The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya on the Formation of Bhikṣuṇīs

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Perspectives on Bhikkhuni Ordination
Summer Semester 2014
University of Hamburg
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Ways We Use Vinaya Texts in Discussions of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

As a legal code?

As a source of evidence on historical antecedents?
What kind of text is the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, anyway?

A very, very long one.

...and almost 8,000 more pages like these
What kind of text is the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, anyway?

Sūtras
Ritual manual
Cosmology
History of kingdoms
Buddha’s biography
Jātakas
Avadānas

Narrative, narratives ... and more narratives
Reading As Authoritative Text

- Not what the Buddha intended?
- Set in stone or set in water?
- Superseded by “easier” text:
- 6th/7th-century “Root” Vinaya
  Vinayasūtra
The great Indologist Sylvain Lévi called it a “masterpiece of Sanskrit literature” composed by someone “whose verbal enthusiasm and rampant imagination evoke the memory of Rabelais, and the best of Rabelais.” *

Reading As Narratives

Issues in reading as history
  - Date
    (at least six centuries after events described)
  - Politics of representation
  - Multivocal yet authoritative
Reading As Narrative

- The world of the MSV is densely populated by women

- Women not confined to ghetto

- Their voices are heard, subjectivity imagined

- Narrator(s) acknowledge misogyny
Story One:
Gender is on the MSV’s Radar

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī Arranges First Dharma Teachings for Śākya Women

“...the arising of the Buddha in the world is for the sake of men, not for women.”

Vinayavastu, Sanghabhedavastu
Making Bhikṣuṇīs

- Not a Process that ends when vows are given

- Envisioning women As full participants in Buddhist monasticism
Story Two:
Just What Does a Bhikṣuṇī Do, Anyway?
(Definitely not housework)

- Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī’s part in defining a bhikṣuṇī’s role

- Class and gender; or, the advantages of being led by a queen

_Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga_
Story Three: The Buddha as Protector of Nuns

A Former Prostitute, a King, a Brahmin and an Eye

- Females as vulnerable to male predators

- The Buddha as protector places nuns under monks

- Protecting bhikṣuṇīs from the bhikṣus

*Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* and *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*
Story Four: Bhikṣuṇīs Caring for Women

Carving out separate spheres

*Bhikṣuvibhaṅga*

“Gender pairing” *

Some Final Reflections