

Article

Gender Conflicts in Contemporary Korean Buddhism [†]

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Abstract: Scholars have observed that Korean Buddhist nuns have a relatively high social status compared to nuns of other Asian countries, much like their sisters in Taiwan. It is a source of great pride for many Korean *bhikṣuṇīs* that their community operates with a high degree of autonomy, bringing them to an almost equal standing with their male counterparts. However, this claim of equal status is challenged once the nuns step outside their own communities and into the hierarchical system of the Order, an institution dominated by male monastics. This paper aims to report on the gender disparity between male monastics and Buddhist women, both nuns and laywomen alike. I will first explore Korean Buddhist nuns’ experiences of gender discrimination imposed by the current institutional and cultural practices of the Buddhist Order, and their battles to challenge the legitimacy of this power structure. Next, I will introduce various episodes, including the Buddhist administration’s conflict with progressive women’s groups, to showcase the gender dynamics and current status of women in Korean Buddhism. Ultimately, my argument is that the conservatism and misogyny of traditional religion continue to influence Korean Buddhism today, despite societal efforts to heighten gender awareness and sensitivity.

Keywords: gender; Korean Buddhism; monastic order; constitution; *bhikṣuṇī*; lay women



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1. Introduction

This paper aims to report on the gender disparity of Korean Buddhist women and *bhikṣuṇīs*, with the purpose of exploring future directions by specifying present observable behavior rather than fixating on theory. Up to this point, academic studies on Buddhist women in Korea can be broadly divided into two categories. The first is historical studies. Buddhism has maintained its status as a traditional religion in Korean society for a very long time. Scholars place the establishment of a *bhikṣuṇī* order in Korea around the 4th and 5th centuries, right about the time Buddhism was first transmitted from mainland China. The first Korean *bhikṣuṇī* to appear on record is Lady Sa of Silla. Records also show that a group of monks, including female monastics from Baekje, were dispatched to Japan in the 6th century, playing a major role in spreading Buddhism to Japan. Furthermore, there are numerous mentions of Buddhist women in the *Samguk Yusa* [Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms], a collection of historical records compiled in 1281. All of these resources point to the fact that the virtuous practice and endeavors of many outstanding *bhikṣuṇīs* and Buddhist women helped maintain the Buddhist tradition throughout Korean history, particularly during the harsh times of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910)¹ up to the present day.

The second (and much more minor) strand of study is critical analysis of contemporary Korean Buddhism from the perspective of gender inequality by means of a women’s studies or feminist approach. These works mainly interpret the indicators related to gender

sensitivity obtained through socio-scientific methodologies or feminist perspectives. By incorporating both of these viewpoints, this paper will attempt to analyze some modern incidents related to *bhikṣuṇī* orders from a gender perspective. I will divide these incidents based on two points of scrutiny, the first being the issue between male and female monastics, and the second being the relationship between male monastics and female laypeople. My stance is ultimately to seek a progressive future based firmly on the spirit of fond support.

2. Social and Internal Changes in the Modern Period

The status of Buddhism as a traditional religion has undergone many changes in the modern era, both institutionally and culturally. Recent history has turned out to be more tense and dramatic than ever before. It is first and foremost necessary to understand the broader context of the modern history of Korea. The end of the Pacific War and the subsequent retreat of Japanese colonial powers were soon followed by U.S. occupation of South Korea, which was brief, but left a deep and lasting impact on Korea, evident in the westernization of Korean society and its religions. A few years later, the Korean War of 1950 solidified the division between the North and South. The two remain separated to this day, making Korea the last divided country on the planet. Despite this division, South Korea was able to achieve high economic growth and now ranks among the top economic powers in the world. Its rapid industrial growth, also referred to as the ‘Miracle of the Han River,’ resulted in a remarkably improved economic situation in the 1970s. The religious community also grew along with the increasingly prosperous social foundation. The previously under-resourced *bhikṣuṇī* community gained new vitality in this process, resulting in a dramatic improvement in its material well-being. Individual *bhikṣuṇīs* were able to engage in activities such as receiving higher education and studying abroad, which was previously unimaginable. Their social visibility increased accordingly, with *bhikṣuṇīs* now earning doctorates and professorships and establishing mega temples.

Additionally, in terms of demographics, *bhikṣuṇīs* came to account for almost half of the entire monastic population. Of the 15,000 registered monastics of the Jogye Order, the number of *bhikṣuṇīs* peaked at 7000 (and is currently in decline as of 2023). Above all, in the three areas of renunciation, education, and ordination, *bhikṣuṇīs* adhere to the same regulations as *bhikṣus* under the management of the Jogye Order (the celibate order), a major Buddhist order to which 90% of Korean monasteries belong. *Bhikṣuṇīs* receive postulant education for about six months these days before becoming *śrāmaṇerīs* (novice nuns). After four more years of mandatory education, they receive ordination and become full-fledged *bhikṣuṇīs*. Since the groundbreaking dual ordination ceremony at Beomeo-sa temple in 1982,² *bhikṣuṇīs* have been ordained according to the *bhikṣuṇī* dual ordination procedure of the Single Ordination Platform ceremony conducted by the Jogye Order. After becoming a *bhikṣuṇī*, one can become the leader of a meditation hall or go on to perform social services by being involved in temple operations or missionary work, depending on one’s inclination.³ It is therefore evident that there is an established structure of systematic education and training for *bhikṣuṇīs* formally managed by the Order.

However, although *bhikṣuṇīs* have formed their own independent community of sorts, and can choose to follow their own paths of either education, practice, or missionary work, when joint cooperation between *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* is necessary, *bhikṣuṇīs* often find themselves alienated from the core power and organization of the Jogye Order. Contrary to internal claims and external expectations that Buddhism should actively respond and change to adapt to modern society, the status and awareness of gender equality within the Buddhist community are at a standstill. The reality of this uneven, dormant imbalance within the Order—in which renunciant women not only cannot realize their potential but also must endure constantly being checked and censored—ultimately reduces the vitality of the entire Korean Buddhist community. The path to true religious harmony and coexistence is becoming increasingly dark amid continuous conflict and tension between the sexes.

In this paper, I will first give a brief overview of the history of the *bhikṣuṇī* order in Korea, and then introduce a couple of episodes that demonstrate current gender conflicts.

By analyzing the positions of each party, that is, *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*, as well as their responses to each case, this study aims to shed light on how the gender hierarchy of the modern Korean Buddhist community operates.⁴

3. First Administrative Position Given to a Nun in 2003

With an increase in the social visibility of nuns along with external expectations and pressures calling for the social participation of women, a nun was appointed as the first Director of Cultural Affairs of the Jogye Order, Korea's largest Buddhist denomination. A headline from a news article published on 5 March 2003 reads "Nun Appointed as Minister for the First Time in the History of the Jogye Order". The Buddhist Journalist Association responded to this announcement as follows:

"Ven. Beopjang's appointment of Venerable Takyeon as the Director of Cultural Affairs is a demonstration of his commitment expressed at the '31st Presidential Debate of the Jogye Order,' co-hosted by the Korean Buddhist Journalist Association and the Central Lay Buddhist Association of the Jogye Order on February 14, [2003]. This [choice] to honor his pledge to 'implement policies to raise the status of *bhikṣuṇīs* and appoint nuns to the Department of Cultural Affairs so that they are not left out of administrative affairs' also reflects his resolution for reform. In a country where more than half of all Buddhists are women, and women are becoming more active in all sectors of society, the appointment of a *bhikṣuṇī* to an administrative position is a natural decision in keeping up with the times, and evident of the changes in the Jogye Order, the foremost order of Korean Buddhism".⁵

However, the leading newspaper, *JoongAng Daily*, was less optimistic and expressed their doubts early on. According to them, "The Director of Cultural Affairs is virtually the fourth-highest position in the administrative rank of the Jogye Order. Perhaps for this reason, there were many *bhikṣus* who objected to Ven. Takyeon's appointment as the Director of Cultural Affairs. In the end, she did not attend her appointment ceremony scheduled for 9 a.m. on March 5, and received her letter of appointment separately around 11:30 am that day. This was an action mindful of such attitudes [toward her appointment]".⁶ This ambiguity surrounding Venerable Takyeon's appointment indicates that there was resistance from within, and it can be said that this resistance still remains today.

4. The Formation of an Anti-Group against the Jogye Order and Its Subsequent Retaliation

Since 2003, the number of nuns in administrative positions within the Jogye Order has remained unchanged, at just one. The sole difference is that *bhikṣuṇīs* are now only eligible for a position in the Department of Financial Affairs and no longer in the Department of Cultural Affairs, which is higher up in the administrative hierarchy. From this, it seems safe to conclude that the concerns expressed by *JoongAng Daily* have turned out to be true.

In 2011, a coalition of anti-Jogye groups formed under the name 'The Central Council NGO Monitor Group.' It quickly became the central voice of criticism against the Jogye administration.⁷ Laywomen's groups in particular led discussions on the Order's misogynistic culture and pointed out the bias in the Order's Constitution. The rules state that all the highest figures of authority, from the Patriarch of the Order to the Heads of Administration, Dharma Propagation, and Monastic Training, should be *bhikṣus* (male monks) over 50 years old with at least 30 years of monastic experience. Such institutional limitations effectively bar nuns from positions of authority. However, no nuns or monks have directly addressed this issue in the past 20 years, and neither has there been a public inquiry into the matter. This blatant gender discrimination has mainly been pointed out and criticized by lay Buddhist organizations and scholars. Unfortunately, the emergence of such feminist objections has only served to intensify the defensive attitudes of the Jogye Order.

Around the time the Central Council NGO Monitor Group was formed, the Order appointed new leadership by way of indirect election through the votes of the abbots from

24 head temples. During their double term, which spanned 8 years from 2009 to 2017, this administration was in large part responsible for the huge conflict to come, based on chauvinistic male attitudes toward women and the misogynistic culture prevalent in the upper echelons of the Order. Following the end of their second term, a subsequent head was elected with the support of his predecessor, only to retire from his position soon after due to a shocking scandal. When it was leaked that he was planning a separate reform of his own, independent of the previous regime, he was quickly rumored to have sired a child from a *bhikṣuṇī* in the past. Eventually, he was charged with sexual harassment and was forced to resign after less than a year.

If the resignation was purely on account of his sexual misbehavior, preventive measures should have been implemented on an institutional level. However, as this accusation was never proven to be true, the prevailing assumption was that this attack was discreetly orchestrated by the former head, who was unsatisfied with his successor's uncooperative behavior. With the resignation of the new head, all of his supposed faults were brushed under the rug, and with them any opportunities for institutional scrutiny or reform.

From 2017 onwards, the situation quickly worsened. There were signs of oppression across various sectors. First, there was a full-scale suppression of the situation in the media. Sanctions were implemented on two progressive news agencies, and Buddhists and temples alike were made to adhere to the following five prohibitions: banning these agencies' access to temples, withholding newsworthy information from them, refraining from placing advertisements in their newspapers, restricting access to their websites, and forbidding interaction with their journalists. Thus, the war between the Jogye administration and anti-Jogye groups began in earnest. The Order's retaliation against the organized activities of the coalition and women's groups further intensified with the emergence of anti-feminist movements in Korea led by rightist groups. Women's studies scholars point out that this occurred in the mid-2010s, during which time misogynist discourse became more widespread among Korean men through online communities such as *Ilgan Best*.⁸ Feminism was reinterpreted as a highly controversial, divisive ideology and disruptive power within political circles, social discourse, religious communities and even among families.

In 2020, something happened that sparked the incentive for change. Ven. Jeongwun, one of the members of the Central Council, wrote a newspaper column criticizing the administrative methods of the Jogye Order. The Order immediately reproached the author and her article, demanding she apologize publicly and repent on grounds of the *Vinaya* (monastic regulations). What was intended as an attempt for communication and constructive criticism was met with a vehement demand for repentance. This hostile response from high-ranking monks toward a nun who was a member of the Central Council, no less, was reminiscent of a regression back to pre-modern society. Under immense pressure, she eventually published a statement of apology in the same newspaper, but the monks did not stop here. At a subsequent Council meeting, a proposal for Ven. Jeongwun's expulsion was added to the agenda. However, the agenda ended up being postponed to the next meeting, possibly because of the attention it garnered from watchful feminists and scholars tensely awaiting the results of the proposal. Although Ven. Jeongwun's case did ultimately blow over, it triggered an openly hostile attitude toward nuns among the monks of the Jogye Council, and their meetings soon became a stage for denouncing the 'rebellious behavior' of female Council members. The undemocratic and tyrannical attitude of the current Jogye Order executives solidified Ven. Jeongwun's case as a testament to the current state of gender inequality in Korean Buddhism, and a foreshadowing of further conflicts to come.

One last incident worth mentioning is the presidential election of the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association held in 2019. The Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association was established with Hyeche'un Sunim as its President in 1985, who served two five-year terms from 1985 to 1995 (Cho 2014, p. 128). Although the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association ostensibly belongs to the Jogye Order, it is neither an internal organization or a subgroup of the Order but an arbitrary coalition of Jogye nuns. However, as nuns make up almost half the entire monastic population of Korea, many issues are often discussed within the Association before being reported to

the Jogye Order. For instance, the ten Council members assigned to represent the nuns are selected by the Association and passed on to the executive branch of the Order. It is also noteworthy that the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association conducts their own direct elections, whereas the administrative head of the Jogye Order and all other positions of authority are appointed through indirect elections. The Association can thus be said to constitute an autonomous body of sorts within the Jogye Order.

To return to the subject matter at hand, the presidential election of the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association generated an outpour of both internal and external opinions on *bhikṣuṇīs* and Korean Buddhism as a whole, some critical, some expectational. The following social media post is but one example showcasing the interest of nuns regarding the election. Considering that *bhikṣuṇīs* do not usually reveal their political opinions very often, this data is very valuable, and so I quote a part of it here:

“The *bhikṣuṇīs* of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism have a long history the likes of which cannot be found in any other country of the world, and are equally as active as *bhikṣus* in our society. There are 6000 *bhikṣuṇīs* today, accounting for half the entire monastic population of the Jogye Order, and since the president of the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association is appointed through a direct election, our organization is more independent and autonomous than any other within the Order. This alone demonstrates the great importance of the status and role of nuns in Korean Buddhism.

However, what is the current reality of the Jogye Order? The *saṃgha* community has collapsed because of the widening wealth gap among monks, and individual competition has become commonplace. Since the Jogye Order is being run unilaterally by monks, the greatest victims of the collapse of the *saṃgha* community are the nuns. As nuns do not have even a single head temple, they are denied the right to vote or be voted for a position of authority in the Jogye Administration that is given to all head temples. Even after the appointment of the 11th president of the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association by means of direct election, and with the 12th presidential election fast approaching, the fact that nuns still lack autonomy, are unable to exercise their own rights, and are used in sectarian politics is something we must reflect upon deeply. [. . .] Determined by a majority vote, the direct election system is the essence of public decision-making. The reason disciples pin their hopes on the Association is because our president is appointed through direct elections. In a world in which laypeople and Buddhists alike leave our temples and no longer respect us, fed up with the corruption of the Order and its strife over supremacy, the Association should give proper consideration to what is best for the future of Buddhism. Now is the time for nuns to take initiative and set new coordinates for the Order”.

The two main points referred to in this post are, first, according to the Constitution of the Jogye Order, the highest positions of authority are solely reserved for monks, and nuns are denied the opportunity to vote or be voted for those positions of authority; and second, back in 1964, *bhikṣuṇīs* were falsely promised that they would be given one of the 25 head temples after the Buddhist Purification Movement. This so-called Purification Movement, which aimed to oust married monks from Korean monastic communities, occurred during a time in which nuns outnumbered unmarried monks, as most monks had taken spouses towards the end of the Japanese colonial period. Naturally, these nuns were able to play a big role in the movement, and were promised a head temple for their contributions. But in the end, the leaders of the movement never followed through. Today, all 25 head temples belong to monks. As the Head of Administration of the Jogye Order is appointed through an indirect election by the (male) abbots of these temples, nuns are necessarily excluded from this process by default.

Not so long ago, when Korean nuns emerged as a new research topic in Buddhist Studies, scholars considered them to be “a bastion for the future of Korean Buddhism”.⁹ Although this prediction still stands, it seems that this future is much further away than we initially anticipated. Indeed, there have been more and more concerns that not only is our progress towards the future currently slowing down, but we are in fact stuck repeating the past to the point where our once optimistic future must now be considered uncertain.

5. Conflict between Monks and Laywomen Surrounding the Appointment of the President of the Buddhist Women's Development Institute in 2019

Given the authoritarian culture of the mainstream Korean Buddhist community and the mentality of the monks as described above, it was only a matter of time before a conflict arose between monks and laywomen. At the heart of this conflict is the Bureau of Dharma Propagation (BDP), one of the two major divisions of the Jogye Order, and the Buddhist Women's Development Institute (BWDI), the only women's organization in the Order. Since its establishment 21 years ago in the year 2000, the Buddhist Women's Development Institute has grown to become a central organization representing the voices of Korean Buddhist women. It currently has close to 10,000 members and is credited with leading a variety of activities, such as academic research, education programs, environmental programs, and Dharma events. However, a big problem arose in January 2019, right before the election of the BWDI's next president.

The head of the BDP at the time was the abbot of a prominent temple in Seoul, which the presidential candidate of the BWDI frequented with her husband. When this abbot became the subject of a sex and embezzlement scandal, the candidate's spouse, a former judge and lawyer, filed a suit against him for embezzling temple funds. Although this led to the monk's resignation from his position as abbot, he still remained the head of the Bureau of Dharma Propagation. This position is the third highest position in the hierarchy of Jogye authorities, and also serves as the chief director for many lay Buddhist organizations of the Order, including the BWDI. Taking advantage of the fact that the right to convene a board meeting rests with the chief director, the monk refused to convene the board of directors to elect the next BWDI president. When the women were unable to hold a board meeting twice in a row, the board members of the BWDI agreed that it was not right for the monk to intentionally sabotage the candidate based on his personal resentment toward her spouse.

When efforts to communicate with the monk failed, the BWDI organized a full-fledged protest, putting placards outside their building and working to make their case publicly known through all possible venues. When this did not prove effective, the BWDI decided to revise their internal regulations with the help of legal experts so that their elections could be held without the head of the BDP. First of all, the president of the Buddhist Women's Development Institute was delegated to serve as the chief director of the Institute instead of the head of the BDP. They also added two clauses to their regulations, the second being particularly significant in stipulating that, in case of conflict between BWDI regulations and those of the Jogye Order, the BWDI regulations will take precedence. Additionally, citing the fact that the monk was neglecting his duties as the head of the BDP, the board members of the BWDI gathered of their own accord and proceeded to appoint a new president themselves. This decision was of course not approved by the Jogye Order, as the monks believed that giving priority to BWDI regulations over their own was a clear sign of disobedience and rebellion against them.

Because the BWDI is still under the management of the Jogye Order's Bureau of Dharma Propagation, it was obvious from the outset that the Order would not accept the newly appointed president because the elections were held in explicit defiance of their own rules. However, the BWDI had their own reasons for attempting this. During the entire ordeal, the women of the BWDI came to realize that the Bureau of Dharma Propagation was actively trying to sabotage their autonomy. It became known that the Bureau had bribed a nun, even awarding her with a certificate of appointment as the interim director of the BWDI. The Bureau also stormed into the Institute and demanded to have the president's seal and bank book, with a physical fight breaking out in the process. It was also revealed that the Bureau was preparing to pass a new piece of legislation allowing the Bureau to hand-pick the members of the Institute's board of directors.

This was the start of a three-year struggle that extended from the beginning of 2019 to January 2022, during which time the BWDI was not able to appoint a president of their choosing. Although a new head of the BDP was now in place, the conflict showed no signs of resolving itself. The new head tried to persuade and pressure the members of the

Institute into conceding to the Bureau's demands. However, the women of the Institute were now painfully aware of the power dynamics and gender inequality of the Korean Buddhist monastic hierarchy. When they finally refused to accept the Bureau's demands in December 2021, the Bureau subsequently announced that they would henceforth be disowning the BWDI and cutting all existing ties. They announced that the "BWDI is no longer affiliated with the Jogye Order. They cannot use the name Jogye; and those who are affiliated with the BWDI are not allowed to participate in any Jogye activities. It is a harmful organization to the Order and any organizations that cooperate with this organization will be considered harmful as well".

During over two years of conflict and struggle, these laywomen were forced to open their eyes to the reality of male authoritative culture in Korean Buddhism, and what the male Buddhist community thought of women in general. Meanwhile, in this process, another peculiar phenomenon was observed in terms of gender hierarchy. Although the members of the Korean *Bhikṣuṇī* Association were favorable towards the laywomen in the beginning, they eventually withdrew their support and even went so far as to replace the monks in reprimanding the laywomen. These nuns were of course pressured into doing so by higher-ranking monks, who gave them a mission to "persuade" the laywomen. Unfortunately, this led the laywomen to distrust not only the monks but the nuns as well. In the end, amidst all this hostility and antagonism, the laywomen of the Institute eventually declared their autonomy, transgressed the Jogye Order, and chose to operate as a nonsectarian women's group independent of any religious order.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I have examined several instances that reveal the internal and external circumstances in which the Korean *bhikṣuṇī saṃgha* and female lay Buddhists currently find themselves, as well as the demand for change that arose among them. The conservative strand of traditional Buddhism still dominates Korean Buddhism today. The state of gender imbalance in the current Buddhist community is much more serious than that of Korean society as a whole. Beyond normative male-centric and misogynistic traditional religious culture, Korean Buddhism is currently experiencing a regression of sorts, owing to the serious misogyny and anti-feminism that have been steadily on the rise since 2010.

However, apart from these general societal trends, one major problem that Buddhist women are facing is that they knowingly or unknowingly continue to embody and reproduce this male-centric, authoritative culture. The fact that monks reprimanded laywomen with the phrase "how dare you bodhisattvas ... [defy us monks]" during the conflict between the Bureau of Dharma Propagation and the Buddhist Women's Development Institute clearly reveals the underlying power hierarchy at work. More fundamentally, this has to do with the stereotype that interprets and disparages women's religious behavior as superstitious and irrational, prevalent in Korean Buddhism. Language and practices that belittle femininity itself are still being used regularly without any reflection, criticism, consideration, or evaluation of the diversity and context of women's experiences. In turn, women themselves imbibe this tendency, resulting in a vicious cycle of internalized self-hatred and humiliation. It is thus necessary to stop waiting passively for one's religious identity to be confirmed by someone else's authority, especially that of a senior monk. The image typical of female Korean believers, showing absolute respect to male monks regardless of age, can symbolically be found in the following expression, "an old bodhisattva attends to a young monk like a servant, holding his garments and bag behind him". It is this subordinate relationship that perpetuates a culture which unrestrictedly tolerates the arrogance of male monastics.

Furthermore, there are no support groups to help women who want to speak out against these prejudices. The Buddhist Women's Development Institute had to fight a very lonely battle. As the Buddhist community has little experience of social participation, there are not many social groups in the first place. Even the 2017 'Corruption Report' published by the Coalition of Lay Organizations does not contain many references to women's rights.

In particular, there is no clear awareness or will to solve the problem of gender inequality through social and institutional interventions or strategies. It goes without saying that the Jogye Order does not have an official human rights division or a sexual violence counseling center, and neither are the issues of women's rights or sexual violence of great interest to Buddhist political groups. The Order's current legislative system, which allots all positions of high authority exclusively to *bhikṣus*, simultaneously denying women's rights to participate in religious affairs, is a blatant violation of Article 11 of the Korean Constitution which states that "all citizens shall be equal before the law, and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, social or cultural life on account of sex, religion or social status". Yet so far there has been no attempt of a collective organized resistance such as a class action lawsuit against the unconstitutional elements of the Order's regulations.

Furthermore, it is fundamentally impossible for monks and nuns to interact with one another as equals so long as precepts such as the Eight *Garudhammas* still stand, greatly limiting the social observances and formal procedures a nun can follow.¹⁰ The eight *Garudhamma*, meaning eight "weighty rules", are a list of specific rules included in all the various recensions of *bhikṣuṇī* Vinaya, a collection of monastic regulations. These eight special rules are regarded to have been established with an explicit purpose of subordinating the female ordinant to the *bhikṣu saṃgha* at the time of the ordination by the Buddha himself, which has since been questioned by scholars. These rules set a condition in which female monastics must be deferential and subordinate to *bhikṣus* and dependent on them. Among these eight rules, perhaps the most harmful and profoundly restrictive in today's society are the last two rules—the seventh, that a nun should never abuse or revile a monk in any way; and the eighth, that it is forbidden for a nun ever to admonish a monk. According to the *Garudhammas*, merely pointing out a monk's fault would already constitute a violation, necessitating repentance and censure. Therefore, no matter how constructive and reasonable an opinion may be, it will automatically be interpreted as a criticism or a challenge, making it immensely difficult for nuns to even raise any objections. Since precepts like the Eight *Garudhammas* hinder the very possibility of equal communication between nuns and monks, it presents a very serious regulatory obstacle that should ultimately be abandoned.

Today is the result of yesterday, which will in turn give birth to tomorrow. In order to solve the current dilemma, it is necessary to determine and eliminate the cause of the problem. We can only expect progress when the Buddhist community promotes gender awareness and establishes fair policies across religious, institutional, and social aspects. Only by improving the Buddhist community's sexist and discriminatory culture will female members be able to realize their religious potential and cultivate a positive regard for the religious order to which they belong. We will then be able to collectively move forward and establish a sound Buddhist culture suitable for modern society.

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Notes

¹ For more on Buddhism during the Joseon Dynasty, see Cho (2019).

² For more on the dual ordination ceremony, see Tsomo (2020).

³ For more on the activities of Korean Buddhist nuns, see Chung (2006); (Wunweol 2006); Cho (2011).

⁴ For more on similar issues of gender in Chinese Buddhism, see Bianchi (2017).

⁵ <http://www.hyunbulnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=185204> (accessed on 22 May 2022).

⁶ 2003.03.06 <https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/130691#home> (accessed on 22 May 2022).

- 7 In 2011, the ‘Buddhist Civil Society Network’, a coalition of Buddhist civil society organizations based on the two tasks of religious reform and social participation, was established. Half the women among its organizations act as representatives or managers, so they have a high level of feminist awareness. In addition, the ‘Central Council NGO Monitor Group’ was formed in 2012, led by a women’s organization to monitor the activities of the Central Council, the legislative body of the Order”. Ok (2013, p. 260).
- 8 An internet community that has started around 2010 and quickly became a center of misogynistic comments. Usually called by its acronym of ‘Ilbe’.
- 9 Ha (1998, p. 15). This volume has contributed to the recent upsurge in interest in the lives of Korean nuns.
- 10 Although many people, both scholars and monastics alike, have questioned the propriety of the Eight *garudhammas*, *bhikṣuṇīs* are still expected to observe these rules in many *saṃghas* around the world, albeit to varying degrees. For more detail on the context and observance of these rules, see Dhammadinnā (2016); Chiu and Ann (2012); Tsedroen and Anālayo (2013). For an analysis of circumstances of how these rules were established at the time of women’s acceptance into the *saṃgha*, see Murcott (2002).

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