Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

Luminary Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwan: A Quiet Feminist Movement

Wei-yi Cheng

Department of the Study of Religions School of African and Asian Studies 116247@soas.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: Luminary order is a well-respected Buddhist nuns' order in Taiwan. In this essay, I will examine the phenomenon of Luminary nuns from three aspects: symbol, structure, and education. Through the examination of the three aspects, I will show why the phenomenon of Luminary nuns might be seen as a feminist movement. Although an active agent in many aspects, I will also show that the success of Luminary nuns has its roots in the social, historical, and economic conditions in Taiwan.

One notable feature of Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan is the large number of nuns. It is estimated that between 70 and 75 percent of the Buddhist monastic members are nuns; many of them have a higher education background. Many Buddhist nuns hold high esteem in the society, such as the artist and founder of Hua Fan University, bhikṣuṇī Hiu Wan, and the founder of one of the world's biggest Buddhist organizations, bhikṣuṇī Cheng-yen. While bhikṣuṇī Hiu Wan and bhikṣuṇī Cheng-yen are known as highly-achieved individuals, the nuns of the Luminary nunnery are known collectively as a group. During my fieldwork in Taiwan in 2001, many informants mentioned Luminary nuns to me as group of nuns well-trained in Buddhist doctrines, practices, and precepts. The term Luminary nuns seems to be equivalent to the image of knowledgeable and disciplined Buddhist nuns. In this paper, I will talk about the significance and influence of Luminary nuns, and why I think theirs is a feminist movement. But first, I will give a short introduction of the social-historical background of Buddhism in Taiwan.

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Social-historical Background

Buddhism probably came to Taiwan with the migration of Chinese settlers. The exact day when the Chinese migration began is hard to determine, but the large scale of migration began only after 1661 with the Ming loyalties who fled Manchu invasion in China. As a frontier society, Buddhism in Taiwan exhibited both continuities and discontinuities: On the one hand, the Chinese immigrants tried to hold onto their customs at home; on the other hand, they also had to adapt to the situation in the new environment. Because of the natural environment in the frontier, life in Taiwan was harsh and the residents constantly faced the threat of plague. It is understandable that such a condition could hardly attract fine monks and nuns. In addition, many temples in Taiwan were founded by private citizens who may have had only minimal knowledge of their religious tradition.³ As the result, Buddhism in Taiwan during the earlier periods took a different form from the monastic form of the Orthodox Chinese Buddhism on the mainland.

A 1919 survey by the Japanese colonial government noted the heavy presence of zhaijiao , or "vegetarian sect," in Taiwan. While there were only 77 Buddhist temples on the island, the meeting and residential places for the members of zhaijiao amounted to 172. While there were only 156 Buddhist monks or nuns living at the monastic order, the members of zhaijiao amounted to 8663.⁴

Zhaijiao was a popular religion emerging around the early sixteenth century in the mainland China. There were mainly three different branches of zhaijiao in Taiwan. While their doctrines and practices varied, their core belief was more or less the same. It all circled around the belief of the Unborn Venerable Mother (Wusheng Laomu), the creator-goddess. According to zhaijiao cosmology, all creatures in the universe are her children; in order to relieve her children from sufferings, she has sent numerous sages and buddhas to the earth. The texts and rituals of zhaijiao are a mix of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and other folk religious elements. Although members of zhaijiao perceive themselves as Buddhists and their religion as a form of "lay Buddhism," due to its mixture of other non-Buddhist elements, scholars debate over whether zhaijiao can be seen as Buddhism.

The Buddhist experience in Taiwan changed greatly during Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945). The fact that Japanese Buddhism allows its clergy members to get married and eat meat further blurred the distinction between Buddhist monks and zhaijao members in the minds of Taiwanese Buddhists.⁷ The interaction between Japanese Buddhists and Taiwanese zhaijao members was frequent and closed during the Japanese colonial period. On the one hand, the Japanese rulers sought eagerly to Japan-ize Taiwanese Buddhists,⁸ probably seeing Buddhism as a means to culturally colonize the Taiwanese population. On the other hand, Taiwanese Buddhists (including zhaijao members) needed the protection of Japanese Buddhists in order to avoid political persecution.⁹ For political and practical reasons, Taiwanese zhaijao members actively, and even aggressively, involved themselves with the Buddhist organizations and activities that had a closely cooperative relationship with the Japanese Buddhist missionaries.¹⁰ In fact, many lead-

ing Taiwanese Buddhist monks during this period were first members of zhaijao who then received formal Buddhist monastic ordination only after traveling later to China.¹¹

It is worthwhile to mention that the structure of zhaijao allows women an escape from the rigid and severely patriarchal Chinese family system. Marjorie Topley reports that women in the rural Kwangtung province of Southern China during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century could choose a life without marriage by taking up zhaijao vows and entering a zhaijao residential place after retirement.¹²

The same phenomena occurred in Taiwan, too. That 1919 survey by the Japanese colonial government noticed the presence of a large number of female zhaijao members. They tended to observe a certain number of precepts, vegetarian diets, and celibacy. The existence of the large number of female zhaijao members might be explained by the fact that Taiwan during the early periods did not have enough qualified monks and nuns to give formal Buddhist ordination. Also, the laws of the Qing dynasty forbad women under the age of forty to be ordained as Buddhist nuns. Is

Nevertheless, the presence of the large number of female zhaijao members indicates that it is wrong to perceive women as passive actors. Whenever the situation allows, women might have grabbed the opportunity to seek a life outside the traditional and patriarchal social arrangements. For example, Marjorie Topley noted that the economic structure in the rural Kwangtung in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century provided women the ability to make a living outside of family, and many women, indeed, sought the opportunity to choose a living arrangement independent of family or male supervision.¹⁶

This is a point that scholars often ignore. When some male scholars¹⁷ attempt to find out the reasons for the rapid decline of zhaijao after the Retrocession, they look only at the external factors, such as political interference, and ignore the possibility that female zhaijao members could be active agents who consciously changed their religious practice. In addition, the large number of female zhaijao members at the early periods and the overwhelming number of Buddhist nuns at the present time might be seen as a continuum in the religious life of Buddhists in Taiwan. The consistently large number of female renunciants might mean that the religious patriarchs in Taiwan cannot totally disregard the presence of women. So, it might also mean that Buddhist women in Taiwan probably face fewer obstacles in the struggle against sex discrimination than their Buddhist sisters in other countries. For example, whether it was the Buddhist missionaries from Japan¹⁸ or monks from China,¹⁹ they had to acknowledge the presence of the large number of female renunciants and ran special classes for women. In either case, education certainly advanced Buddhist women.

After the end of World War II, Taiwan was given to the Chinese Nationalist regime. When the Communists took over China and the Chinese Nationalist government was forced to retire to Taiwan, many Buddhist monks and nuns also escaped to Taiwan. For the second time, Buddhism in Taiwan faced rapid change. The initial rule of the Chinese Nationalist regime was a harsh and dictatorial one.

Taiwanese Buddhists were forced to subordinate themselves to BAROC (the Buddhist Association of Republic of China), which had a close tie with the government and was given the authority to supervise all Buddhist activities in Taiwan.²⁰ The association, along with other monks and nuns who recently fled China, quickly engaged themselves in the rebuilding of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan. For example, during the Japanese colonial period, many Taiwanese Buddhists sought Buddhist education in Japan and adopted Japanese Buddhist customs, such as allowing the clergy members to eat meat and marry. The Chinese monks saw these behaviors as degradation and sought solutions to change the situation.²¹ To build Orthodox Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan, Buddhist monastic ordination was certainly crucial. The coming of the large number of qualified monks and nuns from the mainland China enabled the ordination to be possible. In 1953, the first postwar Buddhist higher ordination was carried out on the island.²² Among those who received the higher ordination were many female members of zhaijao.²³ Zhaijao has declined rapidly in the twentieth century. The majority of zhaijao members have either become Buddhists in the sense of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism or Daoists/ Yiguandao.²⁴ Many of my Taiwanese friends had not even heard of zhaijao until I explained it to them.

The economic growth that began in the 1970s and the lift of martial law in 1987 once again shaped Buddhism in Taiwan. The prosperous economy means increasing wealth, which is seen by David Jordan as an important factor that changed the religious life of people in Taiwan.²⁵ This fact means more donations to the monastic temples and enables Buddhist monks and nuns in Taiwan to engage in activities that were not possible before. The increased wealth also contributes to the rising standard of the Buddhist monastic order (in the level of education of members as well as the level of their religious motivation). Because Chinese monasticism is closely related to the rigid Chinese family system, monastic orders tended to recruit individuals without family ties.²⁶ Hence, we often find records of monastic members who joined the order not out of the intention for spiritual practice but were forced into the order by poverty.²⁷

Today, the decreasing of the rigidity of family system and the increasingly complex economy in Taiwan provide more alternatives for individuals, so it is less likely that people would join the monastic order for non-religious reasons.²⁸ As the result, Buddhism in Taiwan today is more diverse than ever before, tends to be social-welfare oriented, and has frequent interactions with different religions and different Buddhist traditions in other countries.²⁹

It is out of such constant changing social and economic conditions that the Luminary order was founded and was able to pursue a religious life fitted with their ideals. I will now talk a little bit about the history of Luminary order.

History of Luminary Order³⁰

The image of Luminary nuns today might appears to be elitist, for the Luminary Institute provides advanced Buddhist education for nuns. Located in a rural village

in Southern Taiwan, however, the temple of Luminary order actually began as grass-rooted, folk religious temple. The temple was not initially built for the monastic order but for the religious needs of the villagers.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a Guanyin statue (the female form of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the Chinese Buddhist tradition) worshiped at a villager's home was rumored to be performing miracles. The fame spread, and other villagers expressed the wish to worship the Guanyin. So, a temple was built for the Guanyin worship. However, earthquakes in the later years destroyed the original temple. For the period of 1943 to the construction of a concreted building in 1972, the Guanyin statue was taken into villagers' home by turns. In 1973, the temple, then named as YuShan Yan JinLan Si was formally registered with the government for the first time. According to the official website of Luminary order, the villagers thought that the only way for the temple to last was to have an ordained abbot or abbess. So, a request was sent to BAROC. Bhikshu Baisheng, President of BAROC, recommended bhiksunī Xinzhi to be the abbess of YuShan Yan. It seems that the adherents of YuShan Yan were not aware of the difference between folk religion and Buddhism. But bhiksunī Xinzhi was educated in the Orthodox Chinese Buddhism and intended to play a more constructive role for this temple. She first changed the name of the temple into Luminary, a term abstracted from Lankāvatāra Sutra. She also began to purchase the temple land from the villagers for the monastic order, indicating that she was determined to establish a long-lasting monastic order at the temple.

In 1979, bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin succeed bhikṣuṇī Xinzhi and became the abbess of Luminary Temple. Bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin had university education, which was rare at that time and had just returned from a shore period of study in Hawaii. Given her unusual educational background, many advised her not to take up the post at the remote village, which, seemingly, had no potential. However, bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin had studied at the same Buddhist institute with bhikṣuṇī Xinzhi and thus shared similar ideals. She was determined to carry out bhiksunī Xinzhi's renovation works at the temple.

Although today the term Luminary nuns has become equivalent to well-educated and well-trained Buddhist nuns, the transformation of Luminary Temple from a grass-roots, local/popular religion temple to an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist nunnery has not been completed. When one enters Luminary Temple, that person might be surprised by its colorful roofs and the heavy incense burning Buddha Hall, which are features associated more with a local/popular religion temple than a Buddhist temple. Although bhikṣuṇī Xinzhi was conscious enough to start the process of purchasing the temple land for the monastic order, to some villagers, Luminary Temple still belongs to them. Potential conflict³¹ in the transformation erupted in 1996 when a group of villagers attempted to expel the nuns and take over the temple.³² The conflict has not yet been fully settled to this day. Out of the respect for the villagers' religious belief, Luminary nuns tolerate much of the non-Buddhist rituals to be performed at the temple.³³ For example, my informants told me that once in a month, some villagers would gather at the temple to cook and eat pork. These are behaviors unsuitable for a Chinese Buddhist setting. Next, I will talk about why I think the phenomenon of Luminary nuns is a quiet feminist movement.

A Quiet Feminist Movement

Before I begin, I must point out that it is me who gives Luminary nuns the label feminist. Nowhere did I find in the publications of Luminary order using the term feminist, nor do Luminary nuns label themselves as feminists. In fact, Luminary nuns may not even like to be associated with the term feminist.

In my observation, most Buddhist nuns in Taiwan do not like to be labeled as feminist; the reasons are political as well as religious. Politically, feminist means challenging the existing patriarchal tradition, and the label feminist may draw unnecessary political oriented attention upon to oneself. For example, Barbara Reed argues that the tension for Taiwanese women to struggle between the old religious/philosophical traditions and the new aspiration as women of contemporary time, is complicated by not only the influence of Western values but also by the propaganda of an idealized culture from mainland China.³⁴ It was especially dangerous during the early years when the authoritarian regime restricted social movements, including women's movements, and allowed little room to promote the notion of gender equality.³⁵

Religiously, Buddhism regards the difference in sexes as illusion;³⁶ carrying the label feminist might draw one into the attachment of men/women duality that Buddhists try to transcend. The dilemma is also faced by many Western Buddhist women who find balancing feminist anger and Buddhist goal of transcending dualism a delicate task.³⁷ However, more importantly, it is notable that I am seeing the phenomenon of Luminary nuns as an outsider, from an academic perspective. Naturally, my concerns may be different from Luminary nuns themselves who are insiders of the phenomenon and the spiritual practice. While my concern might be to find women's voice in the phenomenon, theirs might be to transcend male/female duality.

Katherine Young argues that "the basic aim of feminism is to identify the problems of women as a class and to promote their interests as a class."³⁸ It is on the basis of this definition that I see Luminary nuns as feminist. But because they do not adopt feminist label, I call the phenomenon a quiet feminist movement. In the following section, I will examine Luminary order from three aspects in order to show why I think the phenomenon of Luminary nuns is feminist.

Symbols

The first aspect I am going to look at is the symbols used by Luminary nuns. Feminist transformation of religious symbols questions whether the religious symbols, including the application of these symbols, such as worship, reflect the experiences of both genders.³⁹ In term of symbols, Luminary order is rather a passive agent than an active agent.

It is a passive agent because, even though the main deity at Luminary Temple is a female deity (Guanyin, Bodhisattva of Compassion), the nuns did not choose to have Guanyin as their main deity. In fact, the nuns were hired to manage the Guanyin worship at the village. At the shrine room, besides the main Guanyin

statue, there are also other small Guanyin statues that the villagers entrusted the nuns to look after. These Guanyin statues are fondly called by the villagers as "Big Mama," "Second Mama," "Third Mama," and so on. At special occasions, such as weddings or funerals, villagers would invite a Guanyin mama to their home in order to receive her blessing. To respect villagers' religion, Luminary nuns tolerate villagers' hire of theatre troupes to be performed at the temple during festivals or even meat offerings at ghost festival.⁴⁰ Thus, Luminary Temple has an interesting feature of being a combination of Orthodox Chinese Buddhist nunnery and a local/popular religious temple.

Some might claim that goddesses are not always feminist, for goddesses do not necessaryily provide legal, political, or economic autonomy for women. However, the fact that goddesses nevertheless can provide "a great deal of psychological and spiritual comfort" should not be overlooked. The transformation of Guanyin from a male deity to a female deity in the Chinese tradition might be viewed as the manifestation of need for female imagery. As in the ancient time, Guanyin can still be a symbol of liberation and coping for contemporary Taiwanese women living in a new, but still male-dominated family system. Although Luminary nuns did not choose Guanyin worship, they did not totally ignore the coincidence of having Guanyin worship at their temple. Their quarterly magazine, XiangGuang ZhuangYan, has run several special issues on Guanyin, in which academic articles on Guanyin are published. In the issue immediately after the devastating earthquake in 1999, the editorial of XiangGuang ZhuangYan appeals to Guanyin for the strength to overcome sufferings:

We do not know when the sufferings on the earth will finally end. But the various appearances of Guanyin have inspired us: in different time and space, facing different beings, you can also become the multi-appearances Guanyin and help to relieve the cries of sufferings; using wisdom and compassion, guiding beings cross the ocean of sufferings.⁴⁴

Also by accident, Luminary nuns are involved with another symbol that might be seen as a sign for feminist liberation. That is their monastic robe. In Chinese Buddhism, both monks and nuns shave hair and wear the same type of robes. 45 It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish a monk from a nun. Bhiksunī Wu-Yin teaches that the monastic robe symbolizes the motivation and the ultimate goal of a renunciant. Additionally, because all the monastic members wear the same type of robe regardless of one's social status before the renunciation, the monastic robe is also an expression of equality. 46 Because monks and nuns have to wear the same robe, the monastic robe liberates the nuns from socially-constructed concepts of femininity as well as the social pressure for women to be slim and beautiful.⁴⁷ According to my informant, bhiksunī Wu-Yin further changed the robe wore by Luminary nuns. Because the traditional robe wore by Chinese Buddhist nuns might be too narrow and might show the curve of a nun, she widened the robe so that it would not show the curve of a nun. It is not to be ashamed of the biological nature of a woman, but is to lead a nun furtherer away from the socially-constructed habits of focusing too much on the body (for example, the social pressure for women to be slim) and to focus more on spiritual practice. 48 In other words, Luminary nuns

may have been a passive agent in choosing their monastic robe (bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin may have changed the robe a little bit, but it is still based on the traditional Chinese robe), but for them, the monastic robe symbolizes not only their monastic identity but also the transcendence of gender appearances between male and female.

Structure

The second aspect I am going to look at is the structure of Luminary order. Because of the absence an Ultimate Divine in Buddhism,⁴⁹ the more urgent aspect for the feminist transformation of Buddhism perhaps lies in the area of the organizational structure. Rita Gross even argues that "the most crucial feminist issue for Buddhism is recognizing and empowering female gurus and lineage holders."⁵⁰ In this aspect, Luminary nuns are an active agent rather than a passive agent.

To examine the structure of Luminary order, it is essential to learn about another nun from an earlier time, Bhikṣuṇī Tianyi (1924-1980). Bhikṣuṇī Xinzhi is a direct disciple of bhikṣuṇī Tianyi, and bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin had studied under bhikṣuṇī Tianyi for several years. Bhikṣuṇī Tianyi was born in a wealthy merchant family and had the chance to study at university in Japan during a time when secondary education was rare for Taiwanese girls. After graduating from university, she returned home to manage the family business and eventually inherited the shop.⁵¹ Thus, we can at least be sure that she did not enter the monastic order out of poverty, as often the case in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist priesthoods during the early twentieth century.⁵² As a child, bhikṣuṇī Tianyi lived in a zhaijiao nunnery for a short period of time and for a while considered joining the zhaijiao order. But she later chose to join the Orthodox Chinese Buddhist order out of the aspiration for a more strict spiritual practice.⁵³ From this fact, we can see that bhikṣuṇī Tianyi was an active agent in pursuing her own religious life.

Bhikṣuṇī Tianyi received Buddhist monastic ordination in 1953; from then on till her death she worked diligently for the reconstruction of the nuns' order. However, she did not place the responsibility on the monks. Rather, it was crucial for her that nuns should take up the responsibility of guiding their own lives. She urged Buddhist nuns to be independent and self-reliant, to learn to do every task by themselves, and to have the ability to solve their own problems. Throughout her lifetime, she advocated the ideas that "women must be taught by women" and "bhikshuni stand up."⁵⁴ I do not know whether she was aware of the feminist wave that was going on in the West during the later part of her life, ⁵⁵ but bhikṣuṇī Tianyi no doubt had contributed a great deal to the feminist transformation of the monastic order.

Having been influenced by bhikṣuṇī Tianyi's feminist ideas, Luminary nuns did not hesitate to catch the favorable social trends to advance themselves. The traditional suppression of organized religious groups by the imperial courts of China had limited the social functions that could be performed by organized religious groups. Fo However, beginning in the 1980s, social, economic, and political changes in Taiwan enabled Buddhism to enjoy great expansion. For example, the

lift of martial law in 1987 and the prosperous economy provided the possible social space and financial strength for Buddhist organizations to engage in various social functions.⁵⁷ Luminary nuns use this opportunity well. By the time of writing this essay, Luminary nuns have established five branch centers throughout Taiwan, to, on one hand, achieve their goal of spreading Dharma, and, on the other hand, to attract more devotees outside the immediate area of Luminary Temple and thus more financial support from the laity.⁵⁸

Among the social functions that Luminary nuns hold is women's retreat. An article in their quarterly magazine reveals their intention for the establishment of women's retreats:

Monastics take refuge in Buddha and follow the spiritual path of Dharma. Monastics renounce the world to follow the Buddha's path, but not to dissociate from the society nor to loathe the society. . . . Dharma should be preached to everyone and not just women. But after several Dharma retreats for the general public, we found it difficult. To achieve Buddhist educational and cultural goals, it is necessary to penetrate different stages and individualities. In other words, people of different statuses and classes have different needs. . . . [Our goal is to] establish women's righteous faith in Dharma. We wish that through involving themselves with various activities in the retreat, women can discover the wholeness of Dharma in their daily-life and eventually enable themselves for further growth. 59

This statement shows that Luminary nuns value Dharma-preaching and social works highly. More significantly, they recognize the importance of the different needs in women and men. Many Western Buddhist women have argued for the need to have women Buddhist teachers for women.⁶⁰ The fact that Luminary nuns recognize the special needs of women and run special retreats for women might be viewed as a step towards feminist transformation of Buddhist structure.

Another significant feminist transformation by Luminary order is the founding of its own publishing house. Ursula King points out that "the greatest problem lies in the fundamentally patriarchal and androcentric framework of the theological and religious writings of the past where women have been written about and defined by others, without having a voice themselves" Indeed, scholars in the West often understand Buddhism through texts that were written by monks and where women and the laity remain hidden 12. The existence of the publishing house enables Luminary nuns to record their stories and to have a voice of their own. Except for the quarterly magazine, XiangGuang Zhuang Yan, which regularly features articles written by the nuns, there is also an internal newsletter and Internet discussion board that allow the nuns to exchange their experiences among themselves. Besides the magazine and newsletter, the publishing house of Luminary order also publishes books on Dharma, including books that are translated from other languages and traditions. 63 Luminary nuns have noticed the lack of records on Buddhist nuns in history; they

thus have begun a project of searching and writing down the stories of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan in order to preserve a more adequate history.⁶⁴ The fact that I can learn a great about Luminary nuns simply by visiting their website proves that they are not a silent group.⁶⁵ The voice of Luminary nuns should and can be heard.

Education

The third aspect I am going to look at is the education provided by Luminary order. In fact, more than anything else, Luminary order is renowned for its Buddhist education.⁶⁶

Buddhist monastic education was already in her mind when bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin succeed to be the abbess of Luminary Temple. It is said that when she was working in the field one day, she raised her head and saw a group of Catholic nuns relaxing at the balcony of a nearby church school. She was stunned and pondered why, as religious professionals, Buddhist nuns had to do manual labor while Catholic nuns could engage in educational works. That year, she was thirty and had been ordained for twelve years. She returned to books and eventually got herself through senior high school and university.⁶⁷

But the incident with the Catholic nuns was not the only factor that motivated bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin to seek the improvement of the monastic education for Buddhist nuns. She never forgot the idea, "bhikshuni stand up," advocated by bhikṣuṇī Tianyi.⁶⁸ For the nuns' order to be independent and self-reliant, education is certainly a key. Furthermore, bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin joined the order at a time when the status of Buddhist nuns was very low in Taiwan. She realized that in order to improve the status of Buddhist nuns in the society, monastic education was essential.⁶⁹

She argues that being a monastic is like being a professional, and just like a professional needs professional training, a monastic also needs special monastic training. Although the goal for a bhikṣuṇī is the ultimate liberation, living in the world means that a bhikṣuṇī still has to deal with other people, including both the monastics and the laity. Hence, to learn how to interact with other people properly is crucial. For her, monastic education should not only teach Dharma, but the education itself should be a process that helps a nun to absorb both her body and mind in the spiritual practice. Only by providing solid support from both inside and outside the monastic order, Dharma may last long in the world. Therefore, bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin is an active agent who works diligently to reconstruct the monastic education for Buddhist nuns. Her idea for the monastic education contents both religious elements (for example, the need to learn the righteous Dharma) and practical elements (for example, the unavoidable needs to interact with other people).

In 1980, Luminary Buddhist Institute for nuns was finally founded. A Buddhist nun does not have to be a member of Luminary order to enter the Institute. However, to change the ignorant and uneducated image of Buddhist nuns, the Institute sets high admission standard. The Institute requires a nun to have at least senior high school education to enroll, in order to ensure that all of the students have similar capability to absorb the trainings together. The founding of the In-

stitute are coincident with a time when higher education was becoming more and more common for both men and women in Taiwan. The high admission standard set by the Institute ensures that the trainings are given to nuns who are sincerely motivated to pursue higher Dharma education.⁷¹ Research shows that most Buddhist nuns in contemporary Taiwan join the order mainly for religious reason.⁷² This is an important factor, for if a nun joins the monastic order mainly for religious reason, then she is more likely than those who join the order for other reasons to be an active agent in the construction of her religious life. Once again, the Luminary order catches this social trend well. The slogan of Luminary order, "Be attentive to Buddhist education and to create Pure Land in the human realm together," creates an active and progressive image. Such an image is very appealing to young female intellectualists who sincerely want to dedicate their lives to Buddhism.⁷³

Bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin wants the trainings at Luminary Institute to be a bridge for students to go from the lay lifestyle to the monastic lifestyle. Thus, the curricula at the Institute are divided into five categories: intellectual studies, practice, community life training, monastery administration, and Dharma education, ⁷⁴ covering both religious study and practical trainings. The Institute wants to avoid the situation of becoming too other-worldly and disconnected from the society. Thus, although Dharma education is the main focus at the Institute, other modern sciences, such as psychology, sociology, and information technology are also provided. ⁷⁵ By the time when I did my fieldwork in 2001, Luminary Institute has gained the reputation of being a well-respected Buddhist college.

When teaching precepts to the nuns, bhikṣuṇī Wu-Yin stresses the importance of the full understanding of the precepts rather than just observing precepts blindly⁷⁶. The emphasis on the full understanding of the circumstance is also stressed on the teachings to the laywomen:

Therefore, only through the self-examination and self-awareness, which arise from the reflection on Dharma, we may gain full understanding of our circumstance, and consequently develop the virtues of optimist, determination and benevolence. We believe that it is the true beginning of an anew and fresh life.⁷⁷

Another short story in XiangGuang ZhuangYan ends with a comment from a monastic⁷⁸:

To struggle for equality is to be one's own master. But during the struggle for independence, one should not forget the respect for the other. Only with mutual respect can there be true equality! If we treat each other with the intention for revenge, there will only be endless cycle of sufferings! The foundation of the so-called gender equality is built on mutual respect.⁷⁹

Therefore, it seems that Luminary nuns have followed the teachings of bhikṣuṇī Tianyi, who placed the responsibility of the nuns' welfare on the nuns themselves, rather than on the monks, Luminary nuns also teach laywomen to be self-reliant and take control of their own situation. They encourage laywomen not to perceive themselves as victims, and to maintain harmony and respect toward wrongdoers. On the surface, such teachings appear to be a nonconfrontation with the patriarchy and oppression, and it does not seem feminist. However, the teachings of Luminary

nuns might be seen as a strategist approach, which emphasizes the importance of developing strategies in the resistance against the oppression. Being strategists does not mean the passive acceptance of the oppressed conditions. In Luminary nuns' teachings, the empowerment for women does not come from the confrontation with patriarchy, but from within. The emphasis on a woman's responsibility for her own situation leads to the emphasis on the need to develop survival skills and a righteous mind; consequently, the woman is given the internal strength to face whatever oppression she might find herself in.

Conclusion

The success of Luminary order might be attributed to the social and economic conditions in Taiwan. For example, had Taiwan had a long history of monastic order, there might be more obstacles for Buddhist nuns to reconstruct their religious life because there would exist more privileged ones. But because monastic tradition is relatively new in Taiwan, Buddhist nuns might have more space to shape their religious life. Other factors, such as the increasing mobility of people in Taiwan, which gives a monastic order the opportunity to attract devotees and donation outside their immediate temple area, ⁸¹ also contribute to the success of Luminary order.

However, without there being active agent in shaping their religious life, Luminary nuns would not have gained such success. Luminary nuns have been active agents in using the favorable social and economic conditions to advance themselves. Luminary nuns certainly have two choices: They could be passive and follow whatever orders the monastic patriarchs told them to do, or they could be active and try to improve themselves. Luminary nuns have chosen the latter option and moved towards the goal of independence and self-reliance. Because they have been active agents in the construction of their religious life, I see the phenomenon of Luminary nuns a feminist movement.

Notes

- 1 Li, Yu-chen. 2000. "Chujia Rushi---zhanhou Taiwan Fojiao Nuxiang sengiu zhi bianqian." In Huigu Taiwan, zhanwang xin guxiang---Taiwan shehui wenhua bianqian xueshu yantaohui lunwangji: 433-435.
- Heng-Ching, Shih. 1999. "Buddhist Spirituality in Modern Taiwan." In Yoshinori, Takeuchi (ed.). Buddhist Spirituality--later China, Korea, Japan, and dthe Modern World. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 427-431.
- 3 Jones, Charles Brewer. 1999. Buddhism in Taiwan---religion and the state, 1660-1990. Honolulu: University off Hawaii Press, 4-11.
- 4 Yao, Lixiang. 1996 (12). "Riju Shiqi Taiwan Fojiao Yu Zhaijiao Guanxi Zhi Tantao." Taiwan Fojiao Xueshu Yantao Hui Lunwen Ji, 73.

- 5 Zheng, Zhiming. 1998. Taiwan Minjian Zongjiao Jieshe . Jiayi, Taiwan: Nanhua Guanli Xueyuan, 41-43.
- 6 For example, see Lin, Meirong and Zu Yunhui. 1994. "Zaijia Fojiao: Taiwan Zhanghua Chaotang Tang suochuan da Longhua pai zhaijiao xiankuang." In Jiang Canteng and Wang Jianchuan (eds.). Taiwan Zhaijiao Da Lishi Guancha Yu Zhanwang . Taipei: Xin Wenfeng.
- 7 Yao 1996, 79.
- 8 Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 418.
- 9 Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 419; and Zheng 1998, 107.
- 10 Yao 1996.
- 11 See records founded by Huiyan, Shi. 1999 (July). "Cong TaiMingRi Fojiao Da Hudong Kan Niseng Zai Taiwan Da Fazhan." Chung-Hwa Journal of Buddhism Studies, No. 12: 249-274; Jianye, Shi (ed.). 1999. Zouguo Taiwan Fojiao Zhuanxiangqi Di Bhikshuni ---Shi Tianyi. Taipei: Zhongtian, 252-256.
- 12 Topley, Marjorie. 1975. "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung." In Wolf, Margery and Roxane Witke (eds.). Women in Chinese Society. Standford: Stanford University Press.
- 13 Huiyan Shi 1999, 263.
- 14 Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 418.
- 15 Jiang, Canteng. 2000. Taiwan Dangdai Fojiao . Taipei: Nantian Shuju, 116-117.
- 16 Topley 1975, 86-87.
- 17 For example, Zheng 1998, 43-45
- 18 For example, the women seminars ran by South Sea Buddhist Association, which was a closed alley with Japanese Buddhist sects and Japanese colonial government (Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 419; Yao 1996, 77).
- 19 For example, the women seminars ran by the Chinese bhikshu Jueli (Huiyan Shi 1999, 263).
- 20 Jones 1999, 97-105.

- 21 Jones 1999, 112-113.
- 22 Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 421; Jones 1999, 150. For many years, the 1953 ordination was/is said to be the first ever Buddhist higher ordination in Taiwan (for example, Heng-Ching Shih 1999, 421). But temple records founded by bhiksuni Huiyan show that Buddhist higher ordination in Taiwan can be traced back as early as 1919 (Huiyan Shi 1999, 263). I do not know whether Buddhist higher ordinations during Japanese colonial period were unintentionally forgotten or intentionally unrecognized (because some preceptors at the higher ordinations during the Japanese colonial periods were Japanese, the Orthodox Chinese monks and nuns may not see these higher ordinations as legitimate).
- 23 Jiang 2000, 118.
- 24 Yao 1996, 71. Yiguandao is listed as a different religion from the Daoism in Taiwan official records. But the Yiguandao official website I founded still translates the name of the religion into English as Taoist.
- 25 Jordan, David K. 1994. "Chagnes in Postwar Taiwan and Their Impact on the Popular Practice of Religion." In Harrell, Steven and Huang Chn-chieh. Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan. Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 142.
- 26 Jordan 1994, 145.
- 27 Huiyan Shi 1999, 251.
- 28 Jordan 1994, 146.
- 29 Wang, Shunmin. 1995 (July). "Dangdai Taiwan Fojiao Bianqian Zhi Kaocha." Chung- Hwa Journal of Buddhism Study, No. 8: 315-342.
- 30 Information about the history of Luminary order mostly comes from its official website: http://www.gaya.org.tw.
- 31 The only religion law in Taiwan was formulated in 1929 in the mainland China and is often criticized by Buddhists and Daoists in contemporary Taiwan. According to this law, the asset of a Buddhist, Daoist or folk religion temple (not including Christian churches and Muslim mosque) should be under the control of its "lay adherent association" regardless whether the temple asset actually belongs to the monastic order. Please see Chiu, Hei-Yuan. 1997. Taiwan Zongjiao Bianqian Di Shehui Zhengzhi Fenxi. Taipei: Guiguan Tushu. One of the problems with this law is that it is not clear who has the right to form the 'lay adherent association'. In the case of the 1996 conflict at Luminary Temple, even though it is clear that the temple asset belongs to the monastic

- order, some villagers were still able to form an 'adherent association' and attempted to claim control over the temple based on the discriminatory, outdated and often self-contradictory religious law. See Lin, Benxuan. 1997 (March). "Sengsu Zhizheng, Suowei Helai." Guoce Qikan, No. 159.
- 32 "'Fa' De Jianchi---XiangGuang Ci 218 jingzuo kangyi jishi," XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 49, 1997, March.
- 33 Ding, Min. 1996. "Taiwan Shehui Bianqian Zhong Di Xinxiang Nisengtuan-Xianguang Nisengtuan Di Jueqi." In 1996 Nian FoXue Yanjiu Lunwenji-dangdai Taiwan shehui yu zongjiao . Taipei: Foguang, 25-26.
- 34 Reed, Barbara. 1994. "Women And Chinese Religion in Contemporary Taiwan." In Sharma, Arvind (ed.). Today's Woman in World Religions. Albany: State University of New York Press, 226.
- 35 Chen, Fen-ling. 2000. Working Women and State Politics in Taiwan: a study in political economy. New York: Palgrave, 111-113.
- 36 For example, see Heng-Ching Shih 1995, 73-105.
- 37 For example, see Gross Gross, Rita M. 1998. Soaring and Settling: Buddhist perspectives on contemporary social and religious issues. New York: Continuum, 7-12.
- 38 Young, Katherine K. "Introduction." In Sharma, Arvind and Katherine K. Young (eds.). Feminism and World Religion . Albany: State University of New York press, 2.
- 39 King, Ursula. 1990. "Religion and Gender." In King, Ursula (ed.). Turning Points in Religious Studies. Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 281; and Morgan, Sue. 1999. "Feminist Approaches." In Connolly, Peter (ed.). Approaches to the Study of Religion. London and New York: Cassell, 51.
- 40 Ding 1996, 26.
- 41 Gross 1996, 190.
- 42 Reed.
- 43 For example, in XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 43 (1995.09), No. 44 (1995.12), No. 59 (1999.09), No. 60 (1999, 12), No. 61 (2000, 03).
- 44 XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 59, 09/1999. Translated by myself.

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- 45 Chen, Mei-Hua. 2002. "Linglei Dianfan: dangdai Taiwan bhikshuni di shehui shijian." Foxue Yanjiu Zhongxin Xuebao, No.7: 316.
- 46 Wu Yin, Bhikshuni Venerable. 2001. Choosing Simplicity: commentary on the Bhikshuni Pratimoksha. Bhikshuni Jendy Shih (trans.). Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron (ed.). Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 253.
- 47 Chen 2002.
- 48 Chen 2002, 319.
- 49 Neumaier-Dargyay, Eva K. 1995. "Buddhist Thought from a Feminist Perspective." In Joy, Morny and Eva K. Neumaier-Dargyay (eds.). Gender Genre and Religion: feminist reflections. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 145.
- 50 Gross 1996, 235.
- 51 Jianye Shi 1999, 35-39.
- 52 Yang, C.K. 1961. Religion in Chinese Society . Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 331.
- 53 Jianye Shi 1999, 40-45.
- 54 Jianye Shi 1999, 133-150.
- 55 Freedom of expression in Taiwan was limited before of the lift of martial law in 1987, so it is possible that she may not have encountered feminist writings.
- 56 Yang 1961, 307-326.
- 57 Jones 1999, 180-183; Jiang 2000, 13-17.
- 58 Ding 1996, 36-37.
- 59 See "XiangGuang Xuefoyin Dakewen," XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 2, 05/1985. Translated by myself.
- 60 For example, Boucher, Sandy. 1988. Turning the Wheel: American women creating the new Buddhism . 1993 edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 148.
- 61 King 1990, 283
- 62 Neumaier-Dargyay 1995, 145.

- 63 Perhaps I should also point out that most of publications by Luminary order are to be distributed freely. Anyone can just write to Luminary publisher and request a copy of their publications. In other words, a wide range of people can hear the voice of Luminary nuns.
- 64 Jianye Shi 1999, 4.
- 65 See http://www.gaya.org.tw (Chinese big 5 only).
- 66 Ding 1996, 40.
- 67 Information from "Wuyin Fashi Jianjie," Luminary website: http://www.gaya.org.tw/spring/author/author/2_author1.htm.
- 68 Jianye Shi 1999, 149.
- 69 Bhikshuni Wu-Yin, "Chujia Di YiYi." Dianshiji 2.
- 70 See "Fang WuYin FashiXXXNi sangha jiaoyu di lixiang yu shijian," Xiang-Guang Zhuang Yan, No. 44, 12/1995.
- 71 Ding 1996, 30.
- 72 For example, Chen 2002, 305-309; Jordan 1994, 145-146; my own fieldwork.
- 73 Ding 1996, 32-33.
- 74 Information from the English version of the recruitment manual, Luminary website: http://www.gaya.org.tw/hkbi.
- 75 Ding 1996, 46.
- 76 Ven. Bhikshuni Wu Yin 2001, 47-61.
- 77 Cited from "XiangGuang Xuefoyin Dkewen," XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 2, 05/1985. Translated by myself.
- 78 It is not specified whether the monastic is a nun or monk, because both monks and nuns are addressed as "Master," Shifu, in Chinese Buddhism. But based on the content of the short story, the monastic mentioned should be a nun.
- 79 Cited from "Lijia Xinshi," XiangGuang ZhuangYan, No. 43, 09/1995. Translated by myself.

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80 Risseeuw, Carla. 1988. Gender Transformation, Power and Resistance among Women in Sri Lanka: the fish don't talk about the water. 1991 edition. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 284-355.

81. Jordan, 1994; 155-156.