimates that by 2007, there were around 500 bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka.<sup>34</sup> It

---

<sup>31</sup> Goonatilake, Hema (2001).

<sup>32</sup> It is important to note that the same text (the *Biquinzhuan*, T50(2063)) that records the bhikkhunī transmission from Sri Lanka to China also records the existence of Chinese bhikkhunī prior to this transmission. Yet, the first known Chinese bhikkhunī, Jingjian, is said to have been ordained by the bhikkhu sangha only.

<sup>33</sup> Kusuma Bhikkhunī (2000).

<sup>34</sup> P.229, Kawanami, Hiroko (2007).

seems that the situation of bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka has changed greatly since the late 1980s when the very word “bhikkhunī” was a taboo.<sup>35</sup> It thus can be expected that bhikkhunī sangha will one day be firmly established in Sri Lanka.

### **Reference**

- Bartholomeusz, Tessa J. (1994), *Women Under the Bo Tree: Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berkwitz, Stephen C. (2004), *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: the power of the pan-Indian medieval Sri Lanka*, Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Cheng, Wei-Yi (2007), *Buddhist Nuns: a critique of feminist perspective*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Copleston, Reginald Stephen (1994), *Buddhism: primitive and present in Magadha and in Ceylon*, New Delhi & Madras: Asian Educational Services.
- Collins, Steven (1990), “On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon”, *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990), p. 89-126.
- Geiger, Wilhelm (trans.) (2003 edition), *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, Dehiwela, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- Gombrich, Richard & Gananath Obeyesekere (1988), *Buddhism Transformed: religious change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goonatilake, Hema (2001), “A silent Revolution: the restoration of the bhikkhunī order in Sri Lanka”, paper presented at *Sri Lanka Studies Conference*, October, Jaipur, India.
- Goonatilake, Susantha (2001), *Anthropologizing Sri Lanka: a Eurocentric misadventure*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Harris, Elizabeth (2006), *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter, religious, missionary and colonial experience in nineteenth century Sri Lanka*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn (1984), *A Comparative study of Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia.
- Karma Lekshe Tsomo (1998), “Prospects for an international Bhiksunī sangha”, in

---

<sup>35</sup> P.23, Cheng (2007).

- Karma Lekshe Tsomo (ed.), *Sakyadhītā: daughters of the Buddha*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.
- Kawanami, Hiroko (2007), “Bhikkhunī ordination Debate: global aspirations, local concerns, with special emphasis on the views of the monastic community in Burma”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 24(2), p.226-44
- Krishna, Sankaran (1999), *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the question of nationhood*, Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press.
- Kusuma Bhikkhunī (2000), “Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women’s History”, in Karma Lekshe Tsomo (ed.), *Innovative Buddhist Women: swimming against the stream*, Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon.
- Kusuma Devendra (1987), *The Dasasil Nun: a study of women’s Buddhist religious movement in Sri Lanka with an outline of its historical antecedents*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, University of Sri Jayawardenapura.
- Li, Yu-chen (2000), “Ordination, Legitimacy, and Sisterhood: the international full ceremony in Bodhgaya”, in Karma Lekshe Tsomo (ed.), *Innovative Buddhist Women: swimming against the stream*, Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press.
- Malalgoda, Kitsri (1976), *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: a study of religious revival and change*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Murcott, Susan (1991), *The First Buddhist Women: translation, and commentaries on the Therigatha*, Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Nissanka, H.S.S. (ed.) (1994), *Maha Bodhi Tree in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka*, New Delhi : Vikas Pub. House.
- Rogers, John d. (1990), “Historical Images in the British Period”, in Spencer, Jonathan (ed.), *Sri Lanka: history and the roots of conflict*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja (1992), *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, politics, and violence in Sri Lanka*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wijayaratna, Mohan (2001), *Buddhist Nuns: the birth and development of a women’s monastic order*, Colombo: Wisdom.
- Wu-Yin, Bhishuni (2001), *Choosing Simplicity: commentary on the Bhikshuni Pratimoksha*, translated by Bhikshuni Jendy Shih and edited by Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publication

