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Female Education in a Chan Public Monastery in China: The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns

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Abstract: The Great Chan Monastery of the Golden Mountain (Dajinshan Chansi 大金山禪寺) is a large monastic complex for nuns located in Jiangxi province in southeast China and belonging to the Chan meditation school. The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Jiangxi foxueyuan Dajinshan nizhong xueyuan* 江西佛學院大金山尼眾學院), established at the monastery in 1994, is one of the few institutes for nuns in China to be especially axed on Chan studies and practice. What are the pedagogical goals and agenda of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns? What are the specificities of this academy as compared to other female academies, and to academies for monks? Why do nuns enroll at Dajinshan Buddhist Academy? What does this case study tell us about the gender balance in Chinese Buddhism today? This paper, based on fieldwork, will try to answer these questions by especially considering enrollment and scale, students and personnel, and curricula and schedule of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns.

Keywords: Buddhist education; Buddhist academies; foxueyuan 佛學院; Dajinshan 大金山; Buddhist academy for nuns 尼眾佛學院



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1. Introduction

Although it is difficult to provide accurate estimates, it is widely acknowledged that Buddhism, counting 100 million followers at the beginning of the twenty-first century, represents today the largest and most influential among the five officially recognized religions in the People's Republic of China¹. Official statistics indicate that in 2018, there were around 222,000 Buddhist clerics and 33,500 Buddhist temples in China, including 28,000 Han Buddhist temples, 3800 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and 1700 Theravāda Buddhist temples². Based on different sources, (Ji 2012)³ and (Gildow 2016) both arrived at an estimate of about 100,000 monastics for Han Buddhism alone⁴, of which in 2016, about 3000 were seminarians in about fifty Buddhist academies (Gildow 2016, pp. 48, 76, 204).

Buddhist academies (*foxueyuan* 佛學院), also referred to as institutes of Buddhist studies or Buddhist seminaries, are higher degree-granting educational institutions annexed to monasteries and convents, where Buddhist courses are complemented by secular studies⁵. Since their appearance in China at the beginning of the twentieth century⁶, Buddhist academies have become central monastic institutions, changing in a durable way monastic training and education in general, and the formation of monastic elites in particular. At least seventy-one Buddhist academies were established in the Republican period (1912–1949)⁷, and at least thirteen for women (nuns and sometimes also laywomen) between 1924 and 1948⁸. The first educational organization for Buddhist nuns and laywomen was the Wuchang Female Institute of Buddhist Studies (*Wuchang foxueyuan nizhongyuan* 武昌佛學院女眾院) established by Master Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) in 1924⁹.

While Buddhist academies were run as private institutions during the Republican period, since the communist takeover in 1949 and the establishment of the Buddhist Association of China (*Zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中国佛教协会, BAC) in 1953, Buddhist monastic education has been subjected to state control. The Buddhist Academy of China (*Zhongguo*

foxueyuan 中國佛學院) was the first national-level institution¹⁰ and the only one allowed to exist between its establishment in Beijing in 1956 and its formal closure in 1966. Since its reopening in 1980 following the end of the Cultural Revolution, the number of Buddhist academies has gradually increased, reaching fifty-eight for Han Buddhism alone in 2014 (Ji 2019, appendix 7.1, pp. 200–4). Not only there are many more Buddhist academies today than in the first half of the twentieth century, but they also serve a much smaller monastic population (Gildow 2016, p. 204)¹¹.

While the majority of Buddhist academies are male-only institutions, there also exist academies with male and female sections (*nüzhongbu* 女眾部), as well as women-only academies. (Yang 2011, chart p. 20) estimated that sixteen female institutions (including both female sections and women-only academies) were established in the country between 1983 and 2005; in 2014, (Ji 2019, p. 186) counted eleven specialized Buddhist academies for women, and fifteen others accepting both men and women¹². The most illustrious example of an academy with male and female sections is the Minnan Buddhist Academy (*Minnan foxueyuan* 閩南佛學院), which (re)opened in 1985¹³, the female branch of which is considered to be the best for nuns in China (Gildow 2016, p. 206). The Buddhist academy of the Xuyun chanlin 虛云禪林, the female sub-temple (*xiayuan* 下院) of the Bailin Chan monastery in Hebei, is an example of a more recently established branch institution, created in 2016¹⁴.

In effect, a rapid survey shows that while a few Buddhist academies for women listed by Ji are not active anymore, new academies were established since 2015. This institutional turnover seems to leave especially unaffected long-established, women-only, provincial-level independent institutions such as the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan* 四川尼眾佛學院)¹⁵, the first female academy to have opened after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1983; the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Wutaishan nizhong foxueyuan* 五台山尼眾佛學院), established at Pushou monastery in 1992¹⁶; the Guangdong Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Guangdong foxueyuan nizhong xueyuan* 廣東佛學院尼眾學院, previously called *Guangdong nizhong foxueyuan* 廣東尼眾佛學院), which was created in 1995; and the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Jiangxi foxueyuan Dajinshan nizhong xueyuan* 江西佛學院大金山尼眾學院), established in 1994 and which is the object of this study.

What are the pedagogical goals and agenda of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns¹⁷? What are the specificities of this academy as compared to other female academies, and to academies for monks?¹⁸ Why do nuns enroll at Dajinshan Buddhist Academy? What does this case study tell us about the gender balance in Chinese Buddhism today? In this paper, based on observations, materials, and interviews from fieldwork, I will try to answer these questions by especially considering enrollment and scale, students and personnel, and curricula and schedule of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns.

I conducted fieldwork at Dajinshan in 2006, 2015, 2016, and 2019, each time residing at the monastery for a period of about ten days. During each of my stays, I followed the monastic community in the daily liturgy and formal meals, participated in different ritual occasions related to the Buddhist and secular calendars, attended classes and meditation sessions, spent time at the retiring house, and visited and resided at the monastery's sub-temples, sometimes also accompanying the current abbess there¹⁹. During my stays at the monastery, I had both formal conversations and informal talks with the retired and current abbesses, with different nuns holding monastic positions, and with a few lay devotees and local political representatives (most of the longer, formal conversations were recorded)²⁰.

2. The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns

The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns is a women-only institution annexed to the Great Monastery of the Golden Mountain (Dajinshan Chansi 大金山禪寺), a large, public monastery²¹ for nuns of the Chan (meditation) school located in southeast

China, near the city of Fuzhou in Jiangxi province. A historical stronghold of Han Buddhism, Jiangxi is the third province for Buddhist sites to population (38.92 per million) according to 2006 estimates (after Fujian and Zhejiang: Ji 2012, p. 17). The monastery and its institute are both independent from any male institution. The monastic community counts a steady average of two hundred nuns, including about a hundred student-nuns.

The Dajinshan monastery was rebuilt by retired abbess Yinkong 印空 (b. 1921), one of the very few Buddhist masters still alive to have entered religion before the 1949 Communist takeover. Starting from 1984, Yinkong rebuilt over ten years the monastery on top of the hill (Jinshan monastery, from the name of the hill on which it seats) where she had received tonsure from a Buddhist nun in 1940 and where she had lived in her youth. In 2000, she began the construction of another monastic complex at the foot of the hill (Dajinshan monastery) in order to expand the premises. Yinkong was herself a teacher before the start of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), and the instruction of women, and more generally, the will to provide women with equal opportunities, is a foundational theme of her lifelong activities²². She therefore rebuilt Dajinshan monastery as a large, orthodox institution for nuns claiming the same status and legitimacy as the most prestigious male monasteries, and she expressly adopted for it a gender-neutral denomination (*chansi* 禪寺, “Chan monastery”) different from the Chinese term referring to small convents or nunneries (*an* 庵)²³. Large public monasteries such as Dajinshan are less commonly occupied by nuns than small convents in China.

Yinkong regrets that when she was a young novice and nun, female monastics did not have the possibility to practice collective meditation according to the standards and methods of the Chan school, as women were (and are) not allowed to enter the meditation halls of male monasteries, and that no meditation halls especially dedicated to them existed (or were easily accessible) at that time. For this reason, she built at her monastery in 1994 one of the first large meditation halls for nuns in the country²⁴. Yinkong later equipped her monastery with an ordination platform, and more recently, she also built a retiring house for aged nuns and the aging parents of Dajinshan’s nuns, as a strategy to motivate more women to enter religion and to motivate parents to give their consent.

Although retired abbess Yinkong engaged in nuns’ education since the 1940s, the idea of establishing the academy initially came from her Dharma master, the monk Benhuan 本煥 (1907–2012)²⁵, whose great renown surely helped the monastery to obtain authorization from the Jiangxi Buddhist Association and the provincial Religious and Ethnic Affairs bureau. The “Jiangxi Buddhist Academy for Nuns” (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan* 江西尼眾佛學院), as it was originally called, was the first academy for nuns to be established in Jiangxi province in 1994, and the only one until 2016²⁶. Initially located at Jinshan monastery on top of the hill, it was later moved to the larger Dajinshan monastery. As a picture included in the commemorative publication of the first twenty years of the academy shows, Benhuan took part in the academy’s inauguration ceremony together with Yicheng 一誠 (1927–2017), another renown Chan monk who was leading at that time the restoration of his lineage temple²⁷, the Zhenru Monastery on Mount Yunju in Jiangxi, and who was later appointed president of the BAC from 2002 to 2010. Since then, the institute has received the visits of many other prominent Chinese Buddhists and political leaders (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan ershi zhounian yuanying zhuankan* 2014, pp. 10–21).

The academy is housed and funded by the monastery, and as is often the case, the most important administrative positions of the two institutions overlap: the academy’s nominal director (*yuanyzhang* 院長) is Yinkong herself, and its vice-director is Dajinshan’s current abbess and Yinkong’s disciple, Duncheng 頓成 (b. 1966). The funds for the construction of the academy were first provided by the Fu Hui Charity Foundation (*Xianggang Fuhui cishan jijinhui* 香港福慧慈善基金會), a Hong Kong-based Buddhist philanthropic association that especially sponsors higher education²⁸, and by a few emigrated Buddhist monks such as Jinghai 淨海 (b. 1931) (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan ershi zhounian yuanying zhuankan* 2014, pp. 16, 62). Starting from 2002, thanks to Benhuan’s introduction, the construction of the new academy at Dajinshan was sponsored by the Glorisun Group (*Xianggang Xuri jituan*

香港旭日集團) (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan ershi zhounian yuangqing zhuan kan* 2014, pp. 1, 62), a well-known Hong Kong jeans company that has financed a great number of Buddhist enterprises in China. As a token of gratitude towards its donor, the main building of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns is called the “building of venerating the rising sun” (*Zunxulou* 尊旭樓).

This teaching building (*jiaoxuelou* 教學樓), which surrounds a verdant central courtyard (Figure 1), includes the students’ lodgings, classrooms, offices, a meeting room, a computer room, a hall for the collective recitation of sacred texts (*fatang* 法堂), and a library. There are no sports equipment and no areas for sport, as sport is part neither of the curriculum nor of the leisure activities preconized at the academy. Student-nuns share ten-person dorms equipped with bunk beds, air-conditioning, and heating. These facilities are also to be found in the classrooms, although when I attended classes in a cool month of March in 2019, the heating was off and students were wrapped up in scarves and hats, with blankets on their legs. Most of the classrooms have been recently equipped with blackboards doubled with an electronic screen. Students are only allowed to take hand-notes, however, and they leave all personal belongings, including flasks, outside the classroom. Generally speaking, Dajinshan’s rules and way of living are quite austere, and the monthly allowance is especially low (130 *yuan*) if compared to other monasteries. Potential student-nuns often come beforehand and stay at the monastery for a few days (*guan dan* 掛單) as temporary residents (*yunshui* 雲水) to make sure that they find the atmosphere and lifestyle suitable for them.



Figure 1. The teaching building of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns.

2.1. Enrollment and Scale

As most Buddhist academies in China, the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns does not enroll students every year. It first enrolled every two years between 1994 and 1998 when classes had to be set up, then every three years from 1998 to 2020, a period during which the curriculum consisted of a three-year elementary program (*jichuban* 基礎班), followed by a three-year beginner program (*chujiban* 初級班) and a three-year intermediate program (*zhongjiban* 中級班), plus a final one-year meditation class. The academy then shifted to a biennial enrollment after the course of study was modified in 2019 in order to match the national standard—it now includes, besides two years of preparatory program (*yukeban* 預科班), four years of a bachelor degree program (*benkeban* 本科班) and three years of a master degree program (*yanjiuban* 研究班). This is the same course of study, for example, as the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (Yang 2011, pp. 37, 39).

As for the academy’s scale, a chart included in the commemorative publication of the first twenty years of the academy provides precise figures for every year from 1994 to 2013. During this period, the academy enrolled eight promotions²⁹, with classes counting an average of 32–33 students³⁰ for a total of 716 student-nuns graduating in the three programs³¹, of which 159 student-nuns graduated in the intermediate, final program alone (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan ershi zhounian yuangqing zhuan kan* 2014, p. 9). If we double these

numbers to also cover the period 2013–2022, we obtain an estimate of more than 300 student-nuns having obtained their final degree since 1994. This is a rather conservative estimate, as the scale of the academy has grown from an average of 90 student-nuns per year for the period 1994–2013³² to 136 student-nuns upon my last visit in 2019. Notwithstanding the fact that academies for nuns are in general of a smaller scale than those for monks³³, the present scale of Dajinshan Buddhist academy matches the national average of 140 students (Ji 2019, pp. 186–87). Therefore, the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns can be considered a large female academy³⁴.

Conditions for applying to the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, according to the 2022 call for applications, are “to love one’s country and religion, to comply with the statutes and obey the laws, to have a clean criminal record and an upright moral conduct, to support the Party’s leadership and the socialist system, and to have a firm belief”³⁵. As is the case for any Buddhist Academy in China, political allegiance and collaboration count as the first requirement. Candidates must be between 18 and 40 years old, and they must have entered religion (i.e., received tonsure) at least one year prior. They must be “fond of practicing and studying, possess a dignified demeanor³⁶, be in good health, be exempt from any hidden handicap, infectious disease and depressive disorder³⁷, do not have unhealthy habits nor marital or romantic relationships”³⁸. Candidates applying to the preparatory program must possess a junior high-school degree or above (*chuzhong yishang* 初中以上), while those applying to the bachelor degree program must have completed a preparatory program in a Buddhist academy or possess a senior middle-school degree or above (*gaozhong yishang* 高中以上).

Applications must previously be approved by the candidates’ public monastery (*kaifang conglin* 開放叢林) or local Buddhist Association. Either a letter of introduction and recommendation from the candidate’s local Buddhist Association or Religious Affairs Bureau, or a certificate from the monastery of origin are to be submitted, along with the ordination certificate (for ordained nuns), ID card, and a medical examination form, including positive resistance to type B hepatitis (required since at least 2013) and DNA test (a new 2022 requirement)³⁹. More sanitary requirements were also added to the 2022 call for applications as compared to the application of 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁰. As is customary in Buddhist academies, candidates meeting all requirements undergo a written and oral admission examination. At Dajinshan, the examination is intended to test their general knowledge, acquaintance with Buddhist liturgy and deportment, and “comprehensive attainments in self-cultivation” (*zonghe suyang* 綜合素養)⁴¹.

The above-mentioned conditions do not differ much from general requirements of male academies, nor from Dajinshan academy’s previous calls for applications (2013 and 2020), except on two points. The first difference is the scale of the enrollment, which in 2022 was raised to 45 student-nuns for the preparatory program and 45 for the bachelor degree program, as compared to 40 and 40 for the same programs in 2020. Second, the age limit to be enrolled at the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns was also raised from 35 to 40 since at least 2020, as compared to the 2013 call for applications⁴². Although a general raise in the age limit seems to concern male Buddhist academies as well⁴³, the current age limit for enrolling at Dajinshan academy is higher than the average for both monks and nuns, judging from a few 2022 calls for applications of other male and female academies for the same programs⁴⁴. This specific choice of Dajinshan academy to raise the scale and the age limit for enrollment can be ascribed to different factors.

First of all, generally speaking, the age for joining the Buddhist monastic order is being increasingly pushed further, since many Chinese enter religion after marrying and bearing a child. Besides disappointment with and failure of marital life (certainly not a new phenomenon), this fact can be ascribed to the state family planning and especially the single-child policy implemented between 1979 and 2015⁴⁵, which will have a growing impact for at least another decade⁴⁶. Due to the long-standing importance of the ancestor cult in China, young adults have the moral obligation of bearing an heir who can continue

the family line. This obligation is all the more compelling for single children, and given that candidates to religious life, especially if minor, must obtain from their parents the permission to enter religion—particularly in the case of wealthy and well-educated single children, this permission is often not easily granted.

Second, while the delay of the age for entering religion concerns both male and female candidates to religious life, the latter pay a higher price. The important gender imbalance also caused by the single-child policy (the male marriage population far exceeds the female marriage population in China) entails that the pressure to marry and bear a child is higher on women than on men. Women are also expected to take care of their old parents more than men are. An analogous disadvantage concerns female monastics. Since there are in China fewer higher education institutions for nuns than for monks, the selection to enroll—which is also executed according to the age of the candidates—is harder for nuns. Furthermore, at some Buddhist academies where male and female sections are available, for example, the Fujian Buddhist Academy, age limits for women's enrollment are lower than for men⁴⁷, and the curriculum is longer⁴⁸.

Finally, although the age limit for ordination is the same for men and women (59 years), according to contemporary official regulations, at least two years must separate the tonsure and the complete ordination of female novices (but only one year in the case of male novices), therefore implicitly allowing for their two-year⁴⁹ training as a probationer (skr. *śikṣamāṇā*, ch. *shichani* 式叉尼)⁵⁰. Since the dozen monasteries allowed to conduct ordinations in the country every year must respect a maximum quota imposed by the government (usually 350 ordinands for each ordaining monastery), when receivable applications exceed the quota, as is often the case, the selection is performed according to the age and education level of the candidates. In other words, among all receivable applications for ordination, monasteries select the youngest and more educated novices. As a consequence, female novices entering religious life at a relatively advanced age often find themselves unable, first, to enroll at a Buddhist academy, and then, because of their age and lack of a Buddhist degree, also to receive complete ordination, even though they might still be below the ordination age limit⁵¹.

Therefore, Dajinshan academy's recent raise of the enrollments' scale and age limit to 40 years old seems to aim at granting both more women in general, and elder women in particular, the opportunity of being both trained *and* ordained. It is also a strategy for Dajinshan academy to enroll more students in a logic of competition with other female academies in China.

2.2. Students and Teachers

Students come from the whole country to enroll at Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns: a small group of students I spent an afternoon with in July 2015 came from Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangdong, and the Wutaishan region. Some students enroll because it is here that they were accepted after applying to different academies, some others, such as one student from Guangdong I interviewed in 2015⁵², chose this academy because of the specialization of its program and despite the fact that there was a Buddhist academy at the very monastery she came from. Indeed, in order to attract student-monastics and to find its place in a context of national diversification and competition (Ji 2019, p. 185), Dajinshan academy puts forward its "distinguishing Chan feature" (*chanzong tese* 禪宗特色; see next section "Curricula and schedule"). Although overseas students are accepted at the academy, they are especially rare.

The Dajinshan monastery also systematically enrolls young novices at the academy regardless of their educational level⁵³, a proof that occasionally, still in the twenty-first century, women's education continues in the Buddhist monastery. According to the 2019 academic dean (*jiaowuzhang* 教務長), Buddhist knowledge must be imparted to all novices starting from scratch in any case—this is what the preparatory program is designed for⁵⁴. If novices are under 20, which is below the minimum ordination age, they also take, in addition to the ten precepts of the *śrāmaṇerī* (*shaminijie* 沙彌尼戒), the six additional precepts

of the probationer (*shichanijie* 式叉尼戒) bonding them for about two years. Probationers are especially forbidden to eat (and drink tea) after noon, an interdiction that is strictly implemented at Dajinshan. All the probationers of the monastery are students at the academy, and they represent the majority of the students of the preparatory program.

In effect, the training of the student-nuns at the academy, especially if they start as probationers, allows for a sort of “religious formatting” that is quite convenient for the monastery, and more generally for Han institutional Buddhism. First of all, it is in a religious communal lifestyle considered as “orthodox” by Buddhist and political leaders that student-nuns are trained in the first place. Furthermore, only a Buddhist academy degree grants (monks and) nuns the possibility of holding positions (*zhishi* 執事) at monasteries and Buddhist academies in China, including Dajinshan. Finally, nuns who do not transition as probationers face more difficulty learning and assimilating at once a consequent number of *Vinaya* rules (368 precepts for fully ordained nuns according to the Dharmaguptaka tradition followed in China). For this reason, the academy also organizes a separate two-year *Vinaya* class (*jieliiban* 戒律版) reserved for fully ordained resident nuns (up to 50 years old) who are over the age to enroll in the standard programs. The *Vinaya* class includes courses on *Vinaya* as well as on basic Buddhist knowledge⁵⁵. A second alternative educational program for nuns who cannot enroll at the academy consists of evening lectures (*fuhiiban* 福慧班) resembling the traditional expounding of *sutras* (*jiangjing* 講經). Differently from other female institutions such as the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy is not open to laywomen.

At the end of their studies, most graduate student-nuns go back to their temple of origin in order to teach and train the community there—this is indeed the main reason why small convents⁵⁶ bear the costs and inconveniences of sending their young recruits to study and practice at a Buddhist academy. In effect, although the academy is free of charge and living expenses are taken care of, and although student-nuns do receive a regular monthly allowance supplemented by offerings from rituals, the temple of origin as well as their families often have to endorse students’ out-of-pocket expenses such as cell phone bills, hygiene products, train/airplane tickets, and so forth.

Other graduated students leave in order to specialize, teach, or hold positions at other academies and temples, including Dajinshan’s affiliated temples. A few enter Dajinshan’s resident monastic community and may also become teachers at its academy. Almost all of the about twenty teacher-nuns (*fashi* 法師) that the Dajinshan academy counted in 2019 had graduated there. This is because when the academy was first established in 1994, it was especially difficult to find nuns holding a Buddhist degree: current abbess Duncheng did not hold any when she began to teach—she had a university degree, however, and this was a rare privilege for a nun at that time—and, more recently, it is difficult to find teacher-nuns specialized in Chan studies and practice, as not many Buddhist academies besides Dajinshan offer this specialization in the country. This is the reason why, especially at the beginning, graduated students were sometimes persuasively retained in order to become teachers at the academy. One of the teachers recalls with humor how, after her graduation, she wished to go perfect her studies at another academy just as some of her classmates, but found herself in a cumbersome situation when she was entrusted with a teaching position. She decided to go on a pilgrimage to Wutaishan in order to make up her mind, but when she returned, everybody was already addressing her as “teacher” (*fashi*)—the monastery had announced her appointment before she could answer the offer!⁵⁷

In the period from 1994 to 2013, the staff of the academy included seventeen teacher-nuns,⁵⁸ three laymen, and two laywomen, aged 27 to 93 years old, and native of ten different provinces (including northern provinces such as Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Heilongjiang); their educational level ranged from senior middle-school to doctorate (*Jiangxi nizhong foxueyuan ershi zhounian yuanqing zhuankan* 2014, detailed chart p. 17). This is a very different configuration from the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, which at least until 2011 mainly relied on the abbess Rurui to teach its 500–600 students⁵⁹, and from the Sichuan

Buddhist Academy for Nuns, where only half of the about thirty teachers are monastics and the rest of them include many university professors (Yang 2011, pp. 37, 39–40). While Buddhist courses are taught by teacher-nuns, laywomen are occasionally invited to teach secular courses such as classical studies (*guoxue* 國學), Chinese painting (*guohua* 國畫), calligraphy, history and geography, and informatics. I met three of these lay teachers across the years. Among them, in 2015, a retired teacher from Shanghai, who was in charge of a two-week course of history and geography at the academy during the summer retreat (*anju* 安居), was letting two willing student-nuns catch up on their exam (*bukao* 補考) one evening in order to allow them to achieve their degree—the academy’s standards and expectations are not exceedingly high. Differently from other nationally renowned institutions such as the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns and the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns (see Yang 2011, pp. 28–30, 35–43), Dajinshan academy only offers one kind of curriculum, and no collaboration with local universities has been established so far. Male teachers represent an exception and rather account as “special guests”; this is the case, for example, of a nationally renowned Buddhist layman who occasionally comes to the academy to teach a one-week class, and of officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau who expressly come to teach courses on politics.

2.3. Curricula and Schedule

Although monastic education is not mandatory in China, and although curricula of Buddhist academies are not nationally unified, they must usually include an established proportion of Buddhist knowledge, general culture, knowledge of politics, and supplementary courses such as music and calligraphy (Ji 2019, p. 190). According to the 2011 call for applications of the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, for example, 60% of the imparted courses dealt with Buddhist knowledge (including doctrines and texts of a large array of Buddhist schools) and 40% with secular knowledge (including Classical Chinese, University Chinese, History of Chinese Philosophy, History of Western Philosophy, Psychology, Politics, English and Informatics; Yang 2011, p. 38).

However, the 2015 and 2018 curricula of the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns included no regular courses of general culture strictly speaking, but only Buddhist courses for an average 18 classes⁶⁰ per week, and supplementary courses (calligraphy and Chinese painting) for a steady four classes per week. General culture courses such as Classical Studies (*guoxue*) were usually taught by lay teachers on a short-term basis, especially during the summer retreat when the latter have more spare time. Since the standardization of the study program in 2019, a 2-h general culture course has replaced Chinese painting, while the 2-h calligraphy course was maintained. Political courses—in 2019, “The Marxist Perspective on Religion”, “The Sinification of Religion”, and “Religious Policy and Regulations”—were and are not delivered on a regular basis at Dajinshan academy either, but only when officials of the Jiangxi Religious Education Service (*Jiangxisheng zongjiao yuanxiao jiaoyu fuwu zhongxin* 江西省宗教院校教育服務中心) are dispatched to the monastery. Therefore, the academy seems far from respecting the provision of 70% religious courses, 20% cultural courses, and 10% political courses established by the “Request for Instructions about Opening Religious School” approved by the central government in 1982 (Ji 2019, p. 191)⁶¹.

This is all the more true if we consider that, differently from most Buddhist academies, the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns’ weekly schedule also forecasts an average of 13 h of collective religious practice for each promotion⁶² besides the strict observance and practice of monastic discipline (*Vinaya*), and on top of the standard and compulsory two daily liturgies (morning and evening) and formal meals, the bimonthly collective recitation of the precepts, and all other ritual events of the religious calendar. In effect, although the monastery has established a philanthropic association and a retiring house, its academy does not put forward the ideal of “serving society” derived from humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) as other Buddhist academies do (see Yang 2011, pp. 26, 30–31, 38). It does, however, explicitly emphasize the importance attributed to

both study and practice (*xuexiu bingzhong* 學修並重) and is apparently not as concerned with one of the major problems of contemporary Buddhist education, that is, academization (*xueshuhua* 學術化) and the ensuing tension between study and practice⁶³.

Buddhist courses change every year and are predominantly axed on texts, including Mahāyāna fundamental texts and texts of selected Mahāyāna schools, such as the Yogācāra and Tiantai schools. The academy's special focus, however, is on texts associated with the Chan tradition. In 2019, for example, these included the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* (*Weimojiesuo shuo jing* 維摩詰所經, T. 475), the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing* 六祖大師法寶壇經, T. 2008), and a course on the annalistic biography of Chan master Xuyun 虛雲 (ca. 1864–1959)⁶⁴.

Although this is not explicitly emphasized by the academy, texts associated with monastic discipline occupy an equally important part of the curriculum than Chan texts. In 2019, *Vinaya* courses focused on the *Sutra on the bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī* (*Da'aidao biquini jing* 大愛道比丘尼經, T. 1478), the *Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition* (*Sifen biquini jieben* 四分比丘尼戒本, T. 1431), the *Commentary on Karman in the Four-Part Vinaya* (*Sifenlü shanbu sui ji jiemoshu* 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏, X. 727), as well as a course dealing with contemporary Chan monastic regulations (“*Guiyue shixian* 規約實踐”: “Monastic regulations in practice”). *Vinaya* courses dealing with monastic precepts are reserved to fully ordained student-nuns of the more advanced promotions. Buddhist non-strictly textual courses in 2019 included Buddhist history and the study of Buddhist paraphernalia (the list of specific 2019 Buddhist courses for the different promotions are detailed in the footnote)⁶⁵.

The general culture course “Modern Chinese History” was taught collectively to all classes, just as the course on Chinese calligraphy. An example of a schedule is provided in the chart below (Chart 1).

| Time \ Day | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:00–8:45 | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> | <i>Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition</i> |
| 9:00–9:45 | <i>Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> | <i>Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings</i> | <i>The Platform sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> | Calligraphy | Modern Chinese History | Self-study |
| 10:00–10:45 | <i>Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> | <i>Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings</i> | <i>The Platform sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> | Calligraphy | Modern Chinese History | Self-study |
| 14:00–14:45 | <i>The Platform sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> | Collective work | <i>Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> | Collective reading of <i>sūtras</i> | <i>Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings</i> | Collective chanting of <i>sūtras</i> |
| 15:00–15:45 | <i>The Platform sutra of the Sixth Patriarch</i> | Collective work | <i>Vimalakīrti Sutra</i> | Collective reading of <i>sūtras</i> | <i>Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings</i> | Collective chanting of <i>sūtras</i> |
| 19:00–19:55 | Self-study | Self-study | Self-study | Self-study | Self-study | Self-study |
| 20:00–21:00 | Meditation | Meditation | Meditation | Meditation | Meditation | Meditation |

Chart 1. Schedule for the third-year class of the bachelor degree program (2019).

Collective religious practice for student-nuns of the academy also reflects the “distinguishing Chan feature” put forward by the academy in order to attract student-monastics and find its place in a context of national diversification and competition. Collective religious practice includes, besides 2 h of reading (*dujing* 讀經) and 2 h of chanting (*songjing* 誦經) of *sūtras* per week, two training methods specific to the Chan tradition: collective meditation alternating quiet sitting and walking meditation (*paoxiang* 跑香, 6 h per week), and practical, collective work (*chupo* 出坡, 2 h per week), conceived as religious practice amidst movement and everyday activities. This is a peculiar feature of Dajinshan academy as compared to other female academies in China.

Turns of duty for collective work are organized according to the different promotions and include, on a daily basis, working in the kitchen (especially cleaning and cutting vegetables, cooking regular dishes such as steamed bread at breakfast, and hand-washing dishes at the end of the meals including the evening informal meal reserved to laypeople and sick or elder nuns), serving in the refectory, gardening, and cleaning the classrooms. In large public monasteries, these kinds of chores are usually accomplished by laypeople; however, Dajinshan only employs three laypeople for a community of more than 200 nuns. Additional occasional tasks add up: for example, on the occasion of the Tomb Sweeping day (*Qingmingjie* 清明節), student-nuns go patrolling the mountain (*xunshan* 巡山) where the monastery's stupas are located in order to keep visitors' firecrackers from setting the vegetation on fire.

On Saturday afternoon, classes and collective work are replaced by the collective chanting of *sutras* (*songjing* 誦經), as student-nuns of all promotions join the rest of the community in the chanting of the *Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha* (*Dizang pusa benyuanjing* 地藏菩薩本願經, T. 412), the Bodhisattva of the underworld. This collective ritual activity represents a source of income for the monastery, since laypeople usually make offerings for the transfer of merit to the deceased. Student-nuns only have classes in the morning also during the summer retreat, when the afternoon is devoted to collective chanting of *sutras* followed by the evening meditation.

The student-nuns of the academy are also on the front line, in terms of both organization and participation, of the numerous events of the annual religious calendar, including, for example, the intensive seven-week winter meditation retreat, the seven-day water-and-land ritual (*shuilu fahui* 水陸法會)⁶⁶, and before 2018, the summer camps for laypeople (*xialingying* 夏令營), of which final-year student-nuns were in charge.

It therefore appears that student-nuns at the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns have a very busy schedule. They wake up at 3:30 a.m., the morning liturgy begins at 4:30 a.m., and the first formal meal of the day (breakfast) is at 6 a.m. Morning classes, from 8 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., are followed by the second and last formal meal of the day (lunch) at 11 a.m. After a resting time from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., afternoon classes are scheduled between 2 and 3:45 p.m., the evening liturgy is at 5 p.m., and in the evening, they accomplish one hour of collective meditation and one hour of individual study before going to bed at 9:45 p.m. No wonder a few of them doze off during the liturgy and the evening meditation!

Student-nuns are also granted some rest, however. There are no classes on Sunday; therefore, after the end of the liturgy and the lunch, the students who are not in charge of the kitchen and refectory can take some free time, and occasionally, the oldest go out to Fuzhou or even Nanchang. Students are also granted two leaves every year: a longer leave in winter after the meditation retreat (at the time of the New Year) and a shorter leave in summer after the summer retreat, for a total of 40 days. They can use this time to return to their temple of origin or, if their tonsure master agrees⁶⁷, visit their families or visit other monasteries and sacred sites (*canxue* 參學).

As is the case for all nuns of Dajinshan, the parents and relatives of the student-nuns can find them and stay at the monastery as long as they wish, provided that they get used to the monastery's lifestyle. The atmosphere at the academy is solemn and benevolent at the same time. Students are allowed to use their cell phones only on the weekend, the penalty for violating this rule being the withdrawal of the already maigre monthly allowance—a penalty that works very well, according to the students.

3. Concluding Remarks

The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns presents major distinctive features if compared to other large female institutions such as the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns and the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns. A large-scale female academy, it offers relatively spartan facilities and only one regular curriculum that does not include classes for laywomen, nor advanced university-level studies for monastics. Unlike the two

above-mentioned top-ranking institutions, the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns is also not funded by the government, and, maybe because of its non-leading status and relatively off the beaten track position, seems to enjoy more autonomy in the choice of its curricula, including a minor proportion of secular courses and courses on politics. Especially axed on Buddhist courses (mainly *Vinaya* and Chan texts) and practice (Chan collective practice consisting in meditation and chores), the academy relies on graduated nuns for teaching, and it does not train its student-nuns in secular hot topics such as management, foreign languages, physical education, international etiquette, and so forth.

The case study of Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns shows that today in China, observable gender asymmetry can be associated with different causes. The fact that there are fewer nuns, fewer academies for nuns, and fewer teacher-nuns can be especially attributed to the state policy of family planning and the single-child policy, the long-term effects of which are, and will be, observable even after their recent abrogation. Society also exerts on women a higher moral pressure to marry and bear a child, and to take care of their aging parents. Different conditions, such as lower age limits in a context of fewer feminine academies, make it more difficult for women to enroll at Buddhist academies, a disadvantage that seems to be imputable to Buddhist national institutions and that Dajinshan academy has addressed by increasing the age limit for enrolling. A token of the fundamental patriarchal nature of the Chinese Buddhist system, the now-retired abbess Yinkong was denied the final consecration for her monastery: according to a former local political representative⁶⁸, after local political authorities had already given their approval, the Buddhist Association took position against her intronization as superior abbot (*fangzhang* 方丈), and the abbot's quarters that already were under construction have remained unused to this day. This situation is very different from the Taoist tradition, where two of the five current Daoist superior abbots (*fangzhang*) are women (Wang 2020, p. 186).

The case of Dajinshan academy also shows that even nominally independent female institutions still depend in many ways on the male *sangha*. For example, Yinkong's master Benhuan helped to obtain political authorizations and financial funds for the academy, and his presence (as well as Yicheng's) at the inaugurating ceremony was considered necessary to legitimize the academy—a female Buddhist master legitimizing a male institution would not be possible due to the eight *gurudharma* rules sanctioning the subordination of the female order to the male one. In the first decade of the academy's activity, when it was particularly difficult to find educated nuns, Benhuan also sent his own lay female disciples to the monastery and academy: current abbess Duncheng, who received tonsure from Yinkong, is one of them. It should be noted that Benhuan always sustained Yinkong's initiatives and actions for the advancement of women.

Notwithstanding the Chan specialization of the Dajinshan academy, the insistence on the study of *Vinaya*, the reintroduction of the probationer stage, and its general austerity and discipline (for example, there are no facilities for sport because it would not be considered decent)⁶⁹ show that nuns themselves especially promote orthodoxy based on *Vinaya* as a source of legitimation, because they strive to find their place in a patriarchal Buddhist system (see Bianchi 2022). This does not only concern Dajinshan—other notable examples are Pushou monastery at Wutaishan, the largest female monastery in China, of which the academy is specialized on *Vinaya* studies, and the Fujian Buddhist Academy, where two *Vinaya* programs are preconized only for the women section⁷⁰. These considerations especially concern female academies and curricula as considered in comparison with their male counterparts. More generally, the rigor of the rules is an important factor attracting people to religious life, and monasteries where *Vinaya* is strictly implemented are popular in both China and Taiwan.

However, in contemporary China, as it was already the case during the Republican period (Yuan 2009), independent, women-only institutions such as the Wutaishan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns, and the Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns show that women in general, and female Buddhist monastics

in particular, are not only subordinates to male undertakings but actively display their own agency. In effect, Buddhist education is explicitly conceived at Dajinshan as one of the different resources for fostering the status of nuns. The Jiangxi Dajinshan Buddhist Academy for Nuns aims at providing female monastics with equal opportunities in terms of education, religious practice, and ordination, three aspects that, at the monastery, are interlinked. More pragmatically, alongside the conferral of tonsures⁷¹ and of ordinations, the Buddhist academy also represents for the monastery a device to attract and keep new, young candidates at a time when religious vocations are dropping and the age of monastics is being pushed forward. Finally, it is less easy for female monasteries to find financial funds, and the family network that every student-nun brings to the monastery generates wealth through offerings for rituals and donations, the main source of income for both the monastery and the academy.

To conclude, and somehow unsurprisingly, together with ordination, Buddhist education is one of the main arenas for nuns to obtain recognition in China today—all the more if duly institutionalized.

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Abbreviations

T = Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經, Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (eds), Tokyo, Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.

X = Manji Shinsan Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō 卅新纂大日本續藏經, Tokyo, Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989.

Notes

- ¹ The five officially recognized religions are Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.
- ² See the document “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief” released by the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China in April 2018: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm> (accessed 30 January 2019).
- ³ In the year 2000.
- ⁴ This estimate includes monks (*bhikṣus*), nuns (*bhikṣuṇīs*), probationers (*śikṣamāṇās*), and novice monks (*śrāmaṇeras*) and nuns (*śrāmaṇerīs*).
- ⁵ For a critical evaluation of concepts and literature on Buddhist education in twentieth-century China, see (Travagnin 2017).
- ⁶ According to (Long 2002, p. 188), the first seminary for monastics was established as early as 1903 by monk Liyun at the Kaifu Monastery in Hunan province. The first seminary to be styled *foxueyuan*, however, was the famous Wuchang Institute of Buddhist Studies (*Wuchang foxueyuan* 武昌佛學院) established by Taixu in 1922; on this academy, see (Lai 2017).

- 7 The list of Buddhist seminaries operating in China between 1912 and 1950 provided by (Holmes Welch 1968, appendix 2, pp. 285–87) does not distinguish seminaries for nuns. On Buddhist education in Republican China, see (Lai 2013).
- 8 This information is provided by Li Ming in his 2009 MA thesis on *sangha* education during the Republican period (“Minguo shiqi seng jiaoyu yanjiu 民國時期僧教育研究”, cited by (Gildow 2016, pp. 32–33)).
- 9 After closing and reopening, the Wuchang Female Institute of Buddhist Studies became the World Female Institute of Buddhist Studies (*Shijie foxueyuan nüzhongyuan* 世界佛學苑女眾院) in 1931: see (He 1999).
- 10 The Buddhist Academy of China was run and funded by the State: (Ji 2019, pp. 175–76).
- 11 According to (Gildow 2016, pp. 42–43), student-monks (*xueseng* 學僧) represented about 3% of China’s Han Buddhist monastic population in 2016, which means there are “at least fifteen times more seminarians than during the peak of seminaries during the Republic”.
- 12 According to Gildow’s informants, female “branch” seminaries, as other branch seminaries, are mostly or entirely independent from their male counterpart (Gildow 2016, pp. 204–5).
- 13 The Minnan Buddhist Academy, first established in 1925, was reorganized by Taixu in 1927; it ran until 1939, before closing due to the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945).
- 14 I visited this academy in July 2017.
- 15 On this academy, see (Bianchi 2001, pp. 103–19; Long 2002; Yang 2011, especially pp. 32–49).
- 16 On this academy, see (Yang 2011, especially pp. 23–31, 39–49). On Pushou monastery, see (Péronnet 2021, 2022).
- 17 The importance of considering the pedagogical agendas of Buddhist educational enterprises was highlighted by Thomas Borchert in his study of Theravada monastic education in China (“Training Monks or Men: Theravāda Monastic Education, Subnationalism, and the National Sangha of China,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 2, 2005: 241–72; cited in (Lai 2013, p. 171)).
- 18 For an interesting comparison with a female Daoist academy in contemporary China (the Kundao Academy 坤道學院 at Nanyue Mountain, in Henan province), see (Wang 2020).
- 19 I wish to express my deepest gratitude to retired abbess Yinkong, current abbess Duncheng, and Dajinshan’s whole monastic community for their openness and patience during all these years.
- 20 All names have been anonymized in this paper, except for those of the retired and current abbesses.
- 21 Monasteries are considered “large” in China if their community counts at least one hundred monastics. “Public” means that the monastery welcomes itinerant and permanent monastics coming from the whole country (in other words, the residence is not restricted to the abbot’s disciples). Moreover, properties of public monasteries belong to the whole Buddhist community (and not to the abbot), and in theory, their abbot is publicly elected (although this is not the case in the majority of public monasteries today, where the abbotship is passed down to the disciples of the retiring abbot).
- 22 Yinkong was ordained by the Buddhist Chan leader Xuyun 虛雲 (ca. 1864–1959) in 1955 and received Dharma transmission in Xuyun’s Linji lineage from monk Benhuan 本煥 (1907–2012) in 1987. On Yinkong and for a bibliography, see (Campo and Despeux forthcoming).
- 23 Interview with Yinkong conducted in October 2013.
- 24 Idem.
- 25 On Yinkong’s and Benhuan’s Dharma lineage, and on the way this particular form of religious kinship has connected the monastic leaders of the first half of the twentieth century to the senior generation of monks and nuns who first engaged in the Buddhist reconstruction of post-Mao China, see (Campo 2019).
- 26 In 2016, the Caodong Buddhist Academy (*Caodong foxueyuan* 曹洞佛學院) was established at Baoji Monastery 宝积寺 in Caoshan (Yihuang 宜黃 district of Fuzhou city). See its website <http://csbjs.99.com/college> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 27 From 1985 to 2005.
- 28 Fu Hui means “Good Fortune and Windom”. See their website http://www.fuhui.org/learn_e/learn.htm (accessed on 11 October 2022); see also (Laliberté 2022, p. 171).
- 29 Years of enrollment are 1994, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2013. After that, the academy enrolled in 2017, 2020, and 2022.
- 30 Counting from a minimum of 10 student-nuns to a maximum of 50.
- 31 More precisely, 268 student-nuns in the elementary program, 320 in the beginner program, and 159 in the intermediate program, that is, an average of 90 student-nuns graduating every three years in each of the three programs.
- 32 There were 99 student-nuns at the academy when I visited in 2015.
- 33 For the sake of comparison, the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns counted about 60 students in 2011: (Yang 2011, p. 40).
- 34 The Buddhist Academy for nuns of Pushou monastery at Wutaishan, which is the largest in the country, counted between 500 and 600 student-nuns in 2011, while the Sichuan Buddhist Academy for Nuns counted about 60 student-nuns (Yang 2011, pp. 23, 40).

- 35 See <https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/130930.shtml> (accessed on 11 October 2022). The 2020 call for applications
 36 (<https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/125703.shtml>, accessed on 11 October 2022) also included “to have decided
 on one’s own free will and with the consent of one’s teachers and seniors”.
- 37 In the 2020 call for applications, this sentence reads “strictly uphold monastic discipline and be familiar with the devotions
 of the five halls” (*wutang gongke* 五堂功課), that is, the two daily liturgies and formal meals plus one meditation session
 38 (<https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/125703.shtml>, accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 39 Depressive disorders were not mentioned in the 2020 call for applications.
- 40 See <https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/130930.shtml> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 41 The reason for this new requirement is unknown to me. It could be linked to the large genetic database that China is apparently
 building.
- 42 Including a green health code and a green State Department Epidemic Prevention and Control Trip Card, the obligation of not
 having traveled in high-risk areas in the past 14 days, and so forth.
- 43 See <https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/130930.shtml> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 44 When I visited in 2015, the oldest nun of the academy was aged 44 (she was born in 1971). The age limit for enrollment was of
 30 years old when the academy was first established.
- 45 If we take as reference the average age limit of 28 years old provided by (Ji 2019, p. 190) for the period 1994–2013 and we compare
 it to age limits for the bachelor degree program of a few 2022 calls for applications, the required age limit was, for example, 30
 years at the Buddhist Academy of China, the most selective in the country, 35 years at the male section of the Minnan Buddhist
 Academy, and 40 years at the male section of the Fujian Buddhist Academy (*Fujian foxueyuan* 福建佛學院).
- 46 In 2022 calls for applications, the required age limit was 36 years at the Guangdong Buddhist Academy for Nuns, 38 years at the
 Jiangsu Buddhist Academy for Nuns (*Jiangsu nizhong foxueyuan* 江蘇尼眾佛學院) and Sichuan Academy for Nuns (*bhikṣunīs* and
śrāmaṇerikās), 32 years at the female section of the Putuo Academy for nuns (*Zhongguo foxueyuan Putuoshan xueyuan* 中國佛學院
 普陀山學院), and 35 years at the female section of the Minnan Buddhist Academy (*Minnan foxueyuan* 閩南佛學院). For a few
 examples of age limits in 2022 calls for applications of male academies, see note 43.
- 47 See “Abolishing the One-Child Policy: Stages, Issues and the Political Process” on this (Scharping 2019).
- 48 We can consider, for example, that a single child born in 1979 turned 43 in 2022.
- 49 See, for example, the 2022 call for applications of the Fujian Buddhist Academy at <https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/130925.shtml> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 50 At the Fujian Buddhist Academy, the curriculum for the male section preconizes one year of preparatory program (*yukeban*), two
 years of specialized secondary program (*zhongzhuanban* 中專班), four years of a bachelor degree program (*benkeban*), and three
 years of a master degree program (*yanjiuban*). The curriculum for the female section preconizes two years of preparatory program,
 two years of specialized secondary program, four years of a bachelor degree program, two years of a higher *Vinaya* program
 (*lǚxue dazhuanban* 律學大專班), and three years of a *Vinaya* master degree program (*lǚxue yanjiusheng ban* 律學研究生班). See
<https://www.pusa123.com/pusa/news/hdyugao/130925.shtml> (accessed on 11 October 2022).
- 51 Chinese Buddhists do not calculate this duration according to the number of full years, but according to the number of summer
 retreats one has passed as a novice.
- 52 The probationer (*shichani* 式叉尼) is an intermediate step between women’s novitiate and ordination, which is mentioned in
Vinaya texts and nowadays making a comeback in Chinese monasteries. See on this (Heirman 2008; Chiu and Heirman 2014;
 Bianchi 2022).
- 53 For example, although the age limit for ordination is 59 years, a novice already aged 55, and who was unable to enroll at a
 Buddhist academy because she entered religion at 36 or 37, will find it difficult to be selected for ordination unless applications
 received by one of the ordaining monasteries do not exceed the quota allowed.
- 54 Interview conducted in July 2015.
- 55 That is, even if they do not possess the minimum junior high-school degree required for the preparatory program, but only an
 elementary school degree.
- 56 Interview conducted in March 2019.
- 57 In 2019, Buddhist courses for the *Vinaya* class included Shengyan’s *Compendium of Vinaya Studies* (*Jielǚxue gangyao* 戒律學綱要),
The Commentary on Karman in the Four-Part Vinaya (*Sifenlǚ shanbu suiji jiemoshu* 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏, X. 727), *The Sutra in 42*
sections (*Sishier zhang jing* 四十二章經, T. 784), and a course on the Bodhisattva precepts.
- 58 That is, counting a dozen resident nuns.
- 59 Interview conducted in March 2019.
- 60 The teacher-nuns were almost all graduates of the Dajinshan academy and had received tonsure at Jinshan monastery.
 Only assisted by two or three teacher-monks and teacher-nuns, at least until 2011: (Yang 2011, pp. 27–28, 39–40).
- The duration of each class is 45 min.

- 61 According to the academic dean in 2019, the volume of political courses would have surely increased in the following years (interview conducted in March 2019), but the COVID-19 pandemic apparently contributed to slowing down this development.
- 62 Making up for an overall agenda of 42 h per week, six days a week from Monday to Saturday. In 2019, student-nuns had three 45-min classes from 8:00 to 10:45 a.m., then two more from 2:00 to 3:45 p.m., plus self-study (*zixi* 自習) and meditation in the evening from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
- 63 On this tension, see (Gildow 2016, pp. 89–116; Ji 2019, pp. 195–99).
- 64 On Xuyun and his annalistic biography, see (Campo 2016). Not only Yinkong’s master Benhuan was a disciple of eminent Chan master and Buddhist leader Xuyun, but Yinkong was herself ordained by Xuyun in 1955.
- 65 Buddhist courses for the preparatory program: *The Sutra in 42 sections* (*Sishier zhang jing* 四十二章經, T. 784), *A Collection of Retribution Stories of the Buddhist Saints* (*Fojiao shengzhong yinyuan ji* 佛教聖眾因緣集), *The Sutra on the bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī*, and “Study of Buddhist paraphernalia”. Buddhist courses for the bachelor degree program, first-year: “History of Buddhism”, “Fundamentals of Buddhism”, “The annalistic biography of Chan Master Xuyun”, *The Lucid Introduction to the One Hundred Dharmas* (*Dasheng baifa mingmenlun* 大乘百法明門論, T. 1614). Buddhist courses for the bachelor degree program, third-year: *The Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition*, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, and *The Outline of the Tiantai Fourfold Teachings* (*Tiantai sijiaoyi* 天台四教儀, T. 1931). Buddhist courses for the master degree program, first year: *The Bhikṣuṇī Precepts of the Dharmaguptaka Tradition*, the *Commentary on Karman in the Four-Part Vinaya*, and “Monastic regulations in practice”.
- 66 On this ritual, see (Stevenson 2001).
- 67 If, at the academy, student-nuns obey Dajinshan hierarchy, during vacations, they are still under the authority of their tonsure master.
- 68 Interview conducted in March 2019.
- 69 On sport activities in Buddhist nunneries, see (Chiu forthcoming; Heirman forthcoming).
- 70 See also the example of Beijing Tongjiao nunnery 通教寺 restored in 1941 as a renowned and active *Vinaya* nunnery (DeVido 2015, p. 81; cited in (Bianchi 2022)).
- 71 Although the conferral of tonsure in public monasteries was strictly regulated (and often prohibited) by imperial and Republican Chinese monastic codes, it was and is generally practiced all over China. For this reason, tonsures are only conferred at the smaller Jinshan monastery on top of the hill, while ordinations are conferred at the larger Dajinshan monastery.

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