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A Survey of the Attitudes Concerning the Role of the Laity in Korea's Jogye Order

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Abstract: Despite its 17-century-long history, Korean Buddhism is currently undergoing a crisis. In addition to the declining number of lay practitioners, Korea's largest Buddhist order, the Jogye Order (K. *Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong*, hereafter "JO" or "the order"), is facing a significant drop in monastic recruitment. Compounding this crisis, a series of scandals within the order's monastic leadership have caused widespread loss of confidence among the order's laity. In addition to calls for greater financial transparency and moral accountability for JO monastics, many reformers are demanding greater lay participation within the order's political hierarchy, challenging the centuries-old roles assigned to monastics and laity. However, these challenges have failed to produce any practical changes within the order while its monastic establishment continues espousing rhetoric reinforcing monastic authority and its supremacy over the laity. In light of these crises, this paper will conduct a perfunctory examination of the attitudes the JO's monastic establishment exhibits towards its lay supporters and the roles it expects for them. Utilizing, in part, previously unpublished internal JO documents, this paper will begin by investigating monastic attitudes expressed towards the laity in the order's 2015 General Meeting of the Four-fold Assembly as well as the ensuing debate over these roles in Korea's Buddhist media. This paper will then explore how the laity are viewed within the JO's lay education program, additionally examining how the needs and concerns of the laity are addressed in introductory textbooks used within this program. While not exhaustive, by examining this variety of sources, this paper seeks to clarify the roles the JO's monastic establishment expects for its lay supporters and interrogate whether such attitudes are sustainable as the order attempts to respond effectively to the crises it currently faces.

Keywords: Jogye Order; monastic; laity; general meeting of the four-fold assembly; laity education

1. Background

Introduced to Korea in the fourth century C.E., Buddhism flourished on the peninsula for over a millennium under the patronage of successive dynasties. However, with the rise of the Neo-Confucian Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), Buddhism was progressively stripped of its wealth and power as prominent temples were disbanded and monastics banned from entering Korean cities. The surviving monastics retreated to remote temples where Korean Buddhism was "virtually quarantined in the countryside" for 500 years, supported largely by subsistence farming and the patronage of rural peasants.¹ With the lifting of government suppression in 1895, Korea saw the emergence of numerous Buddhist reform movements over the following decades led by both monastics

¹ (Buswell 1992, pp. 22–23).

and lay practitioners. Although challenged by competition from foreign missionaries and interference from Japanese colonial authorities, these reformers sought to bring Buddhism out of Korea's mountain temples and into "the milieu of daily life," in the process blurring the "traditionally rigid demarcation" between the laity and ordained monastics.² With the widespread adoption of clerical marriage during the Japanese Annexation (1910–1945), a further reform movement emerged within South Korea's monastic community following the Korean War (1950–1953). During this decade-long, and occasionally violent, "purification movement" (K. *jeonghwaundong*) a minority of celibate monastics struggled to remove married clergy from Korean temples. Government intervention finally ended the conflict in 1962, dividing the monastic community between the married Taego Order (K. *Taegojong*) and the celibate Jogye Order.³ While the JO were awarded almost all major Buddhist temples in South Korea, the order was further plagued by sectarian in-fighting and property litigation through the following decade.

Formed as a "monastic monk-oriented order,"⁴ the JO is the largest of Korea's Buddhist orders and represents the historical mainstream of Korean Buddhist tradition. The order maintains more than 3000 temples vertically organized within 25 districts, in turn overseen by the JO's central administration at Jogyesa Temple in Seoul. JO temples are staffed by approximately 12,000 ordained monastics, almost half of whom are female, who vow to follow the precepts of the *Dharmagupta Vinaya*⁵ as well as the "Pure Rules" (K. *Baijang jingguui*) of Chinese master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814). Each monastic begins their career serving six months as a postulant (K. *haengja*) followed by four years as a novice (K. *sami*), during which they complete JO-mandated education at a traditional monastic seminary or accredited Buddhist university. With their master's approval, novices then take the final ordination as a monk (K. *bigu*), beginning their life-long vocation as Buddhist monastics and full members of the order.⁶ Although various reform movements with the JO in the 1980s sought to increase the order's engagement with secular society, the JO's reformed constitution of 1994 actually banned the participation of laity in either temple management or the order's central administration.⁷ Among other reforms, the new constitution established departments of Education and Dharma Propagation responsible, in part, for the organization of the order's lay supporters. However, as with all of the order's central administration, these departments are managed by senior, predominantly male, monastics.

While Buddhist temples have depended on lay donations for funding since the rise of the Joseon Dynasty, Buddhist identity among Korea's laity has traditionally remained fluid. Lay Buddhism became more defined over the twentieth century in opposition to widespread growth of Christianity, with 22.8% of South Koreans claiming Buddhism as a religion as of the 2005 census. Although individual lay Buddhists and lay organizations have played significant roles in the development of modern Korean Buddhism, lay participation at Buddhist temples remained largely "unsystematic and sporadic" prior to the 1990s, largely catering to the practice of "good luck Buddhism" (K. *gibuk bulgyo*) by laity seeking a material blessing for their families.⁸ With the institutional reforms of 1994, the JO more clearly defined the roles of its lay supporters, expanding their responsibilities and prescribing the protection and support of the order's monastics as their primary duty. Revisions in the order's "laity laws" (K. *sindo beop*) in 1999 mandate that the laity pay annual dues, protect the order's monastics, and follow the order's lay education system, among other responsibilities.⁹ Lay converts must formally take refuge in the "Triple Gem" (K. *gwiui*) of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, after which they are granted a Dharma name and officially register as a lay member of the order. After receiving a membership card, they are required to attend four hours of education, in two separate two-hour sessions. They then take

² (Park 2010, pp. 2–4).

³ See (Buswell 1992, pp. 25–33) for further discussion of this "purification movement."

⁴ (Yoon 2012, p. 36).

⁵ The *Dharmagupta Vinaya* contains 250 precepts of male monastics and 348 for female monastics.

⁶ (Buswell 1992, pp. 69–70).

⁷ (Yoon 2012, p. 53).

⁸ (Kaplan 2015, p. 210).

⁹ (Ok 2013, pp. 78–80).

the lay Buddhist precepts and are expected to fulfill regular religious duties, such as daily sutra reading and weekly temple attendance.¹⁰ They can also choose to ascend the ranks established for the order's lay practitioners through progressive courses of study (see Section 3 below) "ultimately preparing [them] for work as Buddhist propagators."¹¹ The JO currently claims approximately 7 million lay members who are able to participate in ceremonies and meditation retreats as well as cultural and social events at the order's temples.

Despite the reforms of the 1990s, the Jogye Order has been facing a series of crises over recent decades. As discussed in a previous article,¹² the number of annual monastic recruits has been declining steadily, from 510 postulants in 1993 to only 151 in 2017. Furthermore, according to South Korea's 2015 census only 15.5% of the nation described themselves as Buddhist, compared with 22.8% a decade earlier, while 56% of all South Koreans and 65% of young adults claim no religious affiliation.¹³ This decline in membership had been compounded by a growing loss of confidence in the order's monastic leadership following a succession of scandals in the 1990s and 2010s which involved sectarian infighting and high-level corruption. These scandals have instigated further reform movements, such as the lay Buddhist Solidarity for Reform (K. *Jamyeo bulgyo jaega yeonda*) in 1999 which works to increase financial transparency, moral accountability, and lay participation within the JO's leadership.¹⁴ As recently as 2012 a video depicting several high-ranking members of the order's leadership drinking, smoking and gambling with millions of won from lay donations made national news, while in 2018 the newly-elected supreme patriarch of the order resigned following allegations of embezzlement and illicitly fathering a child. These recent scandals have renewed calls for a reevaluation of the limited and subservient roles expected by the JO's monastic establishment for the order's lay supporters.¹⁵

2. The 'General Meeting of the Four-Fold Assembly' and Subsequent Media Debate

Attempting to address the aftermath of the 2012 video scandal, the Jogye Order convened a "General Meeting of the Four-fold Assembly" (K. Daejunggongsa, hereafter "the Assembly") in 2015. Originating in the era of the historical Buddha, such meetings of the Four-fold Sangha gathered all parties traditionally comprising the Buddhist community—namely male monastics (Pāli *bhikkhu*), female monastics (P. *bhikkhuni*), male lay practitioners (P. *upāsaka*) and female lay practitioners (P. *upāsikā*)—for the purpose of sharing opinions and solving problems through group consensus. However, 2015 was the first time in modern Korean history that the Jogye Order hosted such a gathering open to lay participants. The Assembly took place in nine different locations throughout South Korea with three stated purposes: to open dialogue between JO clergy and laity regarding the future of Korean Buddhism, to address the conflict within the order over how to adapt to modern society, and to discuss how to further promote a culture of dialogue between various stakeholders within the order.¹⁶ Through this series of open discussions, participants publicly exchanged opinions regarding the difficulties faced by monastics and the order's laity due to the recent drop in both JO membership and monastic recruitment. Attendees additionally addressed further problems facing the order, such as the lack of transparency in temple finances as well as longstanding allegations of corruption with the JO electoral system. However, lay attendees occasionally clashed with monastics at these meetings, with the monastics strongly contesting a number of the criticisms raised. For example, once such contentious exchange involved the issue of the monastic control of the order's temples and the frequent allegations of monastic financial mis-management. Echoing the criticisms of Buddhist Solidarity

¹⁰ For a complete list see (Kaplan 2015, p. 250).

¹¹ (Kaplan 2015, p. 219).

¹² (Kim et al. 2019).

¹³ (Kosis 2019) http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1PM1502&conn_path=I2.

¹⁴ For more on Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, see (Tedesco 2002, pp. 148–52).

¹⁵ For more on the background narrative on the relationship between the order and the laity in contemporary Korea, see (Lancaster et al. 1997).

¹⁶ (Jogye 2017a, p.1).

for Reform,¹⁷ several prominent lay Buddhists attending the Assembly argued that responsibility for the fiscal management of JO temples should be passed on to lay supporters who have training and experience in financial matters, noting that the tradition of monastics managing temple finances violated prohibitions against Buddhist monks owning property or handling money in the monastic code. However, these criticisms elicited strong responses from several monastics, who saw these rapprochements as a challenge to their authority. One monastic argued that the primary duty of the laity was to support the monastics financially and unquestioningly serve them as their spiritual teachers. Another monastic asked whether the lay attendees raising these criticisms were even “real members of the Jogye Order.”¹⁸

Despite these confrontations, the Assembly was heralded by the JO as a success for fostering open dialogue and for giving a voice to all attendees regardless of their age, gender, or status within the order. The Assembly succeeded in promoting dialogue concerning a number of critical issues which resulted in several practical changes, such as the establishment of new regulations for JO monastics, the launch of a four-fold harmonization committee, and the revitalization of the general meeting of the four-fold assembly.¹⁹ However, most attention within the meetings was focused on the re-establishment of constructive relationships between the order’s monastics and lay practitioners, with the final consensus being that all four parties within the Buddhist community were crucial for the order’s survival and must work to maintain an interdependent and productive relationship.²⁰

However, critics have charged that the discussion fostered by the Assembly was little more than show as the Assembly failed to result in any meaningful changes in the order’s practical operations or the attitudes of its monastic establishment. Furthermore, demographic data of the Assembly attendees suggests there was far less diversity within the meetings than heralded by the JO. Of the 136 attendees, 33% were male monastics and 46% were male lay practitioners, while only 13% of the attendees were lay women and 7% female monastics.²¹ Considering that there are roughly 500 lay members for every JO monastic, the representation of the laity was far from proportional. Furthermore, as close to half of the JO’s 12,000 monastics are female, their significant under-presentation lends support to longstanding accusations of institutional sexism and gender bias within the order.²² Furthermore, the number of participants in the Assembly declined as the meetings progressed, with 115 attendants at the first and 72 at the last, a trend which scholar Jaehyun Park directly attributes to the combative statements of the monastics and the lack of practical outcomes from the meetings.²³

After its completion, the Jogye Order heralded the Assembly as being nothing less than revolutionary for its inclusion of both monastic and lay participants. However, accusations that the Assembly failed to produce any meaningful changes were validated by statements made by Ven. Hyuneung, head of the Jogye Order’s Education Department shortly following the Assembly.²⁴ In an interview with a prominent Buddhist newspaper, the *Beopbo Sinmun*, Ven. Hyuneung defended the views of the order’s monastic establishment, regarding the laity as secondary participants in the order who should remain subservient to the monastics. In Ven. Hyuneung’s opinion, Buddhist monastics serve as meditation specialists residing in temples isolated from the concerns of the world, making it impossible for them to engage with secular society. While monastics are responsible for teaching the laity, it is not their responsibility to leave their temples and practice the Bodhisattva ideal within wider society. Rather, Hyuneung delegates this role to the order’s lay practitioners, whom he views as free

¹⁷ (Tedesco 2002, pp. 148–51).

¹⁸ (Seo 2015).

¹⁹ (Jogye 2017b, pp. 3–4).

²⁰ (Jogye 2017b, p. 43).

²¹ (Jogye 2004b, Appendix pp. 1–23).

²² (Kim 2013).

²³ (Park 2015, pp. 5–6).

²⁴ (Beopbo Sinmun n.d.) <http://www.beopbo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=87016>.

from the responsibilities of the order's monastics. Hyuneung's comments largely reinforced the JO's own bylaws concerning the roles and duties of its laity.

Such comments from the JO leadership so soon after the Assembly had a polarizing effect within the order, instigating further debate over the relationship between Buddhist monastics and laity. Ven. Beopeung at the Buddhist Social Policy Institute challenged a number of Ven. Hyuneung's views.²⁵ According to Beopeung, Hyuneung's comments draw a clear line between the roles of monastics and the laity, implying that neither should interfere with the other. Beopeung interprets this as a strong warning that the laity should not involve themselves in monastic affairs but rather focus their efforts on charity and propagating Buddhism within secular society, ignoring any ethical misconduct by the order's monastics. Beopeung additionally notes that Hyuneung's views free monastics from maintaining any ethical accountability to their lay supporters and further questions whether the order's laity are educated well enough to serve effectively as the JO's representatives in Korean society. He concludes by charging that Hyuneung's views are outdated and contradict the teaching of the Buddha in Early Buddhism. On the popular online news and blog aggregate Café Daum, a fellow JO monastic Ven. Heojeong echoed Beopeung's criticisms, denouncing Hyuneung's statements as a fundamental misinterpretation of Mahāyāna Buddhism.²⁶ Heojeong further asserts that Korean Buddhist monastics have traditionally neglected their practice while only hiding away from the world in their temples, noting that Hyuneung's views actually belittle the role of monastics and limit them to teachers of subjects that they, themselves, do not practice.

Not all responses were critical of Ven. Hyuneung, however, and his comments received a significant amount of support in Korea's Buddhist media from the JO establishment. For example, in an op-ed article published by the *Beopbo Sinmun* newspaper Joongang Sangha University professor Dr. Eungchul Kim supports Ven. Hyuneung's views on the role of the laity.²⁷ According to Dr. Kim, it is the role of lay practitioners to propagate Buddhism within the secular world while also supporting and maintaining Korean Buddhist culture by actively participating in religious events at temples. Kim adamantly opposes the idea that the laity should involve themselves in temple management or monastic affairs in any way, cautioning that it could have a destabilizing effect on Korean Buddhism. Rather, he reiterates the establishment's view that the primary role of the laity in temple life is to serve as patrons and protectors of the monastics, nothing more. This contentious debate over the roles of the order's monastics and laity remains ongoing. In June 2019, the Buddhist journal *Bulgyo Pyeongron* published an editorial by editor Jaeyoung Seo, supporting monastic supremacy over the order's laity.²⁸ According to Seo, attaining enlightenment is difficult for monastics, and thus even more so for lay Buddhists, so the laity must discipline themselves and strive even harder to earn merit by propagating Buddhism and recruiting new members. As such, the laity should avoid publicizing the scandals involving JO monastics for fear of driving away potential converts. Seo even claims that laity who criticize the immoral behavior of monastics are not true Buddhists, admonishing these critics to instead focus on their own spiritual development, and questions whether the precepts guiding the behavior of Buddhist monastics need to be revised and liberalized.

The statements of Ven. Hyuneung and his supporters are largely representative of the attitudes of the JO's monastic establishment toward the order's laity and reinforce the roles for them prescribed in the order's "laity laws." These views and regulations have remained unchanged since the 2015 Assembly and are problematic for a variety of reasons. By limiting the laity to only supporting roles within the order's temples and administration, JO monastics are freed from any accountability to their lay supporters. Meanwhile, the laity are expected to continue donating money to the order

²⁵ (Beopeung 2015).

²⁶ (Heojeong 2015).

²⁷ (Kim 2015).

²⁸ (Bulgyo Pyeongron n.d.) <http://www.budreview.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=2076>.

without having any input or transparency concerning what is done with their donations.²⁹ Many lay practitioners within the JO find this attitude unreasonable, if not insulting, following recent scandals within the order's leadership. Furthermore, as noted by Ven. Beopeung, the active participation of the order's laity has become limited primarily to the propagation of Buddhism in secular society. As a result, the laity has been placed in a position which the JO's education system has not prepared them effectively for (see Section 3 for further discussion) and one which the monastic teachers, themselves, have had little experience. Some have even questioned whether the order's leadership is actually concerned with the spiritual development of its lay members or merely views them as a means of financial support.

3. Attitudes towards the Laity within the Jogye Order's Lay Education System

Throughout the history of Korean Buddhism, monastics have traditionally assumed the role of spiritual teachers to their lay patrons. However, the idea that religious instruction should be systematized into a uniform curriculum is a modern concept that did not arise within the Jogye Order until recent decades as the order sought to more clearly define the roles of its laity. As surveyed in detail by scholar Gwantae Kim, the development of systematic lay Buddhist education in Korea has evolved through several phases.³⁰ With the rapid industrialization of South Korea and the spread of Evangelical Christianity in the 1960s and 1970s, forward-thinking Buddhists recognized the need for deeper religious instruction among the Buddhist laity. In 1973, the *Daewon Bulgyo Gyoyang Dae Hak*, the nation's first private Buddhist college for lay practitioners, was opened by a lay Buddhist organization independent of the JO.³¹ This instigated a national trend as more private Buddhist colleges opened around the country in the 1970s and 1980s, in turn increasing the demand for in-depth religious education among the laity. The Jogye Order responded in 1984 with its first attempt at an organized lay educational system, which was revised several times over the following decades. By the 2000s, lay education had emerged as a major priority for the order, which finalized its current system of lay education in 2011. In accordance with this system, the JO categorized five specialized institutions responsible for educating its lay followers.³² The first of these are Buddhist private colleges (K. *Bulgyogyoyangdaehak*) managed by temples or educational institutions authorized by the Jogye Order to educate the laity about Buddhism, as well as an equivalent online program run through the Jogye Order's Digital College (K. *Dijiteoldaehak*). The JO additionally established a College of Buddhist Counseling (K. *Bulgyosangdamdaehak*) as a training institute for authorized Buddhist counselors, in addition to a Korean Buddhist Teachers' College (K. *Daehanbulgyogyosadaehak*), and the order's Educational Institute (K. *Pogyowon jjeong gyoyukgigwan*) which runs specialized educational programs.³³

The Jogye Order's establishment and financial support of these institutions clearly demonstrates the importance that the order now places on lay education. However, a minority of monastics within the order feel threatened by the increase in education for lay practitioners, fearing that an educated laity will lose faith in the order's monastics. Furthermore, all JO educational institutions remain directly or indirectly in the control of the order's monastic leadership and, thus, are not likely to tolerate teachings that challenge their authority. Echoing Ven. Heojeong's comments (see above), critics have additionally questioned whether it is possible for senior monastics, who have spent the majority of their adult lives within the order's temples, to design a religious educational program that is relevant to the laity and adequately addresses the concerns of those living in the secular world. Other critics, such as Korea University professor Sungdaeg Jo (Sungtaek Cho) (see below), suggest that these laity's needs were irrelevant to the design of this lay education program. Rather, Jo charges that its primary

²⁹ See also (Tedesco 2002, p. 150).

³⁰ For more detail, see (Kim 2012, pp. 9–48).

³¹ For more information, see (Jogye 2004a).

³² (Kwon 2013, pp. 15–16; Jogye 2003; Jogye 2011).

³³ (Kwon 2013, p. 4).

function is to train model lay supporters who fund and protect the order's monastics while working to recruit more members.³⁴ Such criticisms are not only validated by the statements of Ven. Hyuneung in 2015, head of the order's Education Department (see above), but also by a series of special reports on the order's laity published in 2018 in the *Bulgyo Sinmun*, an official newspaper published by the Jogye Order. This report states that the goal of the order's lay education program is to foster "sincere devotees" who feel obliged to serve monastics as physical embodiments of the Buddha, himself.³⁵

3.1. The Jogye Order's Lay Education Program Curriculum

Given these criticisms, this section will further examine both the current curriculum utilized by the order's lay education system as well as two introductory textbooks used in this system to assess the attitudes they express towards the concerns of the order's lay membership. As established in 2011, the Jogye Order's lay education program is divided into four progressive stages.³⁶ The first stage introduces new lay members of the order to the history and basic teachings of Buddhism as well as Korean temple life. Titled *Balsim* ("Arousing Buddhist Faith") this stage introduces new members to basic etiquette, ceremonies, and lay duties practiced within the order's temples and, as noted by Scholar Uri Kaplan, is primarily intended to "construct and unified system of lay Buddhist etiquette."³⁷ After this introduction, new members are required to complete the *Haengdo* ("Practicing the Buddhist Way") program consisting of 12 further hours of religious education over the course of a year. This second stage utilizes the textbook "An Introduction to Buddhism" (K. *Bulgyogaeron*) published by the JO which addresses the basic teachings and doctrines of the order, including the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and the nature of Enlightenment (see Section 3.2 below for further discussion). The *Haengdo* course is conducted either through Jogye Order temples or the Jogye Order Digital University, which offers 25 online lectures to be studied over a three-month period.

Within the third stage of the order's lay education, lay members are required to participate in regular Dharma talks, religious activities and educational training organized by the JO. The curriculum for this stage covers more in-depth topics such as Buddhist history, Korean Buddhist culture, and the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (K. *Geumganggyeong*, a.k.a. *The Diamond Sutra*) and other scriptures valued in Korean Buddhist tradition. In order to complete this stage, lay members are required to attend at least 96 hours of registered educational activities organized by the order over a one-year period. The fourth and final stage of lay education consists of leadership training which qualifies lay members to teach other laity within the order. This advanced course is itself divided into two stages, the *Budong* ("Unperturbed") course and the *Seonhye* ("Wholesome Wisdom") course. After completion, the lay practitioner receives a special designation from the order granting them the title of "special Buddhist propagator."

A recent development, this four-stage curriculum is intended to maximize its effectiveness through step-by-step education that teaches lay believers about Buddhist tradition while establishing Buddhism's connection to contemporary Korean culture through a curriculum relevant to modern society. The program additionally employs modern educational methods, such as learning through online lectures available through the order's Digital University program—an innovation deviating from traditional Buddhist education in Korea. The stated aims of this educational program are not only to educate recent converts, but also existing laity within the order, guiding them to become "sincere members" of the JO.

This raises the question as to how the JO defines a "sincere member" of the order. Critics such as scholar Byungjol Go (Byungchol Ko) claim that this four-stage educational system has little actual relevance to the lives of the laity and ignores their emotional needs, practical concerns, and spiritual

³⁴ (Kaplan 2015, pp. 258–9).

³⁵ (Park 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

³⁶ (Hong 2018, pp. 33–37).

³⁷ (Kaplan 2015, p. 240).

development.³⁸ Go further charges that the JO lay education system was designed to mold the laity into obedient monastic attendants who serve as subordinate members of the order. In Go's opinion, the order continues to regard the education of its laity as a secondary to that of its monastics, and that its facilitation of lay education is insufficient. Furthermore, Go notes that the order defines the status of its lay members only vaguely, in practice equating a "sincere member" with a "skillful propagator of Buddhism." As a result, lay education over-emphasizes the recruitment of new converts, in order to bring financial benefits to the order's monastics through their patronage. Go's criticisms are echoed by Sungdaeg Jo who notes that the JO has failed to state ultimate goals of the lay education program or clarify the ideology behind its curriculum.³⁹ Jo further observes that the JO's four-stage education system was modeled after professional education programs aimed at earning certifications and thus shows little concern with cultivating the spiritual development of the laity or guiding individual practitioners along the path to awakening. In Jo's opinion, the practical purpose of JO's lay education program is, instead, to create a sense of religious identity and belonging within the order's lay membership. As examined in the following section, this lack of clear purpose or ideology has produced textbooks for the laity which contain little more than history and doctrine.

3.2. Introductory Textbooks for the Laity

First published in 1972 by the JO-affiliated Dongguk University, the *Bulgyoseongjeon*, or *Sacred Texts of Buddhism* (a.k.a. "Buddhist Bible," hereafter "*Sacred Texts*"), was one of the first attempts by the JO to make Buddhism accessible to the laity by translating texts written in Classical Chinese into Korean script.⁴⁰ One of the most popular textbooks for lay Buddhists in Korea, the preface of *Sacred Texts* states that it was compiled both as an introduction to various scriptures valued by Korean Buddhist tradition as well as a practical guide to meditation and devotion for lay practitioners. The first chapter of *Sacred Texts* addresses the biography of Shakyamuni Buddha, presenting various stories of his life and those of his disciples while the second surveys basic teachings about wisdom, mercy and Buddhist practice with excerpts from early Buddhist texts in the *Āgamas* and *Nikāyas*. The third chapter introduces Mahāyāna Buddhism with passages from various scriptures important to East-Asian Mahāyāna traditions, such as the *Diamond Sūtra*, while the fourth chapter, in turn, surveys the *Vinaya*—the rules followed by Buddhist monastics. The fifth and final chapter of *Sacred Texts* contains selections of famous stories and quotations from Chinese and Korean Zen (K. *Seon*) masters.

As an introductory textbook for lay Buddhist, *Sacred Texts* is problematic for a variety of reasons. While the scriptural passages included in the first three chapters are relevant, the text fails to include any citations of its sources or commentary explaining why these passages are important or even relevant to the lives of modern Buddhists. Furthermore, the inclusion of a lengthy chapter devoted to monastic precepts in a practical guide for lay Buddhists is questionable and reflects the priorities of the JO's monastic establishment, not those of the laity. As the JO identifies itself as a continuation of the *Imje Seon* (J. *Linchi Zen*) meditation tradition, the subject of the last chapter of *Sacred Texts* is appropriate. However, the book again fails to include any explanation or commentary. Considering that even advanced *Seon* meditators struggle with interpreting these parables, this oversight could cause serious misunderstandings among lay converts. Furthermore, very few lay practitioners even engage in *Seon* meditation practice, reflecting the authors' failure to consider the priorities of their audience.

In an effort to address the issues, an editorial committee was formed in May 2019 in order to revise and update the *Sacred Texts*. Focusing the revised edition on Early Buddhist texts, the *Vinaya*, and the quotations of famous Zen masters, the committee has also decided to include commentary addressing the contemporary lay concerns, such as family relationships and respect for life, in order to

³⁸ (Go 2011, pp. 201–35).

³⁹ (Jo 2013, pp. 243–51).

⁴⁰ (Bulgyoseongjeon Compilation Committee 1972; Buswell 1992, p. 33; Jogye 2012).

better relate Buddhist teachings to modern life and present Buddhist perspectives on contemporary social problems.⁴¹ While the committee's aims are a positive development, the majority of committee members are senior monastics within the JO leadership⁴² so it remains to be seen how effective these revisions will be in adequately addressing the concerns of the laity. Regardless, the JO's efforts to update and revise one of its central textbooks for the laity denotes the seriousness which the order now regards lay education.

A second textbook prescribed by the JO for Buddhist neophytes is *Bulgyogaeron*, or "*Introduction to Buddhism*," which is required reading for completing the *Haengdo* stage within the order's lay education program (see above). As such, *Introduction to Buddhism* was written in order to familiarize lay practitioners with doctrines and practices valued within Korean Buddhist tradition. The book's first chapter introduces the general features of Buddhism as a religion, while the second presents the sacred biography of the Buddha. Broadly following Japanese scholar Akira Hiraakawa's *The History of Indian Buddhism*, chapters three through six then guide the reader through Buddhism's historical development, beginning with Early Buddhism followed by the emergence and maturation of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India and East-Asia. The sixth chapter covers the emergence of the *Seon* tradition and *Ganhwa Seon* meditation as practiced within the Jogye Order, while the final chapter addresses the role of Korean Buddhism in modern society. As a text intended for lay converts, the *Introduction to Buddhism* is clear and easy-to-read. However, as with the *Sacred Texts*, it is questionable whether the historical and doctrinal content of the book's core chapters is relevant to the lives of the laity. While the final chapter of *Introduction to Buddhism* does attempt to relate Buddhism to modern life, the actual contents of this chapter are superficial and fail to present effective Buddhist solutions for problems faced by lay practitioners.

The problems with *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism* become more apparent when compared with *Gendai bukkyō seiten*, or "*Modern Buddhist Scripture*," published by the Young Men's Buddhist Association of Tokyo University (2016). Written specifically as a guidebook for lay Buddhists, the *Modern Buddhist Scripture* introduces Buddhist approaches to the problems of modern society, such as social isolation, depression, environmental destruction, and pollution. The book's contents additionally assist readers in accessing and interpreting often arcane Buddhist texts, aiding them in pursuing further studies of these texts, if they so choose, with an extensive bibliography. In contrast with the largely historical progression of the *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism*, the *Modern Buddhist Scripture* surveys the psychological, social and philosophical applications of Buddhism, with the first chapter discussing identity and the differences between wholesome and unwholesome desires, while the second examines personal issues, such as social isolation and alienation, with selected passages from various Buddhist scriptures. The third introduces Buddhist perspectives on human society, presenting practical Buddhist approaches to various social problems, while the fourth and fifth chapters survey Buddhist philosophy and its exploration of human existence. The final chapter of *Modern Buddhist Scripture* considers what it means to truly live as a lay Buddhist following the teachings of the Buddha in modern secular society.

As with the Korean *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism*, the *Modern Buddhist Scripture* was written as an introductory text for lay practitioners. However, its choice of topics and overall approach is radically different. Unlike *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism*, *Modern Buddhist Scripture* was commissioned, authored, and updated by lay Buddhist scholars and graduate students at Tokyo University.⁴³ Intended specifically to address the concerns and problems of fellow lay practitioners, the authors of *Modern Buddhist Scripture* explain in the preface that the book fulfills a personal duty to provide Buddhist solutions to the problems of modern society.⁴⁴ In contrast, *Sacred Texts* and

⁴¹ (Jogye 2019).

⁴² Five of the seven planning committee members who attended the editorial meeting on 22 May 2019, were monks. (Jogye 2019).

⁴³ The *Gendai bukkyō seiten* was revised six times in the 18 years since its first publication.

⁴⁴ (Young Men's Buddhist Association of Tokyo University 2016, pp. 345–51).

Introduction to Buddhism primarily adopt a historical approach to their presentation of Buddhism, often focusing on complex doctrines and devoting little attention to the needs of the laity. As both texts were commissioned and edited by the JO's monastic leadership, their selection as introductory texts for lay practitioners clearly reflect the priorities of the order's monastic establishment, not those of lay practitioners themselves. Echoing the criticisms of Byungjol Go and Sungdaeg Jo above, the contents of *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism* largely show an indifference to the needs of the laity, but appear to have been selected for the purpose of indoctrinating the laity into a specific religious identity promoted by the order's monastic leadership.

4. Conclusions

This paper has surveyed the attitudes expressed by the Jogye Order's monastic establishment towards the order's lay members in a variety of venues. Specifically, it has examined the order's "General Meeting of the Four-fold Assembly" held in 2015, along with subsequent discussions concerning the roles of the order's laity within the Buddhist media, as well as the order's lay education curriculum developed in 2011, and two introductory textbooks utilized within that curriculum. All four developments represent active attempts by the JO's establishment to address the order's current membership crisis as well as laity's increasing loss of faith in the order's monastic leadership. While there is a diversity of opinions within the order's individual monastics, all four responses demonstrate the continued belief of JO's monastic establishment in their supremacy over their lay supporters, as entrenched within the order's own constitution and "laity laws," as well as the order's continued prioritization of the concerns of its monastics over those of the laity.

As examined in Section 2 above, the JO convened "General Meeting of the Four-fold Assembly" in 2015 in direct response to mounting criticism regarding current political scandals within the order's leadership. The Assembly's meetings were heralded as revolutionary for their inclusion of the laity in the free exchange of ideas. Participants actively debated sensitive issues and the Assembly succeeded in fostering dialogue and positive relationships between the various stakeholders within the order. However, monastic participants occasionally adopted defensive attitudes in response to criticisms voiced by the laity. Furthermore, the Assembly failed to enact any significant changes within the JO's political structure or the views of its monastic establishment, as demonstrated by comments made by the head of the order's Education Department shortly after the Assembly. In the ensuing debate within Korea's Buddhist media, establishment voices repeatedly asserted the monastic supremacy over the order's laity, whose roles they continued to define as dutiful students, financial patrons, and attendants to the monastics in the order's temples.

Section 3 then interrogated views towards the laity expressed within the JO's own lay education program as well as introductory textbooks utilized by this program. Finalized in 2011, the order's four-stage lay education program was a direct response to the desire for meaningful religious training among contemporary Korean lay practitioners. However, as this program is designed and managed by the JO's monastic leadership, it prioritizes concerns of the order's monastics over those of the laity, themselves. Intended to produce "sincere members" of the order, critics charge that the JO's education system, in practice, equates "sincere" lay practitioners with missionaries working to increase the ranks of the order's due-paying membership. Such criticisms are validated by the choice of the *Sacred Texts* and *Introduction to Buddhism* as introductory textbooks for lay practitioners within this system. In contrast with a similar textbooks produced by Japanese lay Buddhists, the JO's textbooks devote little attention to the psychological and social issues faced by the laity and provide few practical solutions to their problems, but rather promote a historical and doctrinal identity valued by the order's monastic establishment.

It is clear that the JO is undergoing a period of extreme transition. Given the steady drop in both lay membership and monastic recruitment over recent decades, the order is facing the possibility of its own disappearance. Compounding this crisis is a growing loss of faith in the order's monastic leadership among its laity, who tire of the frequent scandals and seek greater participation in the

order's practical management. While actively attempting to remedy its membership crisis, the order has so far failed to effectively address the factionalism, scandals, and institutional corruption within its administration. Furthermore, rather than conceding any power to the laity, the attitudes and rhetoric espoused by the order's monastic establishment only reinforces the subservient roles accorded to lay supporters by the order's constitution and "laity laws." It is doubtful whether any efforts based on such attitudes will be effective in addressing these crises.

Yet the JO's end is not certain. In the authors' opinions, the most effective way to revitalize membership within the JO is to engage with the laity in ways that are relevant, meaningful, and supportive of their needs. In order to do this, however, the JO will need to concede some measure of practical decision-making power within the order to the laity. Such radical changes could have far-reaching positive effects. The introduction of professional lay managers to the order's temples, for example, would increase financial transparency and accountability, ending accusations of financial corruption among the order's monastics. Similarly, involving the laity in the creation and production of their own textbooks and curriculum would increase their relevance to the lives of modern South Koreans, potentially attracting more non-Buddhists to the order. However, such changes would require the JO leadership to reevaluate the subservient roles they continue to prescribe for the laity and treat them, instead, as equal partners on the Bodhisattva Path. As noted by Seung Yong Yoon, Director of the Korea Institute for Religion and Culture, the JO would likewise benefit from institutional reforms incorporating the laity into its decision-making structures.⁴⁵ In fact, the order's future might depend on it.

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⁴⁵ (Yoon 2012, pp. 60–61).

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