

Theory and Practice of Buddhist Feminist Movement in Taiwan: From Advocating Animal Rights to Female Rights

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze: (1) the author's mental journey from advocating animal rights to female rights in Buddhism, (2) the situational background against which the movement was initiated, (3) strategic thinking about movement building, (4) the assessment of the strategy and action plan's effectiveness, and (5) bottlenecks to the development of the movement.

In my previous papers, I stated that "the Eight Special Rules" (Aṭṭha Garudhammā) legitimizing gender discrimination were not formulated by the Buddha. In this paper, based on the current situation in Buddhist communities, I would like to further point out the fact that not only have the rules twisted the healthy relationship between men and women in daily interactions and rituals, but also the minds of practitioners. That is, by enforcing the rules, a mixed sense of inferiority and superiority was elicited through them, and the emotions of jealousy and superciliousness also evolved.

Additionally, "the Eight Special Rules" also frame a far-reaching and inescapable so-called "gender order" that manifests in various forms of rituals and gatherings in Buddhism. This draws Buddhism towards becoming an obsolete religion that extremely discriminates against females.

However, words alone are not enough. To effect change, we need to

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take action! Thus I weighed the entire situation and realized that, in order to deconstruct Buddhist male chauvinism, I must start at “the Abolishment of the Eight Special Rules”. Furthermore, I decided that I would not let this dispute develop into a tempest in a teapot engineered by Buddhists alone. I believed that if an appropriate amount of public pressure was brought to bear on the Buddhist community, then the mental state of the male chauvinists in the entire community could be pressed to transform and evolve.

At the end of March 2001, I took advantage of an opportune situation, as the Dalai Lama visiting Taiwan, to initiate the movement of abolishing “the Eight Special Rules”, and appealed to him to restore the bhiksuni ordination lineage for Tibetan nuns. The Buddhist Feminist Movement turned out to be a hot topic in the media at that time. Not only did it receive strong support from public opinion, but also gave a great shock to the male chauvinists in the Buddhist community, which really taught them a good lesson as expected.

Keywords: animal rights, the Buddhist Feminist Movement in Taiwan, Life Protection, Dependent Origination (*s. pratīya-samutpāda; p. paticca-samuppāda*), male chauvinism, bhiksuni, “the Eight Special Rules” (*p.s. Aṭṭha Garudhammā*), the Abolishment of the Aṭṭha Garudhammā, Dalai Lama, the Bodhisattva Path

台灣佛門女權運動之理論與實踐

——從提倡動物權到提倡佛門女權

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摘要：

本文剖陳筆者從提倡動物解放到提倡佛門女權的心路歷程、環境背景、策略考量、績效評估與運動瓶頸。

過往筆者即撰寫論文指出：將性別歧視予以法制化的「八敬法」並非佛制。本文更依佛門現況指出：八敬法業已扭曲了佛門健康的兩性關係，更扭曲了許多修道人的心性——自卑與自大交綜，嫉妒與驕慢滋長。它並且建構了無遠弗屆而且無可遁逃的「性別秩序」，導致佛教在各種禮儀與集會的形式上，成為極度歧視女性的落伍宗教。

但是光有論述是不夠的，必須要有行動！因此筆者認為：解構佛門男性沙文意識，一定要先從「推翻八敬法」下手。更進而研判：不能讓此一議題成為佛門「茶壺裡的風暴」；唯有讓佛教適度承受社會輿論的壓力，才能讓佛門大男人主義者迫於形勢而「心智成長」。於是在 2001 年 3 月底，達賴喇嘛來台訪問時，筆者趁勢發起了「廢除八敬法運動」，並呼籲達賴喇嘛恢復藏傳比丘尼制度。這使台灣佛門女權運動一炮而紅，不但獲得輿論的普遍肯定，也達到了向佛門男性沙文主義者實施「震撼教育」的預期效果。

關鍵字：動物權、台灣佛門女權運動、護生、緣起 (s. pratīya-samutpāda; p. paṭicca-samuppāda)、男性沙文主義、比丘尼、八敬法 (p.s. Aṭṭha Garudhammā)、廢除八敬法運動、達賴喇嘛、菩薩道

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In September of 1984, being encouraged and supported by Master Yin Shun, I was able to teach at Fu Yan Buddhist Institute. In that year, I was 28 years old, and had been ordained for six years. At that time, I had already envisioned the picture of my life. I wanted to become a scholar bhiksuni concentrating on the study of Buddhism and sangha education. By doing so, I could show my gratitude to my teachers, and fulfill the expectations from the Buddhist community.

Since I expected myself to be a scholar bhiksuni, it was perfectly natural that I never thought of practicing “Buddhism for the human world” (人間佛教) through social engagement as my career plan in those years of living on the mountain. When working in the academic field, I often lived in solitude so as to have time and space to study. This kind of lifestyle was quite different from that of being at one with the masses. However, several years later, without any preparation or expectation, I was gradually involved in public and social engagement in response to a chain of events, walking down the road of no return. Besides, my image also shifted from a quiet, refined scholar to an active, controversial, powerful public figure.

From a Scholar Bhiksuni to the Spokesperson for Animals

In 1988, I moved away from the incense-burning and sutra-chanting life in the mountain to the dusty, lively Great Taipei Metropolitan Area. Chance led some like-minded partners and me to co-found the Division of Religious Protection under the Buddhist Association of the R.O.C.. It was my very first step to have a dialogue with society since I left the mountain gate. Through various kinds of organized activities, I tried to protest against the media and the public for making insulting remarks upon bhiksunis and continually distorting the true meaning of the Buddha Dharma. We took a series of actions to respond to some news events. One such action was putting a stop to a performance of one of the classic plays of the Kunqu Opera, which tells of a young Buddhist nun who has worldly thoughts and desires. In addition, we worked towards dispelling popular misconceptions about the souls of dead babies, and fighting against the commercial exploitation of dead babies' parents, who were being manipulated by immoral religious persons. From these successful experiences, we proved

that as long as there was a “shared will”, there was a way to transform the “shared karma” of the public.

In 1990, Ma, Shiao-bin and his two friends were sentenced to the death penalty for committing kidnapping and blackmail. Human rights groups found the penalty excessive, so they petitioned the Government for their capital punishment to be reviewed and, ultimately, repealed. When I participated in the solidarity action for the rescue of the three young people, I had deep feelings for the sadness and suffering of these socially humble figures that were confined to the bottom of the social hierarchy.

When I strived hard for the protection of Buddhism, I was certain that I was brave enough to fight against the dominant power in society fearlessly. However, after this rescue action, I also realized that I could transform this courage into a great compassion, vibrant with an enduring and unflinching energy to protect and care for all life. According to Buddhist perspective, suffering comes from misconduct (of individuals, others, or common/shared evil deeds). And, now that the Buddhists who practice the Bodhisattva Path always have mercy for all the sinful, suffering beings, they would never give up any one of them. This is probably why such practitioners are destined to carry on the endless deep sorrow of fellow sentient beings throughout endless birth and death!

Since then, I have stayed involved in social engagements, and gone beyond the traditional Buddhist domain. Early on, my focus had been mainly on issues of human rights and environmental conservation. Since such issues tended to be related to the problems of legality and policy making, I was obliged to expand my vision from social engagement to political engagement.

From “Buddhist-oriented Life Protection” to “the Wildlife Conservation Act” and “the Animal Protection Law”

In the spring of 1992, I heard by chance that there was a growing fashion of playing “the game of stabbing fish” for recreation in Taiwan. Therefore, I initiated an “Anti-Stabbing-Fish Movement”, and launched an appeal to the public for a boycott of this popular, but cruel, recreational game because I deeply empathized with the agonizing suffering of these stabbed

fish. I rushed around inviting all related social groups to endorse this movement all over the Island. In response to this heartfelt appeal, as well as the strong public voice, Mr. Hao, Po-chun, the Prime Minister at that time, decided to enforce the ban on the game of stabbing fish immediately. After the success of this movement, many conscious-minded people started offering me a lot more information about abused animals. It seemed as if I were the “spokesperson for animals”.

As a matter of fact, I felt rather powerless and helpless, just like anyone when facing these endless and merciless phenomena. Why? The answer is simple! There are many players complicit in operating a system that makes animals entrapped into a miserable situation. These players include industry groups, the academic community, the consumer market, and the deliberately ambiguous bureaucracy, which represent a great number of voices and forces. In a democratic society, people have the right to vote for changing their fate and to voice their opinions, while animals have none of these. Day after day, animals are abused and slaughtered in dark, secret places that make their painful crying impossible to be heard by a person of humanity and sympathy.

After considering the entire situation, I realized that sheer personal power alone was not sufficient to be a successful spokesperson for animals. I must go beyond it. Only through the long-term functioning of a formal organization could the voice in protest against animal cruelty be articulated precisely and powerfully. Moreover, a formal organization could act as go between for related social groups and legislative bodies when lobbying for a bill that closely concerned the welfare and rights of animals. These arrangements not only ensured that animals could live in peace under legal protection, but also prohibited people from abusing animals. Meanwhile, I also understood that if I wanted to further spread awareness about protecting animals, it was necessary to set up a formal organization. Only in this way could we effectively convey the idea that “all life is equal” through education, publication, and various kinds of communication to the public, and hopefully correct an anthropocentric bias in our attitudes towards the non-human world.

In January 1993, with a group of kind hearted friends, we established the “Life Conservationist Association (LCA) of the Republic of China”. For

quite a long time, animal protection in Taiwan's Buddhism remained mostly on the level of personal moral concerns, such as becoming vegetarian or freeing captured animals. However, with this organization, we raised the issue of animal protection to one of legal ethics. That is, in addition to personal moral concerns, we also tried to formulate strong public policies, and push for some bills that were in favor of animals to be passed in the legislature.

Sometimes, I may use the term "animal rights", which was a popular Western concept, to loosely express my idea of animal protection. As a matter of fact, in Buddhism, the concept of "life protection" is based on the theory of Dependent Origination, which provides a complete theoretical framework for explaining the rationale behind this concept. Therefore, the motivation for "life protection" or "animal protection" in the Buddhist context does not necessarily come from the idea of "animal rights" that was developed by Western philosophers. Why? Because a common objection to the notion that animals have rights involves questioning the origin of those rights. My argument is that if the rights are "granted by God," it is impossible to prove or disprove them in reality. Meanwhile, arguing for an extension of legal rights to animals is also invalid, since "rights" and "obligations" usually go hand in hand. Thus, if the animal rights activists call for the enactment of laws giving legal rights, they would be easily trapped by the logical inference that "animals are not qualified to acquire the rights that humans possess," for they do not share common obligations.

As mentioned above, the rationale behind "life protection" in Buddhism comes from the fundamental root of the Buddha Dharma — the law of Dependent Origination (*s. pratīya-samutpāda*; *p. paṭicca-samuppāda*). It has been clearly stated in many Buddhist texts that keeping precepts means "to use one's own feelings to recognize, perceive, and directly experientially feel the emotions of others" for the purpose of controlling one's sensual desires toward others. This is what the Buddha called "the Dharma of taking oneself as the measure" (自通之法), which is similar to the ideas of empathy or the principle of reciprocity in Confucianism. Furthermore, what lies behind this kind of naïve feeling or experience is the speculative logic in the law of Dependent Origination.

Specifically speaking, this law emphasizes an important principle that

everything in the world exists through directly or indirectly relating to one another in mutual dependence. In other words, nothing exists by itself but rather everything exists as a result of the relationship of causes and conditions. Moreover, within the law of Dependent Origination, every thing that arises and becomes extinct is dependently originated, and is only conditionally, rather than inherently existent, so it is impossible to find a self-entity that is permanent, independent and unique. More importantly, through the practice of the “Eightfold Right Path”, not only can one’s karma be transformed, but all life will enter the same nature of things, and ultimately experience the same emancipation. For these reasons, the Buddha declared that “all life is equal”.

With a keen awareness that all beings are equal and interdependent, to protect animals, one should not focus on whether the moral object (animal) possesses “rights”. Instead, the emphasis should be put on whether a human being as a moral subject has empathy for the suffering of others, gratitude for the ecological environment, and an equal mindset towards all life.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the concept of “animal rights”, on any account, bears the profound meaning that it fosters reflective criticism of human-chauvinism (anthropocentrism), and thereby aims to correct our biased attitude towards the non-human part of nature. Because of this, animals no longer exist only as the property of “Mr. or Mrs. So and So”. The concept of animal rights presents animals as individual subjects, striving hard to survive and live in the universe. (Although they are not “moral agents,” in Tom Regan’s words, now at least they are “moral patients”; in other words, they are capable of being benefited from the moral norm.)¹

Furthermore, we must admit that the ideal of humanity is constructed out of our naturally empathetic emotion toward the weak minority. That is, “the Dharma of taking oneself as the measure”, provided that we are willing to talk about “human rights”. Then, people who agree with the advocacy of human rights cannot avoid the reality that animals are even weaker than the weakest minority groups in human society. Therefore, they should not treat

¹ For a more detailed discussion about “animals as the moral receivers”, please refer to “Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004, pp.236-248.”

the weak minorities of human beings and animals with dual standards. From this perspective, even though it may fall into some logical trap, the calling for “animal rights” could still be very persuasive and appealing in terms of strategic thinking for the movement.

With limited manpower and budget, the R.O.C. Life Conservationist Association (LCA) has achieved very gratifying successes in animal education and advocacy, the promotion of animal bills, and the caring of abused animals. For example, so far, two animal laws have been passed due to its efforts.

■On 27th of October 1994, the NGO version of the Wildlife Conservation Act (野生動物保育法) was passed by the Legislative Yuan. This version was promoted by the Ecology Reservation Alliance (生態保育聯盟), which consisted of some animal protection groups (including the LCA) and environmental conservation groups, and sponsored by the late Legislator Lu, Shiou-i (盧修一).

■On 13th of October, 1998, the Legislative Yuan passed its third reading for The Animal Protection Law (動物保護法). This was a major event in the field of animal protection and welfare in Taiwan.

There is one thing worth mentioning here! According to Article 10 of the Animal Protection Law, any animal race or contest for the purpose of gambling directly or indirectly shall be prohibited. In fact, at that time, it was a real surprise for us to know that this article was passed smoothly because there were surging waves that constantly hit us, raging beneath the apparently tranquil surfaces. For a very long time, several consortiums had been trying hard to stop the passage of “Anti-Horse-Betting Bill” (反賭馬條款) through their influential connections and green power under the table. Moreover, the crazy speculation in the media about this contentious topic had also been exerting harsh pressure upon us. Therefore, the passage of this Article in the Legislative Yuan was definitely another significant success for Taiwan social movements since the lifting of Martial Law.

Without the persistent efforts of social movement groups to persuade government officials and legislators by providing them with the information about the negative impacts of “legalized gambling”, the horse racing fields (even “Tourist Casinos”) would have sprung up like mushrooms in Taiwan. As a result, it would have not only brought the misery and suffering—

physically, mentally, and spiritually—to animals, but to individuals, families, and society.

The passage of this law left a mark in Taiwan's history, for this was the first time Taiwan's NGOs succeeded in framing the Life Protection Act (護生法案) through lobbying, and being involving in the operations of the national council without losing their autonomy. Meanwhile, this was also a milestone in world history, for it was the very first law made in the world against betting on horse and dog racing. In other words, Taiwan's animal protection law is forward looking in terms of the legal norms.

As we know, horse race gambling usually involves large commercial interests and incredibly vast sums of money that are shared by politicians and business sectors. Therefore, even the advanced countries in the West are still entangled in the web intricately woven by these interest groups, although they enjoy an excellent reputation for animal protection. Meanwhile, this has also become the endless ache in the heart of those group members who advocate for animal protection in those countries. Yet, in Taiwan, we have been capable of preventing all of the negative consequences of horse racing gambling by passing this law before the horse racing even had a chance to take place.

As I recalled, the early draft of the law on animal protection was prepared by Dr. Yeh, Li-san, and I represented the LCA to propose the draft law at the National Council of Agriculture from 1994 to 1997. During the drafting process, I advocated that the "Anti-Horse-Betting Bill" should be incorporated into this Law, which soon provoked a lively debate among meeting participants. Fortunately, the head of the Division of Animal Husbandry, Chi, Shuan-ching, made the decision to integrate this bill into the draft. Since then, there had been a see-saw battle between social movement groups and the consortiums, and this hard-fought battle had continued as long as four years! The success in pushing for the passage of this law was not easily attained! We could say that it was the shared aspiration and good will of both the government and civil society organizations in Taiwan that made it possible. I firmly believe that countless peoples' and animals' suffering due to shared evil deeds would be transformed because of our shared will and shared action.

Bhiksu Chauvinism Suppressed Buddhist Female Rights

Generally, in order to justify “animal rights”, the female rights movement was usually utilized to serve as an analogy. In the history of social movements, the female rights movement did take place earlier than the animal rights movement did. For me, however, I began my involvement the other way around. I first focused my concern on animal rights since 1992. It wasn’t until March of 2001 that I started to fight for female rights inside the Buddhist community.

The motivation for this movement was originally due to an event in which there were some emperor-like bhiksus behind the closed mountain gate writing anonymous articles in “*Sangha Magazine*”, a magazine clearly colored by “bhiksu superiority”. In the articles, they demanded that the bhiksunis obey “the Eight Special Rules” (*p.s. Attha Garudhammā*), a set of disciplinary rules that emphasize male dominance in the Buddhist community; to “recite the 84 ugliness of women”; and to “perform the 84 ugly manners”. They employed all available means to strengthen the ideology of “male supremacy and female inferiority” in the Buddhist order that led a lot of bhiksunis to suffer from a strong sense of inferiority. In order to prevent the bhiksuni readers from being brainwashed unilaterally, I started to launch a trenchant attack on these bhiskus’ remarks. Meanwhile, I also grasped every opportunity to produce Buddhist feminist writings, and to give speeches or lectures on gender equality in Buddhism. What’s more, I publicly clarified my position on this issue in my books that were carefully written based on theoretical analyses and alternative interpretations of canonical literature, with the aim of deconstructing male chauvinism and raising the feminine self-awareness of the bhiksunis in the Buddhist community.

Through these efforts, the speech in advocacy of “big bhiksu chauvinism” was diminished a bit in the public. Yet, the dishonorable tricks played under the table have never ceased. Therefore, in addition to receiving many insulting letters written by anonymous persons, I also knew for sure that there were many disparaging remarks about me passed between individuals through word of mouth. I was not deterred from fulfilling my ideas by any threats; on the contrary, I was inspired to fight back, and became a Buddhist feminist. I vigorously challenged “the Eight Special

Rules” as well as other Buddhist texts that suggest discrimination against women. I believe they are all against the higher justice of Buddhism. So I read them solely within their historical context, or from the angle of the mental state of the male practitioners of religion.

If these works could be counted as part of my so-called “personal achievements” in the Buddhist community, I should give these credits to these androcentric bhiksus!

During the nine-year-long period, my consciousness of female rights merely remained in the stage of theoretical debate and thought construction, without me taking actual action. I hesitated to do so by the reason of my concerns for the status of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. In Taiwan, the status of the Buddhist bhiksunis has excelled both in quantity and quality. They are not only well relied on by the Elder bhiksus, but highly respected by society. They are the luckiest of all the Buddhist women in the world. With their strength to show in the public, most of the bhiksunis in Taiwan become more aware of female consciousness. As a result, when they read the passages that appear to denigrate and attack women, they would not so easily rationalize them. They might not heavily criticize these passages as worthless with a persuasive eloquence like I do, but they would, at the least, just put them aside and ignore them.

By contrast, women in the Tibetan and Theravada tradition are rudely deprived of their rights to be ordained as bhiksunis by the bhiksus who cozy up to political forces. They don’t even have the opportunity to be bhiksunis, let alone talk about “gender equality”! At that time, my concern was that if I hastily launched the female rights movement in the Buddhist community, could it perhaps reinforce the suppression of the female practitioners in these areas because the local bhiksus would be afraid of women gaining power? Would they have no chance at all to become “bhiksunis”?

Even so, I reasoned that if Taiwan’s bhiksunis were not be able to serve as the spokespersons for female Buddhist practitioners in the world on gender issues, then it’s wholly impossible for those in Tibetan Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism to expect that “one of these days their time will come” in such a patriarchal society as Asia! Therefore, on second consideration, I decided that I really should not be subtly impeded by the status of Buddhist

women in the Tibetan and Theravada tradition, and maintained a discreet silence thereby.

In Buddhism, on the premise that “all life is equal”, the logic behind the concept of “gender equality” is quite simple. However, seeing that Buddhist disciples have been haunted by ignorance and arrogance, as well as by the psychologically delicate and complex feelings of “professional jealousy,” this concept was faced with a series of severe tests in practice in Buddha’s time, and continues up to the present day. Moreover, profound traces of “Male Chauvinism” are clearly discernible in the Buddhist canonical literature of past generations, even though their discourses seem obviously illogical or incoherent to the readers.

According to the “Vinaya”, there are the bhiksus sangha and the bhiksunis sangha. Besides, the “Vinaya” also states that even “bhiksus transgenders” (from male to female) or “bhiksunis transgenders” (from female to male) do not have to be re-ordained. This suggests that the “difference in the physical body” is not the point at all, and women should be ordained on an equal basis as their male counterparts. However, virtually all the canon of the Buddha’s teaching was composed by men, which meant that they had the absolute authority to compile and interpret the canonical literature. As a consequence, females were completely demonized as “monsters” fully assuming “84 ugly manners”. What’s more, they were also branded as “culprits”, unavoidably causing “the true Dharma to last for just five hundred years”. Furthermore, the idea that the Eight Special Rules were framed by the Buddha served as a binding spell that rendered bhiksunis powerless to act. As a result, the bhiksus were able to suppress the bhiksuni sangha, and even get rid of them altogether with considerable justification.

The Eight Special Rules—Causing a Sense of the Inferiority of Bhiksunis, and the Superiority of Bhiksus

“The Eight Special Rules”, a set of disciplinary rules that emphasize male supremacy and female inferiority in the Buddhist order, have twisted the healthy relationship between men and women in the Buddhist community. By following these rules, which are highly discriminatory against women, many bhiksunis felt that they were “much lower than the bhiksus” in social

standing. This not only made them strongly sense Bhiksus' superiority and Bhiksunis' inferiority, but also led Bhiksus to cast the "binding spell" easily whenever they wanted to control Bhiksuni. Because of "the Eight Special Rules," the bhiksus were so indulged in a sense of superiority arising out of the so-called "statutory authority" that they did not make progress in their monastic life. They were neither able to humbly study under outstanding bhiksunis or novice nuns, nor were they able to observe the etiquette governing the social interaction between youth and the elderly in general when they met and greeted the senior bhiksunis. By enforcing the rules, a mixed sense of inferiority and superiority was elicited within Bhiksus, and their emotions of jealousy and superciliousness also developed. Obviously, the "Eight Special Rules" made both the bhiksus and the bhiksunis "losers" in the path of practice and spiritual development.

Since 1945, under the protection and support of the open-minded leaders of the elder generation in Buddhism, Taiwan's Buddhists had established a decent tradition of mutual respect and trust between bhiksus and bhiksunis. Unfortunately, some bhiksus of the younger generation broke this traditional balance of power in the Buddhist community, and made strenuous efforts to instill the concept of "male supremacy and female inferiority" in the bhiksunis' minds through various Buddhist educational channels. Such inhuman brainwashing did produce the effect of self-suggestion that led many bhiksunis to be totally disarmed, and even to helped launch propaganda in favor of these male chauvinist bhiksus' beliefs and values. Hence, Taiwan's decent tradition of equality between bhiksus and bhiksunis was facing serious challenges under this anti-intellectual tide!

By cozying up to the Buddhist parties that discriminate against bhiksunis in Mainland China, these bhiksus made the state of sexual discrimination in Buddhism far worse than before. Through ordination ceremonies and Buddhist educational systems, they have aided and abetted a small number of bhiksunis of a servile character in engaging in brainwashing, so as to instill the idea of male dominance (over females) into students' minds in complete secrecy. Several negative effects have already resulted from this kind of inhumane education. For example: "the Eight Special Rules" have been strictly enforced at many ordination platforms and Buddhist colleges.

Besides, in some Buddhist colleges, the bhiksunis are required to bow at their fellow bhiksus' feet in class; still others, both the bhiksunis and novice nuns are asked to be responsible for eating up the leftovers while their male counterparts are exempted from this obligation. As far as I know, recently, on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, there has been a tendency to demand that each member of the Nun Order should follow "the Eight Special Rules," and this unhealthy trend is gaining momentum. I also heard that at one ordination platform, even the Elder bhiksuni precept masters (*S. ācārya*) were required to make salutation to the bhiksu who had just been initiated. The elder bhiksunis became very angry and upset about all these things.

The law that emphasizes "male supremacy and female inferiority" in the Buddhist order not only resulted in the grotesque phenomenon that "a bhiksuni ordained even for a hundred years should perform a full bow to a newly ordained bhiksu". Even worse, it made many bhiksus drift away from their deep respect for the Dharma. I've personally heard that some bhiksus, when receiving instruction in the meditation practice from a well-known and revered shramaner (沙彌尼) in Theravada heritage, were sitting up with cool effrontery, as their instructor kneeled on the ground while teaching. Try to imagine the arrogant looks on their faces! How disgusting they must have been. To our surprise, social status was far more important than the Dharma in their minds! Wasn't this the very command of the Buddha—"Never give a dharma talk to anyone who is sitting while I am standing"? If they did take "the Buddha's Command"(佛制) so seriously, they would not have put their dharma teacher in such a hopelessly awkward position with a good, clear conscience.

Besides, in Buddhist societies, the "gender order" that appreciates males and depreciates females not only has far-reaching influences, but also becomes inescapable. I detect that the emergence of the gender order is the detrimental consequence of legalizing sexual discrimination. Written as well as unwritten laws have both contributed to the worsening of such discrimination, and in turn create a vicious circle and shared negative karmic network.

The root of gender order can be retraced to "the Eight Special Rules" that depreciate Bhiksuni. The construction of "the Eight Special Rules" has created a gender order that puts Bhiksuni forever in subordination to Bhiksu, and the fact that these Eight Special Rules are recorded in the Vinaya has

further granted the gender order a legal status rather than remaining as simple decorum. The scope of the influence of such a gender order has reached the four groups of Buddhists.

At any given time, you could see young and junior Bhiksus walk or sit unabashedly in front of senior Bhiksunis. Some even take rather ridiculously childish actions to occupy seats in order to signify that they are indeed higher in rank than Bhiksunis. Not only do Bhiksunis suffer from such formal inferiority, but general Buddhist laywomen do as well. Laywomen are usually arranged to walk or take their seats following laymen.

Compared to other traditions, in addition to the gender order, Chinese Buddhism also justifies orders through class hierarchy. In some of the formal occasions in the Chinese tradition, some outstanding Bhiksunis and successful laywomen are allowed to exceptionally take privileged seats next to Bhiksus. If these outstanding Bhiksunis and successful women can embrace ideas of justice rather than indulging themselves in those tempting privileges, they may form a potential force in deconstructing the gender order.

Many kind-natured female practitioners often hypnotize themselves with ideals of “humility” and “selflessness” without knowing such passive conformation has actually encouraged the gender order. On the other hand, those modern women who harbor the consciousness of equality, and feel deeply insulted and upset under the gender order may even hold themselves back from any Buddhist gatherings. The gender order has apparently become the greatest obstacle in spreading the Dharma in the West.

It is not the Bhiksus alone who have maintained the gender order. Many Bhiksunis and lay Buddhist women have equally contributed to such an order. They have made tremendous efforts in maintaining the gender order in various public occasions, assuring that women follow after men. Those who refuse to abide by such a gender order are treated “aliens” or “traitors”. While striving to appear as “humble” and “tender” in front of men, they appear to be rather “forceful” and even “ferocious” towards their fellow women.

I strongly believe that the prosperous existence of a very obvious discriminatory gender order cannot be only attributed to the responsibilities of men alone. This is a gender game that is practiced over and over in every

occasion by both males and females in Buddhism, who have consciously or unconsciously promoted or allowed such a gender order. There were at least two very obvious cases that clearly showed that some bhiksunis' submissive attitude in the patriarchal society has indeed won them a higher status in the sangha or in the ordination system. However, I cannot help but reasonably suspect that not only have such women become complicit in gender discrimination but they have also played the role of the "white glove" in suppressing women's status, through which they are able to win their own place in the patriarchal sangha.

Compared to the gender discrimination that hides deep in the mind or between the lines, the ubiquitous gender order is particularly blunt and overt, and has grabbed startling attention. Even worse, with its appearance in various forms of Buddhist rituals and gatherings, the gender order has made Buddhism an obsolete religion that extremely discriminates against women.

I was incited by all these significant adverse trends in the Buddhist Female Rights Movement, so I decided to resort to radical measures to touch off a clash of creeds— "the Special Eight Rules were not framed by the Buddha". I had written many articles to expound this idea in the hope that people could put away their scruples about their objections to "the authority of holy words"(聖言權威性). But words alone are not enough. To make things change, we need to take action! Thus I weighed the entire situation and realized that in order to deconstruct Buddhist male chauvinism, I must start at "the abolishment of the Eight Special Rules". Furthermore, I decided that I would not let this dispute develop into a tempest in a teapot engineered by Buddhists alone. I believed that if an appropriate amount of public pressure was brought to bear on the Buddhist community, then the mental state of the male chauvinists in the entire community could be pressed to transform and evolve.

But who would be responsible for setting off the clash of gender equality in Buddhism? If this action could receive endorsement from any other prestigious Elder bhiksunis, it would certainly be far more effective in achieving the desired goal. Yet this might make them run the risk of becoming "cannon fodder in the front line". Since I could not bear to see anyone of them get hurt when speaking up in defense of their beliefs, I simply decided to let myself be the only target for attack.

What were the reasons behind my decision to do so? First, it had been a general impression that I was incredibly tough and persuasively eloquent all along, which made those irrational and timid opponents fear me a little. In order not to be caught in an extremely embarrassing situation that might damage their “male dignity”, they would not casually initiate a war (against me). Secondly, as a public figure, I had a certain degree of social visibility, after all. Therefore, they could perhaps do whatever they wanted to the other bhiksunis behind the closed mountain gate. However, if they really wanted to “fix” me, they simply must have measured the public opinion and feelings and felt certain scruples about them, for the public definitely would not side with these bhiksus.

Then when was the right time to trigger this clash move? To our surprise, there came a golden opportunity that remarkably coincided with this strategic move. Actually none of us would ever have dreamed that this moment would arrive in such great haste. However, sometimes a happy coincidence is better than a well-laid plan. In late March of 2001, I happened to know through newspapers that the Dalai Lama would travel to Taiwan and deliver a keynote speech entitled “*The Moral Values of the New Century*” (新世紀的道德觀) to the audience. I was inspired by this news.

Dalai Lama Facing “the Abolishment of the Aṭṭha Garudhammā”

On 31st of March 2001, we had already planned to hold a conference at Academia Sinica to celebrate the 96th birthday of Master Yin Shun, with a theme entitled “*Buddhism for the Human World; the Great Heritage Being Handed Down*” (人間佛教，薪火相傳). At that time, I thought, in order to make a contrast with the slighted status of the Buddhist women in the Tibetan heritage, the Buddhists in Taiwan could choose to declare publicly “The Abolishment of Unequal Treatment between Males and Females in the Buddhist Order” right at the conference. This declaration would fully assume unprecedented significance of “*the moral values of the new century*” in the Buddhist history of the world.

Before the Dalai Lama arrived in Taiwan, I had decided to make a clever hit first and wait to see what the response would be from him. I published an article entitled “*Go-Go! Dalai Lama —On ‘the Moral Values of*

the New Century, might as well learn a valuable lesson from Buddhism in Taiwan” in the Liberty Times on 28th of March 2001. The main gist of the article is as follows:

“The moral values of the new century are just in complete accord with the Buddhist idea of ‘all life being equal’; that is, thoroughly challenging the moral values of both male and human chauvinism. And the accomplishments attained by the Buddhism in Taiwan in these two areas are unrivalled internationally. Hence, it seems that the Dalai Lama had better understand all these things before his visit to Taiwan, and not be ashamed to learn from us, the younger greenhorns!

It may be the case that the Dalai Lama is still under the pressures of the chauvinist bhiksus, so he has no choice but using the rhetoric that the ‘bhiksuni’s ordination heritage has been broken off’ as excuse for his reluctance to restore the Tibetan bhiskuni order. If that is the case, how could it be possible that his speech in Taiwan would fully assume the moral significance of ‘the new century,’ as he can not even allow Tibetan nuns (so called “ani”) to be ordained on as equal a basis as their male counterparts? Therefore, not only should his travel to Taiwan aim solely at ‘preaching the Dharma’ to the people, but also ‘learn a valuable lessons’ from this place, especially listening attentively to ‘the testimony of Dharma’ afforded by the outstanding bhiksunis here in Taiwan.”

Strategically speaking, my reasoning and judgment about the development and trend of the overall situation were correct. Just as I expected, once this message was published, the Buddhist Female rights movement turned out to be a hot topic in the media.

On 31st of March, the conference on “*Buddhism for the Human World; the Great Heritage Being Handed Down*” officially kicked off at Academia Sinica. Immediately after the conference chairperson and guest speakers had finished their opening remarks, “The Declaration Ceremony for the Abolishment of the Unequal Treatment between Males and Females in the Buddhist Order” began with the announcement of “The Second Revolution by Contemporary Mahāprajāpatī—Declaration of the Abolishment of the

Eight Special Rules”. Mahāprajāpatī, the very first bhiksuni in Buddhist history, once challenged the justification of the Eight Special Rules, and suggested that the etiquette governing the social interaction between bhiksus and bhiksunis should be based on their seniority. Because of this, with a slight satire, I positioned this movement as “the Second Revolution by Contemporary Mahāprajāpatī”. I invited eight persons from the four sectors of Buddhist disciples to make an unprecedented world-historical act altogether that day—To tear the articles of “the Eight Special Rules” down from the screen. This act signified that “the Eight Special Rules” was abolished collaboratively by all sectors of Buddhist disciples, who were open-minded and progressive.

On the same day, a small number of bhiksus from Buddhist colleges tried to make a big issue at the conference by inquiring “Did Master Yin-shun agree with what you did?” What’s more, the bhiksus of the Buddhist Association of the R.O.C.(中國佛教會) also became angry from embarrassment, so they sent a letter to Master Yin-Shun urging him to make clear where he stood afterwards, with the hope that I would be falsely accused of misconduct. However, what they had done only further confirmed that the male Buddhists really did not want to give up their vested interests in maintaining their power in the Buddhist community, and in turn proved that my outcry against injustice actually had good reasons—“To rebel is reasonable, and to revolutionize is not in the wrong.”

After all, the Dalai Lama is a man of vast, worldly experience, so his mind was far clearer than those “irrational” bhiksus then. He knew that he already received a hot potato, and tried pass it on at once by saying that, it was “a particularly controversial issue” that cannot be resolved by him alone. It would be best if he could invite the representatives of both Tibetan and Theravada bhiksus to hold meetings to further study and discuss this issue. However, in every country dogs bite. How could we expect that these bhiksus would maintain their neutral stance on this issue? Moreover, Theravada bhiksus’ arrogant attitudes toward the bhiksunis were even worse than the Tibetan’s. Under these circumstances, the Dalai Lama went so far as to bring them together to settle all questions of the restoration of the Tibetan and Theravada bhiksunis order. Wasn’t this just like a bunch of wolves trying

to determine the fates of the baby chickens?

Nevertheless, the power struggle between the sexes in Buddhism was, on the whole, fairly successful in achieving the expected result this time. It gave a “great shock” to the male chauvinists in the Buddhist community, which really taught them a good lesson. Meanwhile, with the following words presented in his article, “*A Farewell to Tradition – Welcome the New Century of Gender Equality in Buddhism*,” professor Jiang Tsan-teng (江燦騰) also allowed a precise positioning of this “great shock” in the Buddhist community at the very start of the century:

“This was the most aggressive and innovative move that Chinese Buddhism had ever made over the last thousand years. As soon as it launched, it was not only well recognized by the people in Taiwan, but also received positive support from public opinions. Moreover, the great appeal for gender equality in Buddhism, made by contemporary Taiwan Bhiksunis in a rational and professional manner, also had a direct as well as powerful impact on the Dalai Lama during his second visit to Taiwan. And in consequence, he was pressed to quickly respond to the appeal that identified the universal value of human rights, even though he still dodged. The traditional Buddhist group in Taiwan and the Buddhist community in other areas of Asia were likewise strongly swayed by this bold move. But, they gave mixed reactions to this ‘particular controversial issue’, and even the members of World Chinese Buddhist Sangha Council (世界華僧會) failed to reach any consensus on it. Nevertheless, with their outstanding professional performance, and with their far-seeing wisdom for advocating the new way of thinking about gender equality in Asian Buddhism as well, these Bhiksunis in contemporary Taiwan were still worthy enough to be called the rare masterpiece (of religion) over the last one hundred years.”

The Practice of Bodhisattva’s Path

Some people were interested in knowing my mentality towards gender interaction in the Buddhist community. One politico bhiksu even viciously spread rumors that I was so mistreated that I became mentally disturbed, and

displayed “irrational speech and thought.”

On the contrary, as a bhiksuni, I was very lucky! Due to my hard work for Buddhism, I won recognition from many Elder masters. Therefore, I never experienced any such unpleasant encounters such as “being discriminated or mistreated as a bhiksuni”. Instead, I received many favors within the Buddhist community, especially from some well-respected Elder bhiksu. They unselfishly supported and protected me, both materially and spiritually. Their great kindness to me was as high as the mountain, and as deep as the ocean. That I will never forget. Thus, when I prepared to trigger this gender equality issue in the Buddhist community, I also endured terrible mental struggles.

Frankly speaking, deep inside my heart, I felt the pressure of potential moral reproach; so much so that I could not help thinking, “Did I return hatred to those who were kind to me?” I recall that on 26th of May 2001 the Chinese Buddhism Temple Association (中華佛寺協會) held a meeting to reelect its board members. As the board election results were announced, to my surprise, I received the second highest number of votes, only two votes less than the Venerable Elder Kai-Zheng, the chairperson of the Association. The board members consist of both bhiksu and bhiksuni abbots of each temple, who were acting as the authorized representatives. Therefore, their support in such an important election proved that the wide recognition I had achieved truly went beyond gender.

As I anticipated beforehand, advocating the Buddhist Feminist Movement was to be a tough and thankless task that would suffer bitter scorn from all sides. I would not be appreciated by the bhiksunis of a servile character, while at the same time I would become an fright to those chauvinistic bhiksus who had vested interests. Still, I would offend many bhiksus who identified with my ideas originally, and would have to face countless enemies out of ideological differences. If I had wanted to keep up my personal prestige in the Buddhist community, I really should not have asked for trouble to be involved in the Feminist Movement.

However, after the Animal Rights Movement had drawn to a conclusion, I finally triggered the Female Rights Movement, which was profitless to me. If words could say why I did this, I would say that I must

have been prompted by the inner drives of being “unendurable to be conscious of the decline of noble teaching, and unendurable to be conscious of the sufferings of sentient beings.” (不忍聖教衰，不忍眾生苦)”

Having intervened in the field of social movements, on one hand, I was too busy to do academic research, and thereby was devoting no time to produce academic writing from a micro perspective, which tended to focus heavily on meticulous data collection and analysis. Yet, on the other hand, writing more socially oriented works from a macro perspective did present a wonderful opportunity to broaden my vision and deepen my insight on many issues, which was utterly impossible for me during my years as a pure scholar. More significantly, my actions and performance proved that the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism—“To dignify the pure land, and to mature sentient beings”—was not only a far away story within “*the Scriptures of the Buddha's Reincarnated Manifestations*” (*S. Jātaka Sūtra, Birth Tales Sūtra*), nor was it the Earth Bodhisattva’s super power. It is definitely achievable by the ordinary Bodhisattva in the flesh and blood, and can be embodied in the collaboration of people who have a shared will and take shared action!

Previously, while staying in the mountain as a scholar bhiksuni, I knew there was a “Bodhisattva Path,” and was very familiar with the essential meaning of Mahayana Dharma too. Yet, when facing the fundamental defects of life, and the infinite, countless beings, I always experienced a profound sense of helplessness. It was not until I engaged in social movements that I began to feel that there was an endless flow of energy passing through me. Besides, I also felt that the shared karma of the public could be transformed through their shared will and shared action. Then, I genuinely and practically confirmed that “the Bodhisattva Path” truly exists. And it surely can be followed and practiced!

When I engaged in the Animal Rights and Female Rights Movements, I had been trying hard to transcend personal limits in every aspect of my life. All these transcending experiences were probably the highest rewards that I earned for myself!

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