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The Making of a Monk: The Training of Śrāmaṇera (Novice Monks) in Dunhuang with a Focus on Scriptural Study

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Abstract: Monastic life begins with the ordination of novice monks, who start their formal training at this stage. The education of a novice involves both general cultural studies and specialized Buddhist training. However, the focus during the novice stage is predominantly on Buddhist education, which encompasses learning monastic discipline and studying Buddhist scriptures. The Dunhuang manuscripts offer a wealth of information, providing valuable insights into the training and education of novice monks in Dunhuang during the periods of Tibetan Occupation (787–848) and Guiyi Army (851–1036).

Keywords: Śrāmaṇera; novice monks; Dunhuang; monastic education

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1. Introduction

Novice monks are vital members of the monastic community, and their education and training are pivotal to the future development of the monastery. The training of a novice monk encompasses both general cultural education and specialized Buddhist education. Specifically, Buddhist education, which is the primary focus during the novice stage, includes the study of monastic discipline and Buddhist scriptures. The Dunhuang manuscripts offer a wealth of information that sheds light on the education and training of novice monks. Given the space limitation, this article will specifically focus on the study of Buddhist scriptures by novice monks in Dunhuang during the Tibetan Occupation and Guiyi Army periods.

Buddhist monastic regulations stipulate that a śrāmaṇera (novice monk) should have two mentors.[1] However, historical practices in China sometimes deviated from this norm. For instance, Yijing 義淨 (635–713) criticized the Chinese ordination ceremony, noting that "after the shaving of the head, a śrāmaṇera might temporarily rely on just one teacher" 既蒙落發, 遂乃權依一師.[2] This practice was also observed during the late Tang Dynasty in the Dunhuang region, where the actual practice of ordination might have deviated even more from the canonical stipulations than in central China. According to the Dunhuang manuscript P. 6005, titled "An Edict Issued to Monastic Officials for the Administration of Monastic Communities in Preparation for the Vassa Residence" 釋門帖諸寺綱管令夏安居帖, it was mandated that "Monks, nuns, novice monks, and novice nuns are required to observe the summer retreat, reside in monasteries, depend on a mentor for advancing their practice and studies, and perform the thrice-daily rituals of veneration and penance" 應管僧尼沙彌及沙彌尼, 並令安居住寺, 依止從師, 進業修習, 三時禮懺. The document also notes that "some novices within the monasteries may not yet have requested a mentor" 諸寺僧尼數內沙彌, 或未有請依止, indicating that while all novices were theoretically required to have a mentor, sometimes referred to as a "master upon whom one relies" (*yizhi shi* 依止師), in practice, some did not. Despite these inconsistencies, the role of the mentor remains fundamental. According to Buddhist tradition, mentorship is crucial within monastic education, as it provides primary guidance for a novice prior to full ordination, significantly shaping their cultural and spiritual growth.

The study of scriptures by novice monks, under the guidance of a master (Skt. *acārya*), can be divided into two categories: firstly, reading and reciting scriptures, and secondly, copying scriptures. In addition to this, novices also engage in learning basic Buddhist knowledge and receive training in Buddhist liturgical practices. Below, we will elaborate on each of these aspects.

2. Reading and Recitation of Buddhist Sutra

The engagement of monks in the reading of scriptures is a fundamental duty for Buddhist monastics, and their training in reciting scriptures typically commences at the time of ordination. Since novice monks initially lack literacy skills or possess only rudimentary literacy, direct engagement with classical texts is challenging. During this phase, they often rely on their mentors for oral transmission or attend recitations led by experienced monks to familiarize themselves with the scriptures. As novice monks acquire a foundational level of cultural knowledge through monastic education and other channels, they gradually transition to independent reading and study of the scriptures. In ancient China, classical texts were devoid of punctuation, necessitating that learners of literature master punctuation skills as they embarked on their scripture-reading journey. This learning process unfolds gradually, with novices inevitably encountering errors initially, necessitating corrective guidance from their mentors. Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, a passage in the preface of Chapter Eight of the *Fahua jing* 法華經 [Skt. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*; Lotus *Sūtra*] (S. 2577) elucidates this pedagogical approach:

> For the benefit of those who are learning to read this scripture but are unfamiliar with parsing the sentences, I provide the punctuation marks. I do not divide sections, nor do I discuss beginnings and endings. Usually, a sentence consists of four characters. If there are sentences exceeding four characters, then I begin by punctuating them; however, sentences consisting of precisely four characters remain unpunctuated. Regarding polyphonic characters, such as "為" (wéi) and "為" (wèi), "行" (háng), and "行" (xíng), I will also add a small vermilion dot adjacent to the character in question to distinguish its intended pronunciation and usage. It is my hope that future readers of this scriptural will not misconstrue this vermilion mark as a misplaced punctuation mark. 余為初學讀此經者, 不識文句, 故憑點之。亦不看科段, 亦不論起盡, 多以四字為句。若有四字外句者, 然始點之; 但是四字句者, 絕不加點。別為作為, 別行作行。如此之流, 聊復分別。後之見者, 勿怪下朱言錯點也.[3]

In this passage, the master says he would only punctuate sentences exceeding four characters while abstaining from punctuating those with precisely four characters. This indirectly suggests that he expected his disciples to have already known the punctuation rules for sentences with four-character structures.

Novice monks are expected not only to be able to read but also to memorize extensively common and significant Buddhist scriptures such as the *Fahua jing*, *Jin'gang jing* 金剛經 [Skt. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*; Diamond *Sūtra*], and *Xin'jing* 心經 [Skt. *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*; Heart *Sūtra*]. Under the ordination system, individuals who aspire to the monastic tonsure and renunciation of secular life are required to undergo a scripture recitation examination (*shijing* 試經) conducted by the central government. Although the standards for these examinations have varied over time, the minimum requirement has typically been approximately 150 sheets, equivalent to the size of the *Fahua jing* (Wu 2024). While monks during the period of the Tibetan Occupation and the Guiyi Army were not necessarily required to undergo such examinations, memorizing scriptures became a daily practice postordination.

Among biographies of monks, numerous recorded monks demonstrated exceptional abilities, such as being capable of "memorizing five sheets a day" 日通五紙 (approximately 2295 characters),[4] "reciting a thousand verses a day" 日誦千言[5]—achievements that were beyond the reach of ordinary monks.[6] Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, there are two documents directly reflecting the pace of monks' daily recitation. One such document is

BD 13683, which meticulously records a monk's daily recitation of the *Weimo jing* 維摩經 [Skt. Vimalakirti *Sūtra*].

> Memorize two lines of the Weimo jing daily. On the 4th day of the eleventh month, recite until "kezhong debao" 可眾得寶. On the 16th day of the eleventh month, memorize until "wanfan tianwang" 萬梵天王. On the first day of the twelfth month, memorize until "ershi zhangzhe zi" 爾時長者子. On the sixteenth day of the twelfth month, memorize until "ershi sheli fo" 爾時舍利佛. On the first day of the first month, memorize until "fangta pin" 方他品. On the 17th day of the first month, memorize until "dizi pin san" 弟子品三. 《維摩經》日誦兩行. 十一月四日至"可眾得寶", 十一月十六日誦至"萬梵天王", 十二月一日至"爾時長者子", 十二月十六日誦至"爾時舍利佛", 正月三日誦至"方他品", 正月十七日誦至"弟子品三".

Based on this document, we can calculate the person's progress in reciting the *Weimo jing*: From the second to the 16th day of the 12th month, he recited from "wan Fantian wang" 萬梵天王 to "ershi zhangzhe zi" 爾時長者子, covering 831 characters over 14 days, averaging less than 60 characters per day (approximately three lines). From the 17th day of the 12th month to the third day of the first month of the following year, he recited from "ershi shelifo" 爾時舍利佛 to "fangbian pin" 方便品 covering 474 characters over 17 days, averaging 28 characters per day (approximately two lines). From the fourth to seventeenth day of the first month, he recited from "fangbian pin" to "dizipin san" 弟子品三 covering 1006 characters over 15 days, averaging 67 characters per day (approximately four lines). Typically, he recited only approximately 60 characters daily, which is roughly three lines, closely matching the description in the document of "reciting two lines a day." At times, he recited as few as 28 characters, only half the expected goal, indicating a relatively low study intensity.

The second document, P. 3092V, is titled "Notice from the Examination Division in the Jintu Monastery on the first day of the tenth month of the *wuzi* year (928)" 戊子年十月一日淨土寺試部帖. It records the directive from the Examination Division 試部 of the Metropolitan Monastic Authorities 都僧統司, which was the supreme institution responsible for the administration of the Buddhist monastic community in the Dunhuang region, to all monasteries under their jurisdiction. It required monks to recite scriptures, disciplinary texts, and doctrinal texts twice a month (on the new moon and full moon days) and includes the recitation results for 20 individuals.

1. Dingzhi: *Jin'gang jing*. Recite until "...listeng" on the 19th day of the tenth month; recite until "jifei pusa" 即非菩薩 on the first day of the 11th month. 定志: 《金剛經》十月廿九日誦至"□□□聽", 十一月一日誦至"即非菩薩"
2. Huishen: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until "cheng Guanshiyin" on the 19th day of the tenth month; recite until "dazizai tian" 大自在天 on the first day of the 11th month. 惠深: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至"稱觀世音", 十一月一日誦至"大自在天."
3. Yuanying: *Baifa lun*. Recite until "Shiru (yi) xiaocheng" on the 29th day of the tenth month. 願盈: 《百法論》十月廿九日誦至"是汝（以）小乘"
4. Yuanqing: *Baifa lun*. Recite until "ru (er)wo zhi kong" on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "hongfa lisheng" on the first day of the 11th month. 願清: 《百法論》十月廿九日誦至"如（二）我之空", 十一月一日誦至"弘法利生".
5. Yuanji: *Guanyin jing* 願濟: 《觀音經》
6. Fayuan: *Dabei jing: Diyi* 法緣: 《大悲經第一》
7. Yuanjiao: *Fumu enzhong jing* 願教: 《父母恩重經》
8. Huide: *Pusa jie*. Recite until "Rufa xiuxing" 如法修行 on the 29th day of the tenth month 會德: 《菩薩戒》十月廿九日誦至"如法修行"
9. Baozhu: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until "Yi he yinyuan" 以何因緣 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "Jide jietuo" 即得解脫 on the first day of the 11th month 保住: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至"以何因緣", 十一月一日誦至"即得解脫"

10. Jieding: *Shan'e yinyuan (guo) jing*. Recite until "Bao ..." on the 29th day of the tenth month 戒定: 《善惡因緣 （果） 經》 十月廿九日誦至 "胞□□□□"
11. Baoxing: *Jin guangming zuisheng [wang] jing: Diyi*. Recite until "Zashi tongzi" 雜事童子 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "Shiren dang zaoyu" on the first day of the 11th month 保行: 《金光明最勝〔王〕經第一》 十月廿九日誦至"雜事童子", 十一月一日誦至 "是人當澡浴"
12. Yuanan: *Guanyin jing* 願安: 《觀音經》.
13. Yuanxiu: *Yan shoujing lun*. Recite until "Huozuo luotuo shen" 或作駱駝身 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until […] on the first day of the 11th month 願修; 《延壽經論》 十月廿九日誦至 "或作駱駝身", 十一月一日誦至.
14. Huicong: *Jingang bore boluo [mi] jing*. 惠聰: 《金剛般若波羅〔蜜〕經》
15. Yuanjing: *Jin'gang jing*. 願淨: 《金剛經》。
16. Jishao: *Duo xinjing* 繼紹: 《多心經》。
17. Yuanding: *Guanyin jing*. Recite until "Jide jietuo" 即得解脫 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "Jiexu duanhuai" 皆須斷懷 on the first day of the 11th month 原定: 《觀音經》十月廿九日誦至 "即得解脫", 十一月一日誦至 "皆須斷懷".
18. Yuanhui: *Qianwen* 願惠: 《千文》
19. Yongjian: *Duo xinjing* 永建: 《多心經》
20. Shengjing: *Bayang jing*. Recite until "Huoru sifu" 獲如斯福 on the 29th day of the tenth month; recite until "Er rheng fodao" 而成佛道 on the first day of the 11th month (some words are missing hereafter) 勝淨: 《八陽經》十月廿九日誦至 "獲如斯福", 十一月一日誦至 "而成佛道".

We can calculate the recitation progress for Yuanqing 願清, Baozhu 保住, and Baoxing 保行 as follows: Yuanqing appears to have read the *Dasheng baifa mingmen lun kaizong yiji* 大乘百法明門論開宗義記 by Tankuang 曇曠, averaging 283 characters a day (approximately 17 lines). Baozhu recited 277 characters daily (approximately 16 lines), and Baoxing managed approximately 621 characters each day (roughly 37 lines). Shengjing's 勝淨 recitations from the *Bayang jing* 八陽經 are most likely from the *Tiandi bayang shenzhou jing* 天地八陽神咒經 [*Sūtra* of the Eight Sun Gods of Heaven and Earth]. However, since the passages he highlighted overlap in two sections of the text, it is not possible to determine precisely how much he read, with potential sections including approximately 526 characters (approximately 31 lines), 471 characters (approximately 28 lines), 396 characters (approximately 23 lines), and 341 characters (roughly 20 lines).[7] Nonetheless, compared to the monk in Document BD 13683, their recitation pace is significantly faster, particularly for Baozhu and Baoxing, who were intensively preparing for an exam, thus dedicating much more effort.

Although it is unclear whether the monks mentioned in these two documents were novice monks, we can still surmise that the level of novice monks was roughly similar. From the second document, we can also discern the types of scriptures that were popularly recited around the year 928 in the Dunhuang monastic community. These included the *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 [*Bodhisattva Sūtra*] (i.e., the "Universal Gate Chapter" of the *Lotus Sūtra*, 普門品 with over two thousand characters) by four individuals, the *Jin'gang jing* 金剛經 [*Diamond Sūtra*] (over five thousand characters) by three individuals, the *Dasheng baifa mingmen lun kaizong yiji* 大乘百法明門論開宗義記 (over thirty thousand characters) by two individuals, the *Duo Xinjing* 多心經 [*Heart Sūtra*] (260 characters) by two individuals, a five-*juan* version of the *Dabei jing* 大悲經 [*Great Compassion Sūtra*] by one person, the *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經 [*The Sutra of the Profound Gratitude of Parents*] (over a thousand characters) by one person, the *Shan'e yinguo jing* 善惡因果經 [*Sūtra on the Causes and Effects of Good and Evil*] (nearly four thousand characters) by one person, the "Golden Light Sutra of Supreme Kings" (from the title, it appears to be the version by Yijing, totaling ten *juan*s) by one person, the *Yan shouming jing* 延壽命經 [*Sūtra on Prolonging Life*] (nearly a thousand characters) by one person, and the *Tiandi baiyang Shenzhou jing* 天地八陽神咒經 (over four thousand characters) by one person. The scriptures they chose were generally short and commonly known texts, including some that were popular in society but de-

nounced as apocryphal in Buddhist catalogs, such as the *Tiandi baiyang Shenzhou jing*, the *Fumu enzhong jing,* and the *Yan shouming jing.*

During the process of reading scriptures independently, novice monks often encounter unfamiliar characters. Therefore, many Buddhist texts append a list of difficult characters at the end of the *juan* to facilitate the learning of readers. For novice monks, initial literacy education typically begins with the most basic texts, like the *Shangdafu* 上大夫 and others. However, the guidance from monastic schools 寺學 or mentors in this regard cannot possibly cover all the characters used in the scriptures. Thus, after moving beyond basic literacy education, the literacy development of novice monks relies more on self-study. Their tools include the lists of difficult characters found at the ends of Buddhist texts or other reference books on phonetics and meanings. The Dunhuang manuscripts have preserved valuable evidence of how they learned and recorded these difficult characters. For instance, the recto of P. 2874 contains the *Shami qishier weiyi* 沙彌七十二威儀 [*Seventy-two Deportments of a Novice Monk*] copied by a novice, followed by a phonetic and semantic copy on the verso. Similarly, the recto of P. 2948 features the "Difficult Characters of the *Lotus Sutra*" 法華經難字 which excerpts the difficult characters from the first six *juan*s. Although it starts to mention *juan* 7, it does not continue, and spaces are left between the difficult characters, likely reserved for later phonetic annotations, indicating that this manuscript was an unfinished draft. This manuscript later circulated to others, but from the handwriting, it appears to be that of a novice. This novice wrote in the blank space following the difficult characters on the recto, "Iron spear: it can be read, by the *fanqie* method, by the initial consonant of *suo* 所 and the final by that of *zhuo* 卓. It may also be written as *shuoshuo* 矟搠 "(鐵槊: 所卓反, 亦作矟搠)" Additionally, the novice continued on the verso to copy both *juan*s of the *Lianhua mian jing* 蓮花面經 [*Lotus Surface Sūtra*] and one *juan* of the *Fo chui banniepan lüeshuo jiaojie jing* 佛垂般涅槃略說教誡經 [Brief Exhortations of the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa Sūtra] for phonetics and meanings. According to Xu (1991), these phonetics and meanings are derived from the *Xinji zangjing yinyi suihan lu* 新集藏經音義隨函錄 [Newly Compiled Record of Phonetics and Meanings in the Tripitaka] by Kehong 可洪 (fl. 10th c.) from the later Jin Dynasty (936–947), known as *Kehong yinyi* 可洪音義 [Kehong's Notes on Phonetics and Meanings]. From this, we also know that the novice used Kehong's work as a reference tool for consulting difficult characters and their phonetics and meanings. Xu (1991), J. Zhang (1996), and Y. Zhang (2008) have identified seven manuscripts of the *Kehong yinyi* in the Dunhuang documents (P. 3971, S. 5508, S. 6189, BD5639, in addition to excerpts (P. 2948), and abstracts (S. 3553, Дx. 11196)). Among these, S. 3553, which exhibits childlike handwriting, likely came from the hand of a novice, similar to P. 2948. Thus, among these eight items, at least S. 3553 and P. 2948 were used by novices, illustrating the role of these phonetics and meanings in the literacy learning process during their scripture study.

Sometimes, monks gather difficult characters into collections, which serve as specialized materials to be memorized. For instance, manuscript P. 3109, known as *Lüeza nanzi* 略雜難字 [Brief List of Miscellaneous Difficult Characters], has two annotations. The first, written on the verso, dates the manuscript to the 25th day of the fifth month of a *gengyin* year 庚寅年, noting it as a document for "brief list of miscellaneous difficult characters." The second annotation, written on the recto, dates it to the eighth year of the Taiping Xingguo era 太平興國八年, which corresponds to 983 AD. Thus, the "*gengyin* year" would be 990 AD. The inscription on the verso displays superior calligraphy compared to the difficult characters in the text. This document also includes many practice characters, suggesting that it was either initially compiled by a novice monk or used by one. Such documents, detailing difficult characters and their phonetics, are also found in other texts like *Da Baoji jing* 大寶積經 [*Maharatnakuta Sūtra*] (P. 3332), *Da zhuangyan lun* 大莊嚴論 [*Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra*] (P. 3891), and *Fo benxing ji jing* 佛本行集經 [*Buddha's Former Lives*] (P. 3506). These learning aids play a crucial role in the educational journey of novice monks, serving as reference guides that support their continued learning beyond the initial stages of literacy and elementary education. Therefore, transcribing difficult characters and their

phonetics was an important self-learning technique for novice monks as they advanced in their studies.

It is important to note the use of codex during the learning process. These codexes are small and convenient, making them easy to carry around. According to statistics from Jean-Pierre Drège (1979), in the Stein collection, there are 155 codexes (including 11 Tibetan codexes from the India Office Collection), 120 in the Pelliot collection (with 21 being Tibetan codexes), one codex housed at the Musée Guimet, and approximately 60 codexes in Russian collections, totaling nearly four hundred codexes, most of which have been disassembled into half-page forms. Many of these codexes were used by novice monks as practicing or study books. For example, the *Sanke fayi* 三窠法義 [*The Meanings of the Teaching of the Tripiṭaka*]) (P. 3861) and *Xiaosheng sanke* 小乘三科 [*Three Learnings of the Small Vehicle*] (Дx. 2822) are introductory Buddhist texts primarily used by novice monks learning the basics of Buddhism and Buddhist technical terms. Additionally, P. 3823 contains many practices and miscellaneous characters; its main content consists of difficult characters from Buddhist scriptures like the *Dafangguang shilun jing* 大方廣十輪經 [Skt. *Daśacakra-kṣitigarbha Sūtra*; Ten Wheels Sūtra], *Da baojijing Daban jiepan jing* 大般涅槃經 [Skt. *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*], *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 [Skt. *Damamūka nidāna sūtra*; Sūtra of the Wise and the Fool], *Bao'en jing* 報恩經, and others.

3. Copying Scriptures

After learning the basics of writing and literacy from a mentor or through monastic education, some novice monks begin to copy scriptures on their own.

The tradition of novices copying scriptures has always existed, and one of the purposes of this copying is to facilitate their own learning. According to the colophon of the Dunhuang manuscript 甘博 001, which contains the "Chapter of Conduct Accordant with the Way" 道行品 and "Chapter of Nirvāṇa" 泥洹品 of the *Faju jing* 法句經 [Skt. *Dharmapada*; *Dharma-phrase Sūtra*], this manuscript was used by the novice Jingming 淨明 from Shengping 升平 10 (368 AD) to Xian'an 咸安 3.10.20 (373 AD).

The manuscript Дx. 1277, characterized by its notably immature calligraphy, features the *Bao cimu shi en'de* 報慈母十恩德 [Sūtra on Repaying the Ten Kindnesses to the Benevolent Mother] and is likely written by a novice monk. This manuscript may have been copied either as a calligraphy exercise or for personal recitation of the sūtra. Additionally, Shangtu 上圖 119 depicts another manuscript by the novice Jielun 戒輪 from Sanjie Monastery 三界寺, specifically a copy of the *Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經 [Sūtra on the Heavy Debt towards Parents] dated to the 19th day of the first month of the sixth year of Xiande 顯德 (959). Further details about Jielun's scribal activities are preserved in P. 3919. Unlike the manuscript in Shangtu 上圖 119, this manuscript is crafted in palm-leaf format, inscribed on "the 28th day of the third month of the *yiwei* year (959)" 己未年三月廿八日 of the same year as the above-mentioned manuscript. This palm-leaf manuscript comprises multiple Buddhist scriptures, including "Chapter of Buddha's mother" 佛母品 of the *Daban niepan jing*, *Foshuo fomu enzhong jing* (copied twice), *Foshuo pusa xiuxing sifa jing* 佛說菩薩修行四法經, *Foshuo shixiang jing* 佛說十想經 [*Sūtra on Ten Contemplations*], *Foshuo fanjie zuibao qingzhong jing* 佛說犯戒罪報輕重經 [Sūtra on the Light and Heavy Retributions for Violating Precepts], *Foshuo wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing* 佛說溫室洗浴眾僧經 [Sūtra on Bathing Monks in the Wet Lodge], *Foshuo jiaju lingyan fodingzun sheng tuoluoni jing* 佛說加句靈驗佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經 [Miraculous Addendum to the Buddha's Crown Supreme Victorious Dhāraṇī Sūtra], *Da weiyi jing qingwen shuo* 大威儀經請問說 [The Great Deportment Sūtra: Questions and Answers]. According to P. 3919, Jielun copied at least 67 palm leaves of scriptures, with only 17 leaves currently extant, indicating a significant volume of work. The writing on the last leaf notes, "Received and upheld by Shanhui of Sanjie Monastery" 三界寺善惠受持, suggesting that these scriptures might have been copied for Shanhui, or possibly transferred to him under various circumstances. These documents indicate that Jielun's calligraphy skills had significantly developed, a testament to his extensive training in this art. It is particularly notable that in the manuscript of the *Foshuo*

jiaju lingyan Fodingzun sheng tuoluoni jing, Jielun identifies himself as "Monk Jielun of the Guanyin Hall of Sanjie Monastery" 三界寺觀音院僧戒輪, linking him to the Guanyin Hall where the renowned monk Daozhen 道真, who had led the restoration of the monastery's scripture collection, was recently in charge.[8] Xiubo Wang (2014) has compiled multiple instances of scripture copying by monks during Daozhen's tenure at Sanjie Monastery, supporting the view that Daozhen's restoration efforts were well-supported by the monastic community. This support likely contributed to a significant enhancement of the educational quality within the monastery, with Jielun exemplifying the novices of the time.

The scripture exemplars used by novice monks for copying scriptures may have been ones that adhered to standardized formats. For example, in manuscript P. 3919, which Jielun transcribed and includes the *Wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing*, there was an initial omission in the text. There, the manuscript writes: 一者、四大無病, 所生常安, 勇武丁不著, and 為人所敬. However, Jielun missed some content between "勇武丁" and "不著." Upon realizing the mistake, he corrected it by adding the omitted text alongside the main text, which states: 健, 眾所敬仰; 二者、所生清淨, 面目端正, 塵水. The omitted content exactly filled seventeen characters. Given that each line containing seventeen characters was the standard format for scriptural copying during the medieval period, this indicates that Jielun was using exemplars that followed the standard copying format at the time.

Many Dunhuang manuscripts were constantly exchanged and circulated. Typically, novice monks could acquire these manuscripts from a variety of sources, including monasteries, their mentors, other monks, or patrons. However, according to the manuscripts specifically identified as having been copied by novice monks (excluding disciplinary texts) that I have collected, the vast majority were personally transcribed by the novices themselves, rather than being acquired from external sources.

Among the scriptures commonly transcribed by novice monks, the *Fumu enzhong jing*, *Jin guangming zuishengwang jing*, *Bayang shenzhou jing*, *Guanshiyin jing*, and *Wuliang shouzong yaojing* were particularly prevalent. This selection aligns with the scriptures that are known to be popular in the Dunhuang area.[9]

Occasionally, novice monks would also undertake commissions to copy scriptures for others. For example, BD 6261 appears to be a copy of the *Guanyin jing* created by novice monk Lingjin 靈進 from Liantai Monastery 蓮臺寺 for individuals, such as Zhang Haisheng 張海晟. These copying tasks are typically not performed for free. Indeed, engaging in paid copying was already a known practice among student (*Xueshilang* 學士郎) copiers. Earning a fee for copying scriptures might have been a common practice among these Xueshilang. For instance, BD 1199 includes a poem by a Xueshilang that reads, "The book is written today, why then no payment made? What kind of scoundrel leaves, without a backward glance?" 寫書今日了, 因何不送錢? 誰家無賴漢, and 回面不相看. Similarly, S. 692 features a poem at the end of the "Qin Wife's Lament" 秦婦吟 stating, "The text is written today, for it five bushels of rice. Credit is unattainable, it remains my own misfortune" (今日寫書了, 合有五斗米。高代（貸）不可得, 還是自身災). If these poems are indicative of local rates in Dunhuang, then a student copier's fee was approximately five bushels of rice. According to Zheng Binglin's estimates (Zheng 1997), the market price for a Dunhuang manuscript was approximately equivalent to one bolt of wheat per *juan*, equivalent to ten bushels of wheat. If the price mentioned in the poems is accurate for a single *juan*, then the fees charged by student copiers might have been roughly half of what professional copiers commanded.

4. Learning Buddhist Knowledge

While studying basic scriptures, novice monks are also required to learn fundamental Buddhist concepts and terminologies. Once they have gained a sufficient understanding of Buddhism, they move on to studying more in-depth commentaries to undergo advanced Buddhist training.

Paul Magnin (1984) has carried out preliminary research and organized five types of Buddhist texts that use catechistic format, which include *Sanbao sidi wenda* 三寶四諦問答 [Questions and Answers on the Three Jewels and the Four Noble Truths], *Xiaosheng sanke*

小乘三科 [The Three Categories of Small Vehicle], *Sanke fayi* 三窠法義 [The Meaning of the Teaching of the Three Categories], and *Famen mingyi ji* 法門名義集 [Collection of the Words and Meanings of the Dharma Gate]. Daishun Ueyama (1990), in his study of Dunhuang manuscripts, proposed the notion of "Buddhist Doctrinal Outline" 佛教綱要書 to describe texts that introduce fundamental Buddhist knowledge.[10] Building on Ueyama Daishun's groundwork, Fapeng Yang (2010) has systematically catalogued similar literature from Dunhuang manuscripts, naming them "Buddhist primer" 佛教入門讀物. He views these as the main educational materials used in monastic schools. Although his perspective that these documents are the principal material in monastic education is debatable, his recognition of their value as introductory readings for Buddhism is insightful. These texts, though not necessarily part of the monastic school curriculum, include the most basic Buddhist concepts and terminologies, indicating that they were likely used by novices and other beginners in Buddhism. According to Yang's classification, these documents include: *Sabao sidi* 三寶四諦 (P. 2434, P. 3450, P. 2073V, P. 4627, S. 6108, S. 4236, S. 2669V, S. 1674, BD 7572, BD 6230, *Xiaosheng sanke* 小乘三科 (P. 2841, P. 4805, S. 5531, BD 3274, BD 7493, BD 7082, BD 6858, BD 8466, Дx. 223, Дx. 708), *Dasheng sanke* 大乘三科 (P. 3861, BD 7902), *Sansheng wuxing* 三乘五性 and *Wusheng sanxing* 五乘三性 (BD 791), BD 8024), *Shijian zongjian* 世間宗見 (BD 8024, BD 5889, Ryūkoku University 535) and *Famen mingyi ji* (P. 2119, P. 2128, P. 2317, P. 3008, P. 3009, P. 5958, P. 3001V, S. 6160, P. 4943, S. 1520, BD 7268, BD 4483, and BD 2889).[11] Novice monks likely acquired their foundational understanding of Buddhist cosmology and other basic concepts through guidance from their mentors, lectures, and these introductory texts.

The *She Dasheng lun* 攝大乘論 [Skt. *Mahāyāna-samgraha*; Compendium of the Great Vehicle], a fundamental treatise of the Yogācāra tradition, is also a significant scripture in the Chinese Yogācāra tradition. This text requires a solid foundational understanding before one can engage with its teachings. The manuscript S. 2048, which contains the "first *juan* of the *She Dasheng lun*" 攝論章卷第一, includes a notation that reads: "On the 28th of the eighth month of Renshou 1 (601 AD), novice monk Shanzang from Chongjiao Monastery in Guazhou copied this commentary at Biancai Monastery in the capital. Shanzang completed this with the intention of ensuring its circulation for future generations and noted that the verification and correction of the text are now complete" (仁壽元年 (601年) 八月廿八日, 瓜州崇教寺沙彌善藏, 在京辯才寺寫《攝論疏》, and 流通末代, 比字校竟). In doing so, Shanzang not only facilitated his own study but also expressed the hope that the text would be preserved and transmitted through the ages.

Alongside the *She Dasheng lun*, the *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 [Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*] is another seminal text from the Yogacara tradition. During the periods of the Tibetan Occuaption and Guiyi Army, influential figures such as Tankuang 曇曠, Facheng 法成, and Fajing 法鏡 spurred a resurgence of the Yogacara tradition in the Dunhuang area, making the study and preaching of the Yogācāra texts a popular trend. Tankuang, for instance, preached in Dunhuang for many years, each session drawing large crowds of monks from various monasteries to listen and learn. Among the many attendees were numerous novice monks. Novices Hongzhen 弘真 and Yizhen 一真, for example, attended these sessions multiple times and may even have transcribed a complete copy of the *Yujia shidi lun.* Specifically, the manuscripts Hongzhen copied include BD 1087 and BD 1857 of the *Yujia shidi lun.* Yizhen's lecture notes include *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論分門記 (S. 6788), *Yujia dilun: juan yi* 瑜伽師地論卷一 (Collection of Yamamoto Teijirō 山本悌二郎), *Yujia shidi lun: juan si*瑜伽師地論卷四 (BD 14026), *Yujia shidilun: juan yi liu* 瑜伽師地論卷一六 (P. 3940), and *Yujia shidi lun juan sayi* 瑜伽師地論卷卅一 (BD 14032) (see Daishun Ueyama (2010)).

Besides the Yogācāra tradition, Chan tradition was also highly prevalent in Dunhuang, with a particular emphasis on practicing both the Northern and Southern Chan schools. This Chan culture influenced even the novice monks. For instance, on the 23rd day of the second month of a *dingmao* 丁卯 year (847), novice monk Minghui 明慧 copied the text *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men* 大乘無生方便門 [Mahāyāna Unborn Expedient Means], a key document of the Northern Chan school. Along with this text, he also transcribed a

poem that praises the Chan approach: "The Buddha, with a stature of ten and a half Chinese *chi*, commands reverence from people of the past, present, and future. The Dharma he preached represents an eternal truth that transcends time. To attain the state of being free from afflictions, it is imperative that one begins with the mind, as this is the foundational point for all endeavors" (丈六誰跡三世欽, 菩提理絕去來今。欲昇彼岸無學道, 一切都緣草計心). This poem expresses the direct approach to realizing Buddha-nature through the mind, as encapsulated in the motto "realizing the mind and seeing one's nature" 明心見性, which aligns closely with the approach of the Northern Chan school. Although it is unclear if Minghui wrote this poem himself, his transcription of it suggests his deep engagement with Chan studies. Additionally, the high quality of the calligraphy in this poem also indicates Minghui's advanced skill level.

5. Ritual Training

Besides studying the precepts and scriptures, novice monks also learn various religious rites under the guidance of their mentors, primarily focusing on reciting scriptures and performing penitential rites. Penitential rites are a core Buddhist activity within the monastic community, based on the belief that these rites can absolve sins. For the rulers of the Guiyi Army, which was a governing authority that ruled over the Dunhuang region from 848 to 1036, monks primarily served to bless the nation, so their main duties involved scripture recitation and penitential rites. This training begins during the novice stage. Document P. 6005, titled *"An Edict Issued to Monastic Officials for the Administration of Monastic Communities in Preparation for the Vassa Residence"*, indicates that novices must perform "penitential rites at three specific times each day" 三時禮懺 under their mentor's supervision.

Another relevant document is S. 1604, titled "Tianfu ernian siyue ershiba ri dusnegtong Xianzhao tie zhu sengni gangguan tuzhong deng" 天復二年四月二十八日都僧統賢照帖諸僧尼綱管徒眾等 [On the 28th day of the fourth month of Tianfu 2, a notice from Xianzhao, the superintendent of monks, to all monks, nuns, and their respective communities]. This notice requires the religious community, including monks, nuns, male and female novices, to "intensify their efforts" 勤加事業 during the summer by "reciting the one-juan Da Foming jing every night" (每夜禮《大佛名經》一卷). Although no complete manuscript of the Da Foming jing 大佛名經 [Buddha Name Sūtra] written by novices from the Guiyi Army period has been identified, many practice writings on the verso of manuscripts feature Buddha names from this sūtra, such as "南南無無無東方善德" from P. 2483, along with others like "南無海德光明南南明" from S. 2104 and "南無光佛" from S. 2669. Besides the Da Foming jing, Dunhuang manuscripts also include texts like the Tiantai lichan wen 天台禮懺文 [Penitential Rites Text of Tiantai School]. Novices have copied similar penitential writings, such as in BD 5727, containing the Lichan wen 禮懺文 [Penitential Rites Text], handwritten by a novice from the Pure Land Monastery 淨土寺 on the 25th day of the tenth month of Changxing 長興 5 (934), a jiawu year 甲午年.

Besides penitential rites, monks often use eulogies during various religious activities, such as funerals. Document P. 2483, titled "Buddhist Eulogies" 佛家贊文, contains several eulogies, including "Eulogy for Ascending to the Pure Land' 歸極樂去贊, "Hermitage Eulogy" 蘭若贊, "Amitabha Eulogy" 阿彌陀贊, "Prince's Five Watches of the Night" 太子五更轉, "Eulogy for Rebirth in the Pure Land' 往生極樂贊, "Mount Wutai Eulogy" 五臺山贊, "Precious Bird Eulogy" 寶鳥贊, "Buddha's Sand Impression Eulogy" 印沙佛文, "Facing the Void Eulogy" 臨曠文, "Mahāyāna Pure Land Eulogy" 大乘淨土贊. In the colophon at the end, an individual named Chouyan 丑延 states he personally wrote this on "the 27th day of the fourth month of a *jimao* year" 己卯歲四月廿七日, while a colophon at the beginning written by the individual Baoji 保集 states that "he wrote one copy of the personal tribute with a devoted heart" 發信心寫《親贊文》一本 on "the third day of the 12th month of the fourth year of Taiping xingguo, a *jimao* year" 太平興國四年己卯歲十二月三日. Chouyan's note is dated earlier, in the same year as Baoji's. However, the handwriting on the front closely resembles that of Baoji's inscription, suggesting that the manuscript was

originally by Baoji and Chouyan might have falsely claimed it later to assert ownership and done so by predating his colophon to that of Baoji. This manuscript includes texts for various rituals such as "daochang fashi" 道場法事 (mandala ceremonies) (e.g., "Hermitage Eulogy"), funeral rites (e.g., "Facing the Void Eulogy"), and "Buddha sand impression" rites (e.g., "Buddha's Sand Impression Eulogy"), indicating its broad utility. Chouyan's possession of this manuscript suggests he was also learning these rites.

Document S. 5892 is a compilation copied by the novice monk Fading 法定 from Sanjie Monastery on the 30th day of the *jiaxu* year (974?), including "Entering the Mountain Eulogy" 入山讚文, "Buddha Name Sūtra" 佛名經, and "Rite of the Dharma-body without Ideation" 無想法身禮. Copying these ritual texts was part of the learning process for conducting these rites.

6. Conclusions

This article primarily discusses the educational framework in Buddhism, detailing the education and training received by novice monks. However, it is crucial to recognize that not all novices have access to such religious education. According to our analysis of literacy rates among the Dunhuang monastic community, only approximately fifty percent might have this opportunity. Many novices receive their early education within the monastic school settings. For those who could not attend these schools, they may still receive some basic education from their mentors. For novice nuns, all their early education might depend entirely on their mentors. One document attesting to the early education is P. 2995, transcribed by a "Xushi Lang", includes a primer on surnames characteristic of the Dunhuang region,[12] followed by a poem that emphasizes the importance of this basic education: "Novices naturally know much, what does another's name matter? From start to finish, no surname is irrelevant. Those who fail to learn, risk their novice heads being broken." (沙彌天生道理多, 人名不得那（奈）人何？從頭至尾沒閑姓，忽若學字不得者, 打你沙彌頭腦破). This illustrates that mentors provide basic education, including lessons on surnames, to novices.

As for the progression of education for novices, it does not necessarily follow a clear sequence between basic education in monastic schools and specialized religious education from mentors. In particular, the study of monastic precepts might start as early as their ordination. However, religious studies requiring literacy typically begin only after novices have received early education in monastic schools and have developed some literacy and culture.

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Notes

1 Similar expressions can be found in the *Sifenlv Shanfanbuque Xingshi Chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 [Simplified and Amended Handbook of the Four-Part Vinaya] authored by Daoxuan (596–667) of the Tang Dynasty. For further reference, see T no. 1804, vol. 40, p. 25.

2 *Nanhai jigui nei fazhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 [A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago] authored by Yijing (635-713), T no. 2125, vol. 54, p. 219.

[3] The punctuation system utilized in contemporary books is not found in ancient Chinese literature, or rather, standard ancient Chinese books seldom employed complex punctuation marks. However, in the Dunhuang manuscripts, we have discovered a variety of more enriched symbols. For more on this topic, refer to Imre Galambos (2014).

[4] See *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Tang Dynasty] authored by Daoxuan (596–667), T no. 2060, vol. 50, p. 537.

[5] See *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty] authored by Zanning (919-1001), T no. 2061, vol. 50, p. 746.

[6] Regarding the daily curriculum of monks as recorded in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, see Zürcher (1989).

[7] I calculate the number of characters based on the texts in their canonical versions, discounting other versions found among Dunhuang manuscripts.

[8] Daozhen's role as the abbot of the Guanyin Hall of the Sanjie Monastery is inferred from P. 2614, known as "Chongxiu daxiang bei guku tibi bingxu" 重修南大像北古窟題壁並序 [Renovation of the Southern Great Statue and Northern Ancient Grottoes: Inscription and Preface].

[9] For the statistics regarding the popular scriptures in Dunhuang in different epochs, see Lin (2013).

[10] Although Ueyama Daishun primarily discusses the 'Buddhist Outline' texts in Chinese manuscripts, his work also touched upon some Tibetan counterparts found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.

[11] Paul Magnin (1984) has focused on these documents.

[12] The content most characteristic of Dunhuang includes the listing of the nine common non-Chinese surnames: 張王李趙, 天下不少。殷薛唐鄧, 令狐正等。安康石平, 羅白米史, 曹何闕院…

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