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## The Going Forth of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī in T 60

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# The Going Forth of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī in T 60

Bhikkhu Anālayo<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In what follows I translate a discourse preserved as an individual translation in the Taishō edition under entry number 60, which reports the going forth of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Following that is a discussion concerning the different attitudes toward women that emerge from this discourse and a comparison to the current setting in Thailand.

## Introduction

Records of the going forth of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī can be found in a range of *Vinayas*,<sup>2</sup> as well as in discourses in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and

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<sup>2</sup> The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 922c7 to 923c12, the (Haimavata?) \**Vinayamāṭṭṛkā*, T 1463 at T XXIV 803a22 to 803b24, the Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravāda *Vinaya*, Roth 1970: 4–21, the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 185b19 to 186a28, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 350b10 to 351c2, with considerable parts preserved in Sanskrit fragments, Schmidt, and a Tibetan counterpart in D 6 da 100a4 to

the *Madhyama-āgama*.<sup>3</sup> This conforms to a general pattern evident in early Buddhist texts, where some degree of overlap exists between the material allotted to the collections of discourses and to the *Vinaya*.<sup>4</sup>

The Taishō edition attributes T 60 to Huijiǎn (慧簡). According to a suggestion by Mizuno,<sup>5</sup> T 60 could be part of a group of discourses from a no longer extant *Madhyama-āgama* translation by Zhú Fóniàn (竺佛念), undertaken by him during the period of time in which he also translated the *Ekottarika-āgama*, which is still extant in the Taisho edition as entry no. 125. Recent quantitative text analysis has shown Mizuno's hypothesis to be improbable.<sup>6</sup>

The *Madhyama-āgama* collection translated by Zhú Fóniàn, as well as the still extant *Ekottarika-āgama*, were orally transmitted by the same reciter and brought to China. This makes it highly probable that they would stem from a collection of discourses of the same Buddhist school. In contrast, discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama* collection extant in the Chinese translation by Saṅghadeva are so substantially different from their parallels in the extant *Ekottarika-āgama* that they must reflect quite distinct lines of textual transmission that do not stem from the same school.

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104b5 or Q 1035 *ne* 97a7 to 102a1 (cf. also D 4094 *ju* 212b6 to 214a3 or Q 5595 *tu* 242b6 to 244a4), and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 253,1 to 256,32.

<sup>3</sup> AN 8.51 at AN IV 274,1 to 279,13 and MĀ 116 at T I 605a8 to 607b16. Other versions of the same episode can also be found in T 156 at T III 153c7 to 154a6, T 196 at T IV 158a22 to 159b17, and T 1478 at T XXIV 945b25 to 950a15.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo (“Mass Suicide” 27–42)

<sup>5</sup> Mizuno, discussed in Hung et al. (my ignorance of Japanese prevents me from consulting Mizuno myself).

<sup>6</sup> Hung; for a reply to an objection by Palumbo against this conclusion cf. Anālayo (“Discourse Merger” 25 note 37).

This is significant for the case of T 60 translated below,<sup>7</sup> because this discourse is closely similar to the account of the going forth of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī in the *Madhyama-āgama*, which I studied in detail elsewhere in comparison with its parallels (“Mahāpajāpatī’s”), the results of which apply similarly to the present discourse.

In view of the differences, at times quite substantial, between other extant versions that report her going forth, it seems safe to conclude that T 60 and the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse stem from very closely related transmission lineages,<sup>8</sup> which in turn makes it highly probable that they were transmitted by the same school, namely the Sarvāstivāda.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The translated discourse is T 60 at T I 856a7 to T I 858a6, with the title given at T I 856a4: 佛說瞿曇彌記果經. The title’s indication that this is a discourse “spoken by the Buddha” (佛說) is a regular feature of the titles of translated works in the Chinese canon, where in most cases this probably does not render an expression present in the original, but serves as a formula of authentication of the translated text. Regarding the reference in the title to “declaration on the fruit(s)” (記果) the character 記, a standard rendering of *vyākaraṇa*, does not recur in the discourse. The character 果 makes its appearance again in the context of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s reference to women’s ability to attain the four fruits of recluse-ship, which are the four levels of awakening. Therefore it seems fair to assume that the title would have such fruits in mind. Hirakawa (47f note 2) refers to T 60 just as *Gautamī-vyākaraṇa-sūtra*. In my translation of MĀ 116 in Anālayo (“Mahāpajāpatī’s”), I have noted variations between MĀ 116 and AN 8.51; these apply similarly to the case of T 60. In the present case, I instead note the variations found between T 60 and MĀ 116, in order to complement my study in Anālayo (“Mahāpajāpatī’s”). By employing Pāli terminology I do not intend to take a position on the underlying language of the original used for translating T 60 into Chinese.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed comparative study of the different versions cf. Anālayo (*Foundation*).

<sup>9</sup> The general consensus by scholars on the Sarvāstivāda school affiliation of the *Madhyama-āgama* has been called into question by Chung and Fukita (13–34); for a critical reply cf. Anālayo (*Madhyama-āgama* 516–521).

## Translation

### *Discourse on Gotamī's Declaration on the Fruits [of Recluse-ship]*

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sākyans at Kapilavatthu, in the Nigrodha Park, observing the rainy season together with a great community of monks.

At that time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Blessed One. Having arrived, she paid homage with her head at the Blessed One's feet and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said to the Blessed One:

“Blessed One, would it be possible for women to attain the four fruits of recluse-ship?<sup>10</sup> Will you not let women go forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path?”

[The Buddha replied]: “Wait, Gotamī, do not [think like] this. Women do not obtain the going forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path. Gotamī, you can always shave your hair, put on ochre robes, and until the end [of your life] practice the pure holy life.”

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, being restrained by the Blessed One, paid homage with her head at the Blessed One's feet, circumambulated the Blessed One, left the Blessed One, and returned.

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<sup>10</sup> Here and below, MĀ 116 at T I 605a13 instead speaks of the *fourth* fruit of recluse-ship; cf. the revised translation in Anālayo (*Madhyama-āgama* 452).

At that time the monks were making a robe for the Blessed One [thinking]: “Soon the Blessed One, having completed the rainy season among the Sākyans, the three months of the rainy season being over, with his robes made and done, having completed his [set of] robes, taking his robes and bowl, will journey among the people.”

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī heard that the monks were making a robe for the Blessed One [thinking]: “Soon the Blessed One, having completed the rainy season among the Sākyans, the three months of the rainy season being over, with his robes made, having completed his [set of] robes, taking his robes and bowl, will journey among the people.” Having heard it, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Blessed One, paid homage with her head at the Blessed One’s feet, and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said to the Blessed One:

“Blessed One, would it be possible for women to attain the four fruits of recluse-ship? Will you let women go forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path?”

[The Buddha replied]: “Wait, Gotamī, do not [think like] this. It is not proper for women in this teaching and discipline to go forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path. Gotamī, you [can] shave your hair, put on ochre robes, and until the end [of your life] practice the pure holy life.”

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, having been restrained again by the Blessed One, paid homage with her head at the

Blessed One's feet, circumambulated the Blessed One, left the Blessed One, and returned.

Then the Blessed One, <sup>[856b]</sup> having completed the rainy season among the Sākyans, the three months of the rainy season being over, with his robes made, having completed his [set of] robes, taking his robes and bowl, journeyed among the people.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī heard that the Blessed One, having completed the rainy season among the Sākyans, the three months of the rainy season being over, with his robes made, having completed his [set of] robes, taking his robes and bowl, had [set out to] journey among the people and villages. Having heard it, together with some elderly women Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī followed the Blessed One. They followed the Blessed One while the Blessed One was journeying in stages [until] he arrived at Nādika, where he stayed at a dwelling place in Nādika.

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Blessed One, paid homage with her head at the Blessed One's feet, and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said to the Blessed One:

“Blessed One, would it be possible for women to attain the four fruits of recluse-ship? Will you not let women go forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path?”

[The Buddha replied]: “Wait, Gotamī, do not [think like] this. Women do not obtain the going forth in this teaching and discipline, becoming homeless to train in the path.



Gotamī, you [can] shave your hair, put on ochre robes, and until the end [of your life] practice the pure holy life.”

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, having been restrained three times by the Blessed One, paid homage with her head at the Blessed One’s feet, circumambulated the Blessed One, left the Blessed One, and returned.

Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī stood outside the entrance, staring bleakly and weeping, her feet and body unwashed, and her body covered with dust. The venerable Ānanda saw from afar that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was standing outside the entrance, staring bleakly and weeping, her feet and body not washed, and her body covered with dust. Having seen her, he said:

“Gotamī, for what reason are you standing outside the entrance, staring bleakly and weeping, your feet and body not washed, and your body covered with dust?”

[She said]: “Venerable Ānanda, it is like this: women do not obtain the going forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, do not obtain the becoming homeless to train in the path.”

[Ānanda said]: “Gotamī, you stay here and I shall approach the Blessed One. Having approached him, I shall speak [about this] to the Blessed One.”<sup>11</sup>

Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage with his head at the

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<sup>11</sup> In MĀ 116 at T I 605b26 Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī replies affirmatively to Ānanda’s suggestion, 唯然, 尊者阿難.

Blessed One's feet and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:

“Blessed One, would it be possible for women to attain the four fruits of recluse-ship? Will you let women go forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path?”

[The Buddha replied]: “Ānanda wait, do not [think like] this. Women do not obtain the going forth in this teaching and discipline out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path. Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women obtain the going forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, the holy life will not remain long. Ānanda, it is just like a household that has many women and few men. <sup>[856c]</sup> Would it expand and be productive?”

[Ānanda replied:] “No, Blessed One.”

[The Buddha said]: “In the same way, Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women obtain the going forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, the holy life will not remain long. Ānanda, it is just as when hail falls on a ripe rice field or a ripe wheat field.<sup>12</sup> It will not flourish, but will come to ruin because of that hail. In the same way, Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women obtain the going forth out of serene faith,

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<sup>12</sup> MĀ 116 at T I 605c9 instead speaks of weeds growing, 穢生, in a ripe rice or wheat field.

becoming homeless to train in the path, the holy life will not remain long.”

[Ānanda said]: “Blessed One, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī has benefitted the Blessed One, since she raised and fed him with her milk after his mother had passed away.”

[The Buddha replied]: “Ānanda, it is like this, Ānanda, it is like this. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī has much benefitted me, since she raised and fed me with her milk after my mother had passed away.

“Ānanda, I have also benefitted Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Because of me she has taken refuge in me, taken refuge in the Dharma, and taken refuge in the community of monks; she is free from doubt in regard to the Buddha, free from doubt in regard to the Dharma, and free from doubt in regard to the community; she is free from doubt in regard to *dukkha*, its arising, its cessation, and the path [to its cessation]; she is endowed with faith . . . morality . . . learning . . . generosity, and she is endowed with wisdom; she has discarded killing and refrains from killing . . . from taking what is not given . . . from sexual misconduct . . . from false speech . . . *up to* . . . she has discarded drinking alcohol and refrains from drinking alcohol.

“Ānanda, if there is a person because of whom one takes refuge in the Buddha, takes refuge in the Dharma, and takes refuge in the community of monks; [because of whom] one becomes free from doubt in regard to the Buddha, free from doubt in regard to the Dharma, and free from doubt in regard to the community; [because of whom] one becomes free from doubt in regard to *dukkha*,

its arising, its cessation, and the path [to its cessation]; [because of whom] one becomes endowed with faith . . . morality . . . learning . . . generosity, and becomes endowed with wisdom; [because of whom] one discards killing and refrains from killing . . . from taking what is not given . . . from sexual misconduct . . . from false speech . . . up to . . . discards drinking alcohol and refrains from drinking alcohol; Ānanda, then such a person cannot be requited [even] by giving robes and blankets, beds and medicines to this person for the whole life.

“Again, Ānanda, I set forth eight weighty principles (*garudhamma*) for women, which women may not transgress, precepts that women are to practice for their whole life.

“Ānanda, it is just as a skilful worker on dikes or his apprentice who sets up a needle dam in deep water to control the water,<sup>13</sup> to restrain the water so that it does not flow [over].<sup>14</sup>

“Ānanda, in the same way women should practice the eight weighty principles, which women may not transgress, precepts that women are to take up completely for their whole life.<sup>15</sup> What are the eight?

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<sup>13</sup> Literally a “net” which, judging from the context, would intend a structure similar to a needle dam.

<sup>14</sup> In MĀ 116 at T I 606a1 the one who constructs the dike is a fisherman, 魚師, or his apprentice.

<sup>15</sup> In MĀ 116 at T I 606a3 the simile illustrates the Buddha’s promulgation of the eight *garudhammas*, instead of exemplifying how women should practice these.

“Ānanda, a nun should seek higher ordination from the monks. Ānanda, this is the first weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, a nun should every half-month receive from the monks [instructions] in monastic etiquette.<sup>16</sup> Ānanda, this is the second weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, a nun cannot spend the rainy season where there are no monks. <sup>[857a]</sup> Ānanda, this is the third weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, if a nun has completed the rainy season, she should take part [in the invitation] in both complete assemblies on account of three matters: what has been seen, heard, or known during the rainy season. Ānanda, this is the fourth weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, if a monk does not allow it, a nun cannot question a monk about the discourses, the *Vinaya*, or the *Abhidharma*. Ānanda, if a monk permits it, a nun may question a monk about the discourses, the *Vinaya*, or the *Abhidharma*. Ānanda, this is the fifth weighty principle I set

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<sup>16</sup> MĀ 116 at T I 606a8 does not specify the topic of the instruction.

forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, a nun cannot reprimand a monk [regarding] what has been seen, heard, or known. Ānanda, a monk may reprimand a nun [regarding] what has been seen, heard, or known.<sup>17</sup> Ānanda, this is the sixth weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, if a nun has committed an offence requiring suspension, she has to cleanse herself amidst both assemblies for a fortnight. Ānanda, this is the seventh weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, [even] if a nun has been fully ordained for up to a hundred years, she should approach and pay homage at the feet of a newly ordained monk, showing respect and reverence.<sup>18</sup> Ānanda, this is the eighth weighty principle I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Ānanda, these are the eight weighty principles I set forth for women, which women may not transgress, precepts

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<sup>17</sup> Instead of what has been seen, heard, or known, MĀ 116 at T I 606a21 speaks simply of an offence.

<sup>18</sup> MĀ 116 at T I 606a28 adds that she should show utmost humility.

that women are to take up completely for their whole life. Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī takes up these eight weighty principles completely, then in this teaching and discipline she shall train in the path, shall receive the higher ordination, and become a nun.”

The venerable Ānanda, having heard what the Blessed One said, given proper attention to it, memorized and remembered it, paid homage at the Blessed One’s feet. He circumambulated the Blessed One and, having left the Blessed One, returned. He approached Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. Having arrived, he addressed Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and said this:

“Gotamī, women shall obtain in this teaching and discipline the going forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path! Gotamī, the Blessed One said the following: ‘Women should practice eight weighty principles, which they may not transgress, precepts that women are to take up completely for their whole life. What are the eight?’<sup>[857b]</sup>

“Gotamī, a nun should seek higher ordination from the monks. This, Gotamī, is the first weighty principle the Blessed One has set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a precept that they are to take up completely for their whole life . . . up to . . . Gotamī, [even] if a nun has been fully ordained for up to a hundred years, she should approach and pay homage at the feet of a newly ordained monk, showing respect and reverence. Gotamī, this is the eighth weighty principle the Blessed One has set forth for women, which women may not transgress, a

precept that women are to take up completely for their whole life.

“Gotamī, these are the eight weighty principles the Blessed One has set forth for women, which women may not transgress, precepts that women are to take up completely for their whole life. Gotamī, if you can take up these eight weighty principles completely, you shall in this teaching and discipline train in the path, receive the higher ordination, and become a nun.”

[Gotamī said] “Venerable Ānanda, it is like this. You may listen to my simile, on hearing a simile the wise will understand its meaning. Venerable Ānanda, it is just as if a warrior girl, or a Brahmin girl, or a skilled artisan [class] girl, or a girl from among common people, well washes and perfumes herself, putting on bright and clean clothes. Suppose there were a person who thinks of her and sympathizes with her, desiring her benefit and desiring her well-being. [This person] takes a head wreath made of lotuses, or a head wreath made of *campaka* flowers, or a head wreath made of *vassika* flowers, or a head wreath made of *atimuttaka* flowers, and gives it to her.<sup>19</sup> She would accept it by receiving it with both hands and place it on her head.

“Venerable Ānanda, in the same way I shall receive on my head for my whole life these eight weighty principles that the Blessed One has set forth.”

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<sup>19</sup> MĀ 116 at T I 606c19 mentions one more type of wreath.



[Venerable Ānanda said]: “Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, in this teaching and discipline you are able to train in the path, receive the higher ordination, and become a nun.”<sup>20</sup>

Then, at a later time, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was in the company of an assembly of elderly nuns, all of which were senior and elder nuns who had been living the holy life together. She approached the venerable Ānanda together with them. Having reached him, she paid homage with her head at the venerable Ānanda’s feet and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said to the venerable Ānanda:

“Venerable Ānanda, may you [know] that these nuns are all senior elders who are living the holy life. [In regard to] those monks who are newcomers to training in the path, who have recently come to this teaching and discipline, those monks should approach these nuns, pay homage, and respect them according to seniority.”

[Ānanda said]: “Wait, Gotamī, I shall approach the Blessed One. Having approached him, I shall speak about this to the Blessed One.” [Gotamī replied]: “I will now follow the venerable Ānanda’s [suggestion].”

Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One. Having approached him, he paid homage with his head at the Blessed One’s feet and stood back to one side. Standing to one side, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One:

[857c]

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<sup>20</sup> Such a confirmatory statement by Ānanda is not reported in MĀ 116.

“Blessed One, today Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, together with nuns who are senior and elder practitioners of the holy life, approached me. Having reached me, she paid homage with her head at my feet and stood back to one side. Standing back to one side, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī said to me:

“Venerable Ānanda, may you know that these nuns are all senior elders who are living the holy life. [In regard to] those monks who are newcomers to training in the path, who have recently come to this teaching and discipline, those monks should approach these nuns, pay homage, and respect them according to seniority.”

[The Blessed One said]: “Wait, Ānanda, you should guard your words. Do not speak like this again. Ānanda, if you knew what I know, you would not have let loose a single word, let alone make such a suggestion.

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, brahmins and householders would have put their clothes on the ground. Having put their clothes on the ground, they would have said: ‘These recluses possess the practice of morality.<sup>21</sup> Recluses, walk on this! Recluses, be very energetic, so that we may for a long time derive benefit and welfare.’

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, Brahmins and householders would have

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<sup>21</sup> The corresponding passage in MĀ 116 at T I 607a18 does not explicitly indicate that the recluses possess the practice of morality.

spread their hair on the ground and would have said: ‘Let the recluses walk on this, let the recluses stand on this, the recluses’ practice of morality being very difficult, so that we may for a long time derive benefit and welfare.’

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, Brahmins and householders would have stood at the roadside holding various bags full of goods in their hands and would have said: ‘Venerable sirs, you may take this to drink and eat it according to your wish, may we for a long time get benefit and welfare [from this offering].’

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, Brahmins and householders would have had [such] faith in recluses practicing morality that they would have taken hold of them by the hand and,<sup>22</sup> having led them into the house, would have given them various offerings, [saying]: ‘Venerable sirs, take and use it according [to your wish], may we for a long time get benefit and welfare [from this offering].’

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, the glory and ability of recluses practicing morality would have been able to excel even this sun and moon, who are of such great might and power, of such ability, what to say of [excelling] the ability of bad and evil heterodox practitioners.

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<sup>22</sup> Adopting the variant 把 instead of 抱.

“Ānanda, if in this teaching and discipline women had not gone forth out of serene faith, becoming homeless to train in the path, the inheritance of my teaching would have remained for a thousand years. Now it has been decreased by five-hundred years and will remain for [only] five-hundred years. <sup>[858a]</sup>

“Ānanda, it is impossible and cannot come to be, a woman cannot assume five roles at all: she cannot be a Tathāgata, free from attachment, fully awakened, or a wheel-turning king, she cannot be Sakka, she cannot be Māra, and she cannot be Brahmā. That is impossible.

“It is possible that a man can assume five roles: He can be a Tathāgata, free from attachment, fully awakened, or a wheel-turning king, he can be Sakka, he can be Māra, and he can be Brahmā. That is possible.”

The Buddha spoke like this. The venerable Ānanda heard what the Blessed One said and rejoiced with delight.

## Study

In what follows I examine some elements in the above discourse from the viewpoint of a set of distinctions proposed by Sponberg for identifying different attitudes toward women in early Buddhist texts. The following three are of particular relevance to my study:

- Soteriological inclusiveness
- Institutional androcentrism
- Ascetic misogyny

Some degree of soteriological inclusiveness is reflected right away in the title of the discourse, which highlights the fact that here Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī herself raises the topic of women’s ability to attain the four fruits of recluseship. Except for the closely similar *Madhyama-āgama* account and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*,<sup>23</sup> the other versions do not provide a relation between her initial request to be granted the going forth and the fruits of recluseship, but instead present this as a topic raised by Ānanda on a later occasion, when intervening on behalf of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī.<sup>24</sup>

Besides investing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī with more agency, T 60 also offers a significant perspective on the Buddha’s refusal. Here, as well as in several other versions, this perspective is to be found in the suggestion that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī can live a celibate life, after shaving off her hair and donning robes, in the protected environment at home.<sup>25</sup> This changes a flat refusal to grant ordination to women into what appears to express a concern that embarking on the life of a wandering mendicant at a time when the Buddhist monastic order was still in its formative stages may involve hardships and dangers for women that make it advisable to postpone such a move.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> T 1451 at T XXIV 350b13 and D 6 *da* 100a7 or Q 1035 *ne* 97b2; the same is also recorded in the Sanskrit fragment, Schmidt (242,1), although here this is the formulation used when Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī repeats her request on a subsequent occasion.

<sup>24</sup> The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 923a22, the \**Vinayamāṭṛkā*, T 1463 at T XXIV 803b9, the Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravāda *Vinaya*, Roth (14,4), the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 185c16, and the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 254,29.

<sup>25</sup> Besides MĀ 116 at T I 605a17, such a suggestion can be found in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 185b27, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 350b15 and D 6 *da* 100b2 or Q 1035 *ne* 97b4; cf. also Schmidt (242,5).

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion cf. Anālayo (“Mahāpajāpatī’s”).

Alongside such indications, however, the discourse translated above also stands out for expressing rather misogynist sentiments. These become prominent in the last part, which depicts a whole series of repercussions associated with the mere existence of an order of nuns.<sup>27</sup> In the present discourse and its counterpart in the *Madhyama-āgama* this goes so far as to lead up to the proclamation of the five impossibilities of women, according to which a female is unable to occupy the position of heavenly rulers like Sakka, Māra, or Brahmā, or else in the human realm be a universal emperor or a Buddha. This type of presentation is also found in the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* and its parallels, where closer study shows this doctrine to be a later addition.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, on the one side T 60 succeeds in affirming the soteriological agency of women and their potential to reach awakening and offers a solution to the otherwise perplexing refusal of the Buddha to grant ordination to women. The very fact that he does grant them ordination implies that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's quest was, in the end, successful, which in turn sets the starting point for Buddhist female monasticism that has lasted until the modern day. On the other side T 60 also clearly expresses misogynist sentiments that are concerned with attributing any mishap a monk may experience to the mere existence of nuns, which eventually culminate in a proclamation of various inabilities of women.

Alongside these instances of “soteriological inclusiveness” as well as of “ascetic misogyny,” the same text also testifies to institutional an-

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<sup>27</sup> Besides MĀ 116 at T I 607a16, such descriptions are also found in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 186a16, and at a later juncture in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 352a11 and D 6 *da* 121a1 or Q 1035 *ne* 116b1. A comparable outburst can be found as part of the account of the accusations levied against Ānanda during the first *saṅgīti* in the \**Vinayamātrkā*, T 1463 at T XXIV 818b18.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo (“Bahudhātuka-sutta”).

drocentrism. T 60 lists the eight *gurudharmas* (Skt) or *garudhammas* (Pāli), which in all versions of the foundation account express the subordination of nuns and thus unmistakably stand for “institutional androcentrism.” In this way, the single text translated above shows evidence of each of the three tendencies identified by Sponberg.

In relation to these tendencies in the early texts in general, Sponberg points out that “the characterization of ambivalence is misleading,” because what we have here “is not a single, uncertain voice, but rather a multiplicity of voices, each expressing a different set of concerns current among members of the early community” (3f). In the present case this multiplicity of voices converges on a single text.

By incorporating these three distinct types of voices, T 60 poses a challenge to one-sided interpretations of the attitude toward women in early Buddhist texts. T 60 shows that, even in the case of relying on a single text alone and without taking into account epigraphic, archaeological, or other evidence, simple generalizations fail to capture the multivocality that pervades early Buddhist discourse on women.<sup>29</sup>

The same complexity in attitudes toward women can also be seen in the modern setting. Needless to say, the account of the formation of the Buddhist order of nuns has considerable impact on the modern day situation, in various ways influencing attitudes toward current attempts to revive the Theravāda order of *bhikkhunīs*. In what follows I briefly turn to *bhikkhunīs* in Thailand as an illustration of the convergence of the same three attitudes, identified by Sponberg, in a single situation.

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<sup>29</sup> On the need to proceed beyond reading into the texts either a consistently pro-women attitude or else a consistent tendency to patriarchal suppression cf. Collett (“Buddhism” and “Historio-Critical”).

One of the developments that influences the situation of convergence I will be describing stems from a peculiarity in northern Thai Theravāda Buddhist attitudes toward women. In some monasteries in the north of Thailand, women are prohibited from entering sacred grounds.<sup>30</sup> Behind this prohibition stands the fear that the purity and power believed to inhere in *stūpas* or *uposatha* halls stands in danger of becoming polluted through the presence of a menstruating woman.<sup>31</sup>

An attempt in 2004 by Senator Rabiabrat Pongpanit to promote the abolishment of such prohibition led to strong public opposition.<sup>32</sup> This documents that such attitudes are still very much alive in modern times and not merely a relic from the past. In terms of Sponberg's categories, for women to be prevented from entering certain areas of a monastery is undeniably an expression of misogyny.

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<sup>30</sup> Pichard (143) sums up that “dans le Nord de la Thaïlande . . . aujourd’hui encore il est commun que l’accès de l’ubosot y soit interdit aux femmes, une pratique inconnue dans le reste du pays.”

<sup>31</sup> Tanabe explains, “during menstruation women are prohibited from entering Buddhist monasteries . . . owing to the polluted and sinful nature of menstruation. Since menstrual blood also has destructive effects on plants, they are prohibited from setting foot in the kitchen garden, rice field or tobacco field . . . menstrual blood, the focus of the uncontrolled female physiology, can disrupt a man’s emotional balance . . . the blood is dangerous and sometimes powerful because of its marginal and illegitimate nature” (188f). Commenting on the association of menstruation with impurity as the basis for denying women access to sacred space, Kabilsingh points out that “it is important to remember that such beliefs and practices, the vestiges of which are still found among the Buddhist Sangha in Thailand, are not Buddhist in origin and actually represent a corruption of Buddhism” (32). The Theravāda *Vinaya* does in fact not provide a basis for such apprehensions concerning menstruation. As pointed out by Langenberg, “in Buddhist Vinaya texts female blood is neither abominated nor venerated, but treated as a thing of practical consequence” (15). According to Hüsken, the *Vinaya* ruling regarding the menstruation cloth does at the same time appear to be have been formulated by taking Brahminical concerns into account.

<sup>32</sup> Falk (98) and Bowie (113–116).



Another development relevant to my discussion is the recent attempt to revive the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order. As far as we know the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage never reached Thailand in the past.<sup>33</sup> An attempt by Narin Phasit to start an order of *bhikkhunīs* led to a Saṅgha act promulgated by the Saṅgharāja of the Thai Saṅgha in 1928. This Saṅgha act prohibits Thai *bhikkhus* from participating in the ordination of women as *sāmaṇerīs*, *sikkhamānās* or *bhikkhunīs*.<sup>34</sup> Similar to the ban on entering sacred ground, this prohibition is also not a mere relic from the past but has been reaffirmed and is still the stance taken by the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council.

The successful revival of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka, which has gathered momentum since an ordination ceremony undertaken in 1998 at Bodhgayā, has also affected Thailand, where by now gradually growing groups of *bhikkhunīs* can be found. In addition to the well-known Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā, based in the Bangkok area, a sizable group of *bhikkhunīs* under the leadership of Bhikkhunī Nandañāṇī live in the area of Chiang Mai. It is in relation to this group that the situation of a convergence of the three attitudes identified by Sponberg can be observed.

According to recent anthropological research, Bhikkhunī Nandañāṇī has been very successful in establishing cordial relationships with local *bhikkhus* and cultivating mutual trust and cooperation with them.<sup>35</sup> Cooperation between *bhikkhunīs* and *bhikkhus* in several aspects of monastic communal transaction is in fact a need enshrined in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, reflected already in the eight *garudhammas* mentioned in all accounts of the founding of the *bhikkhunīs*' order. One of these

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Skilling (36–38).

<sup>34</sup> Seeger (160).

<sup>35</sup> For detailed studies cf. Itoh and Delia.

*garudhammas* requires the undertaking of *pavāraṇā*, a formal “invitation” to be extended after the completion of the rains retreat period, an invitation to be pointed out any shortcoming in behavior. The formulation in the Theravāda *Vinaya* is as follows:

After the completion of the rainy season a *bhikkhunī* should make an invitation before both communities in respect to three matters: what has been seen, heard, and suspected.<sup>36</sup>

Thus *bhikkhunīs* need to extend such invitation not only to their own community of *bhikkhunīs*, but also to the community of *bhikkhus*. In contrast, *bhikkhus* only need to undergo *pavāraṇā* in front of the community of *bhikkhus*. In terms of Sponberg’s terminology, this is clearly an instance of institutional androcentrism.

At the same time, in the present day situation in Thailand for *bhikkhus* to participate in such a formal act of invitation constitutes equally an act of inclusiveness. Although such participation falls short of fully violating the Saṅgha act of 1928 against giving ordination, it comes rather close to challenging it. By participating in a *pavāraṇā* ceremony *bhikkhus* implicitly acknowledge the *bhikkhunī* status of the female monastics who have come for this monastic observance. Given the normative association of ordination with progress toward awakening,<sup>37</sup> such inclusiveness would in fact be of a soteriological type.

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<sup>36</sup> Vin II 255,14.

<sup>37</sup> This normative orientation is best summarized in the formulation employed for the *ehi bhikkhu* ordination, e.g., in Vin I 12,23 and 17,36, or the more frequently found plural form *etha bhikkhavo*, e.g., in Vin I 12,37, 13,14, 19,30, 20,28, 24,4, 33,10+26, 34,3, and 43,4, which continues with the invitation to live the holy life for making a complete end of *dukkha*, *cara/caratha brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ ti*. For what appears to be an instance of the same type of ordination given to a *bhikkhunī* cf. Thī 109. The use of

In addition to combining inclusiveness, which here is due to the specific setting in Thailand, and institutional androcentrism as a principle characteristics of this monastic observance, the third strand of misogyny comes into play when such a ceremony is conducted in an *uposatha* hall into which normally women are not allowed to enter. This is precisely what has happened recently at Wat Phra That Sri Chomthong. The picture below shows *bhikkhunīs* coming out of the *uposatha* hall of Wat Phra That Sri Chomthong after completion of the *pavāraṇa* ceremony. The picture shows the senior-most *bhikkhunī* from Sri Lanka, followed by Thai *bhikkhunīs*, respectfully waiting for a moment as the last of the Thai *bhikkhus* is about to put on his slippers and depart. To the side of the entrance to the compound and again to the actual hall, blue sign posts can be seen which prohibit entry for women.<sup>38</sup>

The picture on the following page documents a combination of the three attitudes identified by Sponberg within a single moment at a single place. Although some degree of disobedience to Bangkok authorities is not altogether surprising among the heirs to the Lanna tradition in northern Thailand, the present instance clearly throws into relief the degree to which good conduct and harmonious behavior by the *bhikkhunīs*, combined with sincerity of aspiration, can make the difference. Such impact by the *bhikkhunīs* on the ground will be decisive in determining their acceptance by society in Theravāda countries at large.

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*etha bhikkhavo* seems to be specific to such ordination, in contrast to other contexts in the discourses which combine *etha* instead with *bhikkhave* (usually preceded by *tumhe*), such as, just to provide one out of many examples, DN 11 at DN I 211,14; on the two terms *bhikkhave* and *bhikkhavo* cf. also Anālayo (*Comparative* 21f).

<sup>38</sup> I am very much indebted to Ayako Itoh for kindly allowing me to use this picture, taken by her in the course of her research in Thailand.



## Conclusion

The foundation history of the *bhikkhunī* order in T 60 exemplifies the complexity of attitudes toward women in Buddhist literature, where “soteriological inclusiveness” can be found just as “institutional androcentrism” and “ascetic misogyny.” Such multivocality continues up to modern days, a telling expression of which is the undertaking of the *pavāraṇā* ceremony by Thai *bhikkhunīs* in an *uposatha* which otherwise prohibits women from entry. In this way ancient text and modern day situation converge on reflecting a complex situation that defies attempts at simplistic evaluation.

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	Derge edition
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Q	Peking edition
T	Taishō edition
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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