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Illustrating the Way: The Life and Times of Bhikṣuṇī Shig Hiu Wan

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Abstract

Bhikṣuṇī Shig Hiu Wan was a Buddhist master in more than one sense of the word. She was not only a highly accomplished practitioner, teacher, artist, and poet, but she was also a feminist pioneer in higher education. When she arrived in Taiwan in 1966 and began teaching at the Chinese Cultural University, she was the first Buddhist nun to teach at the university level in Taiwan. At that time, it was highly unusual for a nun to take a visible role in the public sphere, so when Shihfu allowed her paintings to be exhibited in Taipei, this was an important breakthrough in helping raise awareness of Chinese and Indian Buddhist culture, Buddhist women's cultural achievements, and women's achievements in general. In this paper, I take a participant/observer approach in an effort to understand Shihfu's unique teaching style and the qualities and achievements that establish her as one of the leading Buddhist nuns of the twentieth century. In this personal reflection, based on fieldwork conducted in Taiwan between 1982 and 2002, I consider her life's work and the impact that she has had on successive generations of Buddhists, particularly Buddhist women. In the process, I examine what it means to be a uniquely progressive master in an overtly, proudly traditional Buddhist culture.

The wind rustled through the bamboo grove, as the Chan practitioners of the Lotus Ashram settled silently on their cushions and turned their attention to the true nature of things.¹ On scenic Bright Light Mountain, just north of Taipei, Bhikṣuṇī Shig Hiu Wan² (1913–2004) created an idyllic atmosphere for intensive training in traditional Chinese Buddhist culture. Eternal Light Temple was surrounded by fields, forests, and bamboo groves and much of our food was grown in the monastery garden.

When I stayed at the Lotus Ashram during the winter of 1982, the nuns slept in bunkbeds, twelve to a room, but Shihfu found me a tiny space of my own to do my Tibetan practices and continue my research in quiet. The silence, however, could be broken at any moment with a summons: "Wisdom of Emptiness, come here!" My Chinese name, Wisdom of Emptiness, was a constant wake-up call, and I was expected to immediately go wherever she took me, whether it was for a few minutes or a few days.

Initially, I found these sudden injunctions disruptive and annoying. How could I just pick up and leave, not even knowing where I was going or for how long I would be away? After months of practice, however, I realized that her summons was a valuable teaching. Not only did I get to see many wonderful temples and meet extraordinary people, but Shihfu's call taught me to stay alert in the moment and to be ready for anything. It taught me both nonattachment and flexibility.

Shihfu often took me with her when she went outside the monastery for important meetings, conferences, or visits to the doctor. Returning to the monastery after these excursions, she often bought me a big loaf of bread. Perhaps she realized that eating soupy rice and soggy vegetables for breakfast was pure torture for a young American. This is just one small example of Shihfu's compassionate care.

Life at the Lotus Ashram

In the spring of 1982, after five years in India as a novice nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, I made the decision to take full ordination as a *bhikṣuṇī* and received permission from several prominent Tibetan teachers. There was no lineage of full ordination for women in the Tibetan tradition, so a friend spontaneously offered me an air ticket to Taiwan and another gave me a new pair of leather shoes. When I arrived in Taiwan, I was driven to the Chinese Cultural University where Shihfu was teaching. This was the first time I had met a female Buddhist master. I greeted Shihfu and her translator in the same manner, with hands joined together, and waited for Shihfu to sit down, as is done in the Tibetan tradition, but Shihfu stood still. I did not know what to do. Time passed, and Shihfu generously gave me a tour of the Buddhist Studies Department where I admired her paintings and environmental design work. From the beginning, I was deeply impressed with her gracious simplicity and kindness. Several days later, she instructed me in monastic deportment: a junior monastic should immediately bow to senior monastics, even if they are standing, but not bow to laypeople; and monastics should never wear leather shoes! Thus began my relationship with indisputably great Buddhist master Shig Hiu Wan. And, as usual, I learned by making all the mistakes.

During the six months that I stayed at the Lotus Ashram, I enjoyed the warm companionship of sixty young, like-minded practitioners immersed in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Each morning, we arose at 4:00 to begin practice. In the pre-dawn stillness, we lined up in order of seniority, then divided into three groups. One group gathered before an elegant image of Śākyamuni Buddha to chant prayers and mantras, punctuated by rhythmic bells and gongs. In another chapel, the second group performed prostrations before a majestic statue of Amitabha Buddha in cadence with prayers of repentance. In a pristine meditation hall at the back, the third group sat in silent meditation and circumambulated a serene marble image of Śākyamuni Buddha. Then all the practitioners converged in the dreamlike stillness of the meditation hall for another hour of Chan practice.

At the light tinkle of a chime, the meditation ended, and we all moved silently toward the dining hall for breakfast. Without a word being spoken, the meal was a seamless continuation of the morning's meditation. The meaninglessness of most ordinary conversation became quite clear in the silence. Apart from classes and chanting, our primary utterance was "Amitabha Buddha," which replaced "Good Morning," "Thank you," and "Excuse me." Every activity became infused with awareness.

Shihfu trained her students to regard every aspect of monastic life as an opportunity to develop *prajñā* – chanting, ritual, meditation, cooking, cleaning, and gardening alike. She encouraged them to master every facet of Buddhist study, beyond sectarian affiliations, national pride, and personal allegiances. One wealthy college graduate from the Philippines told me that she was mortified when Shihfu assigned her to clean toilets, but within a short time, she was deeply grateful to be cured of her arrogance. Shihfu's

motto, printed on the Lotus Ashram's application form, was: "Sincere seekers of enlightenment welcome. Others are advised to apply elsewhere."

Sadly, in the years before I arrived at the Lotus Ashram, there had been several Western nuns who did not behave appropriately. One had never been ordained, but was posing as a nun. Known as "the White Nun" because she wore white clothing, she became so notorious that she had been expelled from Nepal the year before. She insisted on sleeping outside in the bamboo grove and making various other outrageous demands. Throughout all this commotion, Shihfu remained patient, but finally, after she violently attacked Shihfu's translator, the Ashram administration decided that this was the last straw and asked her to leave.

Because of unfortunate incidences like this, I was not admitted to the Lotus Ashram immediately, but was placed on a kind of probation to see whether I could adapt to the monastic lifestyle and the high standards expected of the students. Part of this probationary training required that I sit by myself in the corridor outside the dining hall for all meals. When I was finally allowed to join the other nuns and lay students in the dining hall, after three months of this training exercise, I felt a sense of both relief and accomplishment. Sitting in the corridor alone forced me to contemplate my high opinion of myself and how I could fit into a "self-less" community. This was just one of many invaluable lessons learned from monastic life.

Biography of a Master

Buddhist tradition sees monastic ordination as the beginning of a new life. Accordingly, Shihfu did not speak much about her early life. We know that she came from a well-to-do family in Guangdong, received a classical Chinese education, and studied painting with the well-known master Jianfu Gao from a young age.³ To further her knowledge of Chinese arts and culture, she graduated from two art institutes, one in Guangdong and one in Hong Kong. Her father and sisters were killed during the Japanese invasion of China, a loss that affected her deeply. As a young woman, she traveled widely, gained international recognition for her paintings, and was invited to exhibit her work in Europe. Gradually, she developed a strong interest in Buddhism and began to study with both Tiantai and Chan masters. In Hong Kong, she became the only female disciple of the renowned Tiantai master Bhikṣu Tanxu and went on to receive monastic ordination, an unusual step for an educated, young Chinese woman. While teaching Chinese Buddhist art and culture at Tagore University in Shantiniketan in Bengal, India, she continued her artistic endeavors for six years. The influences of Indian Buddhism and the rural Indian environment are evident in her paintings, poetry, and scholarship.⁴

In 1966, Shihfu was invited to teach at the Chinese Cultural University in Taiwan and became the director of the Institute for the Study of Buddhist Culture of the China Academy. For a Buddhist nun to teach at a public university and lead a prestigious national institute were groundbreaking achievements that were not universally approved in the male-dominated intellectual and institutional climate of the day. One of her special contributions was elucidating the intersectionality of Chinese artistic culture and Buddhist philosophy.⁵ Rather than overtly challenge incidences of religious and gender discrimination, she simply carried on her work with sincerity and pure motivation, which eventually dispelled many preconceptions and confounded the opposition. Shihfu allowed her paintings to be exhibited in Taipei, establishing an

important breakthrough in raising awareness about women's contributions to Buddhism. Her cutting edge achievements place Shifu in the ranks of the most outstanding Buddhist nuns of the twentieth century.

Although Shihfu admired and appreciated the work of her contemporaries in building and administering temples, she herself was not interested in this path. When Shihfu took up her position at the Chinese Cultural University at Yangmingshan, Bhikṣuṇī Shing Ding invited her to stay at nearby Eternal Light Temple, offering the use of the grounds and buildings as an *ashram* and Buddhist institute, and also the ownership of the temple. Shihfu accepted the invitation to stay, but with the clear understanding that Bhikṣuṇī Shing Ding would remain the abbess, and that Shihfu would devote all her time and energy to creating the Lotus Ashram, the Institute of Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, and eventually Huafan University.

Shihfu was among the first in her generation of Chinese scholars to draw attention to the Indian roots of Buddhism, establishing the Institute for Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies. She pioneered the study of foreign languages and furthered the Buddhist education of young women around the world. In her mid-70s, she founded Huafan University, the first Buddhist university in Taiwan. Receiving permission to establish a Buddhist university was not easy; the government required her to begin by establishing a College of Science and Technology – a very expensive venture indeed. In order to achieve her ultimate goal of promoting Chinese culture and Buddhist studies, she agreed to this requirement, successfully raised the needed funds to build the College, and eventually the entire university. Today, Huafan University is one of the leading universities in Taiwan.

In a world dominated by personality cults, Shihfu was unusual in that she did not seek renown. She was extremely gifted, a charismatic figure, kindhearted and dynamically insightful. With a little self-promotion, she could have gained great fame, but that was never her goal. Her mission was to nurture Buddhist teachers and practitioners in her understanding of the essence of the Dharma: *prajñā* (wisdom). Philosophically, *prajñā* refers to direct insight into *śūnyata* (emptiness), the true nature of everything. For Shihfu, *prajñā* was not simply a concept; it meant manifesting *prajñā* in every action of body, speech, and mind. Embodying wisdom is the antithesis of self promotion.

At Eternal Light Monastery, Shihfu established the first traditional Chan practice hall for women in Taiwan. Every week, students of the Lotus Ashram and a Belgian Catholic nun named Rose engaged in a day of intensive meditation practice. Every year, they held a seven-day intensive Chan retreat. Shihfu taught Chan with the insight that can only come from direct realization. During one of these retreats, she assigned us a *kung-an* (koan) to work on: “Who can remove the bell from the tiger’s neck?” After several days of intense introspection, we were asked to anonymously put forth our answers in writing. The “correct” answer, of course, is that since we alone saddle ourselves with our own delusions, only we can remove them. My answer was that the tiger’s girlfriend could remove the bell. Although I expected a scolding for this impudent answer, Shihfu merely said, “The person who wrote this answer must be someone who practices the esoteric teachings.”

Enlightening Education

The intensive training that students received at the Lotus Ashram was inherited from the demanding monastic discipline that produced countless realized Buddhist masters in China for over a thousand years. In her life and practice, Shihfu embodied the six

perfections: generosity, ethical conduct, patience, joyful effort, concentration, and wisdom.⁶ In her writings and teachings, she elucidated the three trainings – ethics, concentration, and wisdom – and modeled them in an authentic, uncompromising, yet openhearted way.⁷ Among all these qualities, she placed wisdom (*prajñā*) at the heart of her Chan practice, art, and educational philosophy, dubbed “enlightening education.”

Shihfu not only taught enlightening education, but also embodied it. In an era when Buddhist conferences were largely intellectual posturing and almost entirely male, Shihfu gave women opportunities to share their understandings of Buddhism from both scholarly and experiential perspectives. Beginning in the 1980s, she created a series of conferences on Buddhist education that were exhilarating and, with the full participation of women at every level, quite revolutionary.

In her teaching, Shihfu was both extremely traditional and radically unstructured. Her approach to monastic discipline was uncompromising; one step beyond the boundaries of the monastery without permission was treated as a major transgression. At the same time, her approach to scholarship allowed space for creativity and critical thinking. She once demonstrated her open-mindedness by allowing me to offer a public critique of Buddhism in Taiwan. Although my critiques were mild – that monks and nuns sometimes stay together in the same monastery and that young men in Taiwan could be deterred from monastic life by military service obligations – she took the considerable risk of supporting academic freedom during a time of martial law. As long as they were respectful, students were free to express their ideas. This experience taught me many things about myself, but it also showed me that Shihfu, strong in her convictions, was willing to make space for difference. She had the generosity of spirit to respect the free expression of ideas, even though she might have disagreed with them. She also had the courage to allow her foreign student to express controversial ideas that might have been embarrassing to the conservative Buddhist community or even dangerous in the political climate created by the KMT government of that day.

At the end of November 1982, Shihfu arranged for me to participate in a huge national ordination ceremony at Haiming Temple on the outskirts of Taipei.⁸ Bhikṣu Wu Ming, the abbot of this temple, was a great master who escaped persecution by the communists on mainland China and who contributed greatly to the current flourishing of Buddhism in Taiwan. The ordination, lasting thirty-two days, was strenuous but immensely rewarding. The participants came from Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and from Chinese communities as far afield as Los Angeles and Calcutta, but we were united in our goal to train conscientiously to better serve the Dharma. After receiving full ordination as *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, we received teachings and commentary on the precepts to be observed. On the day we newly-ordained ones ritually went for alms around the temple, we were quite moved by the enthusiasm with which lay people rushed forth to offer donations. The closing ceremony at which we received the Mahāyāna precepts was especially meaningful. At midnight on the full moon day, over three hundred freshly minted nuns and monks together made a strong resolve to dedicate ourselves to perfect awakening in order to rescue numberless sentient beings from suffering. It is said that such a precious aspiration is so powerful that it can cause the heavens to move and many whispered that they had felt the earth quake.

Internationalizing Buddhist Culture

Shihfu was among the first of her generation of Chinese scholars to draw attention to the Indian roots of Buddhism and to the importance of gaining a solid grounding in the foundations of Indian Buddhist thought. Her steadfast commitment to this holistic Buddhist approach is evident in her naming of the Institute of Sino-Indian Buddhism, acknowledging that Chinese Buddhist thought is, in fact, a blend of Indian and Chinese elements, not simply an import. She was a pioneer in promoting the study of foreign languages, instituting a full slate of classes in Sanskrit, Pali, Japanese, and English at the Institute. She was among the first Buddhist teachers in Taiwan to understand the importance of imparting Buddhist education to overseas Chinese. She invited applications from girls and young women born and raised in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada, and so forth, and sponsored their education and training at the Lotus Ashram. Because of differences in culture, upbringing, and language, educating these students required great wisdom and patience. Often the young women who came to live and study with us were the privileged daughters of well-to-do overseas Chinese families. They were accustomed to having servants to cook, clean, and take care of them, whereas at the Lotus Ashram everyone was expected to work on an equal footing with others. Even training the younger generation of Taiwanese nuns required great wisdom and patience.

Shihfu displayed an international awareness and vision that were highly unusual among Buddhist monastics of her day. In 1976, she initiated a series of conferences known as the International Association of Buddhist Studies conferences. These conferences have continued to the present day, becoming the premier gatherings of Buddhist scholars from around the world. As with much of her other work, Shihfu's leadership in this groundbreaking international effort is often overlooked. In 1990, she led a delegation to the International Association of Buddhist Studies Conference in Tokyo that included of eighteen nuns, all of whom were well-educated, well-disciplined scholar-practitioners. During the proceedings, a male professor looked out at the audience and commented, "The presence of so many *bhikṣuṇīs* today is evidence of the decline of the Dharma."⁹ Shihfu's response to such ignorant provocation was grace, calm, and a totally genuine compassion.

The conference concept that Shihfu pioneered became a model for the Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women that began in 1987 and have brought thousands of Buddhist women together from all around the globe. In 1991, Shihfu traveled to Thailand to attend the 3rd Sakyadhita Conference. In 2002, she hosted the 7th Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan and welcomed hundreds of international participants to Huaan University. Her support for this fledgling international movement of Buddhist women was heartwarming. In place of competitive or hierarchical styles of leadership, she recognized and applauded the efforts and accomplishments of other women. By appreciating the efforts of this humble grassroots movement to gain opportunities for Buddhist women, Shihfu modeled the solidarity that oppressed peoples everywhere need to fulfill their aspirations. Wisdom and compassion were not simply academic topics for her; they infused everything that she touched.

Prajñā in Principle and Practice

The central theme of Shihfu's teachings is *prajñā* (wisdom), which, along with great compassion, is a key signpost in the Mahāyāna presentation of the Buddha's teachings.

I had just completed a Master's thesis on the topic of *prajñā* when I arrived at Yangmingshan, so Shihfu and I had a strong common bond of appreciation for this crucial, variously interpreted concept. She was a master commentator on a wide range of Buddhist texts, especially the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. Every Sunday, she taught classes that were open to the public and attracted large audiences, largely women. When she lectured, she not only explained the words, but wordlessly transmitted the essence of the teachings, leading her listeners directly into the heart of the text. In the process, she opened the listeners' minds and sparked *prajñā* awareness in the present moment. She had a talent for clearly elucidating the profound meaning of each passage, not merely intellectually but directly – how to intuitively manifest the teachings in every moment of everyday life.

Shihfu's illuminating interpretations left many listeners baffled. In addition to her often inscrutable Mandarin, every phrase led to deeper, seemingly endless apertures of awareness. The import was always *prajñā* in every moment of ordinary life – each action as an opportunity for *prajñā* awareness. Her point was not simply the importance of bringing mindfulness to every action; she stressed the vital importance of realizing *prajñā* directly in the practitioner's every thought, word, and deed. Perhaps her greatest gift was the ability to impart meaning beyond words. Her embodiment of the teachings – abiding in *prajñā* awareness, beyond time and tradition – is her lasting legacy to the world.

In some ways, Shihfu was an elusive figure. Her interpretation of the Buddhadharmā was so profound that many listeners were mystified. As I listened to her Dharma teachings, every phrase led to a profound awakening of understanding, yet when I tried to recall the salient points of the teaching afterwards, I had difficulty conveying the impact of the teachings in words. The import was always to practice Dharma genuinely and sincerely, such that every action was an opportunity for *prajñā* awareness, but the impact of her insights went far beyond the explicit meaning of the text. Every Sunday, a dedicated group of 80 to 100 students gathered to hear her elucidate a specific text. For several years, including the time I stayed at Yungmingshan, she taught the *Diamond Sūtra*. From one perspective, she gave a line-by-line commentary on the meaning of the text, but from another perspective, she opened up not only the text but the minds of the listeners to the deepest realization.

Shihfu had a gift for conveying the deeper meaning of a concept in a way that went far beyond the literal meaning of the text. At times, I considered her style intuitive, both in the sense that she intuited the level of understanding of the listeners, but also in the sense that she cued the listeners' own intuitive wisdom. An exchange between Shihfu and Pangjang Kusan Sunim of Korea that occurred in the 1980s illustrates the tone of Chan:

Ven. Shig Hiu Wan: Thought comes from nonabiding.

Master Kusan: What is nonabiding?

Hiu Wan: Do not adhere to existence or nonexistence, and do not stand in the middle either!

Kusan: So what is that which arises before thinking?

Hiu Wan: The arising is nonexistence. Hence it is called "wonderful existence."¹⁰

This is not to imply that *prajñā* is simply intuitive awareness; nor does it imply that anyone can literally impart *prajñā* insight to another. Yet, there is an old tradition in Buddhist learning of wordlessly transmitting the essence of the teachings. In the minds of her students, Shihfu was a master of this tradition.

In other ways, Shihfu was an innovator and, although she has not received much public acknowledgment for these contributions and could have cared less about receiving public acknowledgment, many of the directions that Buddhism has taken in Taiwan were pioneered by her. She was indisputably a pioneer in women's leadership. Although many temples in Taiwan were founded and developed by nuns before she came to Taiwan, nuns tended to defer to monks and often gave the credit for their own efforts to monks. Shihfu did not seek leadership; it came naturally to her. The people who were fortunate enough to work with her understood her greatness and trusted her wisdom.

The true greatness of her leadership was that it was absent of self-promotion. She had no interest in gaining a name for herself, which is why recognizing her contributions is so vitally important. Even though she had no choice but to put her name before the public, as with the public exhibition of her paintings, it was not for the purpose of gaining fame or recognition for herself, but for the purpose of benefitting others. Among many outstanding accomplishments, she exemplified this by establishing a university based on Buddhist values, training a generation of Buddhist women educators, and encouraging future generations of youth in Taiwan to appreciate Chinese contributions to world culture. She understood clearly that women have great potential for leadership and, instead of monopolizing the limelight for herself, she conscientiously nurtured that potential in others. Her intention was never to surround herself with fawning devotees, but to train fully-qualified nuns who would return to their own temples to teach Buddhist texts and meditation and impart to their disciples the same inspiration that they had gained for discovering the true essence of the Dharma.

Proto-Feminist, Feminist, Post-Feminist: The Limits of Labels

To have broader significance, Shihfu's achievements require analysis within their own cultural and historical context. When Shihfu arrived in Taiwan, almost all recognized Buddhist teachers were monks. This still holds true throughout most of the Buddhist world. Because of the deeply ingrained preference for males, at just about every level of society, Buddhist monks universally and automatically received respect, support, and obedience from their disciples. In Taiwan, Buddhists were very familiar with the self-sacrificing service of Buddhist nuns and respected them for the many tasks they tirelessly performed at the temples, but they were not used to seeing nuns in leadership or teaching positions. Shihfu helped change Buddhist presuppositions by encouraging women to be the very best they could be – no excuses. At the Lotus Ashram, the leadership was entirely female from top to bottom. Some students took a while to get used to this, to open their eyes, and to recognize the leadership qualities of other women, but both the nuns and laywomen, given an opportunity, proved themselves capable of much more than they had imagined. In large measure, this was due to the example of Shihfu herself. Her example shattered all of my preconceptions about what women could and should do.

This naturally leads to an analysis of Shihfu's contributions as a feminist. Although she never used the label for herself, insofar as she recognized that women have equal human potential, she was undoubtedly a feminist and far ahead of her time in this respect. During one outing with Shihfu, I asked her about observing the eight *gurudharmas*, the special rules that effectively subordinate nuns to monks in the monastic order.¹¹ Shihfu

said that, in her view, nuns should observe the practice of bowing to monks who were worthy of respect. When I asked her how she would handle this protocol with monks who were not worthy of respect, she simply stated that she did not invite such monks to the Lotus Ashram. Therefore, this type of awkward situation did not occur. On another outing, I asked what roles she thought women should play in Buddhism. Immediately she replied, “All roles. This is the age of the *bhikṣuṇī*.” She challenged male domination not by confrontation, but by perseverance.

Since that time, almost everything I have done is due to the inspiration, encouragement, and training that Shihfu gave me to put my ideas into action, despite the odds: to start education projects for Buddhist women, to obtain the highest academic credentials, to take a teaching role, to integrate Buddhist practice and scholarship, and, above all, to always strive to be genuine. For Shihfu, *prajñā* meant to be completely genuine and to reflect *prajñā* awareness in every thought, word, and deed, in accordance with the Buddha’s teachings. This will be her lasting legacy to the world.

Endnotes

¹An earlier version of this paper, titled “*Prajñā: The Philosophy and Life of Venerable Shih Hiu Wan*,” appeared in *Festschrift for Venerable Hui Wan* (Taipei: Institute of Asian Humanities of Huaan University and Institute of Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, 2005).

²This transliteration of her name is from Cantonese. In Mandarin, it is Shih Xiaoyun.

³Yu-chen Li, “Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan: Enlightening Society by Institutionalizing Buddhist Education,” *Eminent Buddhist Women*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), p. 102.

⁴Jenlang Shih, “Enlightenment in the Chan Painting of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan,” *Buddhist Women in a Global Multicultural Community*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Kuala Lumpur: Sukhi Hotu Press, 2008), pp. 90–98.

⁵Joseph S. Wu, “Chinese Philosophy Outside Mainland China,” *Asian Philosophy Today*, ed. Dale Maurice Riepe (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981), pp. 50–51.

⁶For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Mindfulness and the Six Perfections,” *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness*, ed. Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Nirbhay N. Singh (London: Springer, 2015), 139–57.

⁷A catalogue of her writings published from 1969 to 1999, mostly in Chinese, can be found in the Digital Library & Museum of Buddhist Studies: <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/DLMBS/author/authorinfo.jsp?ID=65744>

⁸My motivation for participating in this second ordination was to observe the ordination procedures, in anticipation of instituting full ordination for nuns in traditions that had no extant *bhikṣuṇī* lineage.

⁹The scholar’s statement apparently alludes to a prophecy, attributed to the Buddha, that the Dharma would decline if women were admitted to the *sangha*. There a number of problems with this account. As Jan Nattier has shown in *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), “With relentless consistency, Buddhist writers have predicted the disappearance of their own religion, offering explicit timetables for its extinction.” (p. 28) She cites Edward Conze’s assessment that “every five hundred years, a decisive change for the worse takes place.” (p. 34) The prophetic timeline had to be extended repeatedly in the face

of evidence to contrary; that is, even though the Buddha admitted women to the *sangha*, the Buddhadharmas remained alive and well. The existence of the Buddhadharmas in the world today, not to mention the presence of tens of thousands of *bhikṣuṇīs*, belies the prophecy. If the Dharma had died out, it could have conveniently been blamed on the *bhikṣuṇīs*, but that did not happen. Under the circumstances, such a prophecy clearly could not have been uttered by an omniscient Buddha.

¹⁰Martine Batchelor, *Women in Korean Zen: Lives And Practices* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 53.

¹¹For critical studies of these rules, see Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen and Bhikkhu Analayo, “The *Gurudharma* on *Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Tradition,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20(2013) 743–74; Tzu-Lung Chiu and Ann Heirman, “The Gurudharmas in Buddhist Nunneries of Mainland China,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 31:2(2014) 215–40; Tzu-Lung Chiu and Ann Heirman, “The Gurudharmas in Taiwanese Buddhist Nunneries,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 29:2(2012) 273–300; and Nirmala Salgado, “Eight Revered Conditions: Ideological Complicity, Contemporary Reflections and Practical Realities,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 15(2008) 176–213. Jean Byrne also broaches the topic in her article, “Why I Am Not a Buddhist Feminist: A Critical Examination of ‘Buddhist Feminism,’” *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 21:2(2013) 180–94.

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