

# Gender Issues in Contemporary Won Buddhism: Focusing on the Status of Female Clerics

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This paper analyzes the perception on the roles of female clerics and sexual minorities in Won Buddhism. In particular, this study focuses on the areas of disagreement between the organizational leadership and members of Won Buddhism, which was ignited by the failed attempt to revise the religion's statutes on the 100th anniversary of its foundation. The sections in this paper reflect the most controversial issues that have been raised by believers. One of the issues that believers have felt most strongly about is that of the so-called "silenced minority." These are the female partners of male clerics, whose status within Won Buddhism was not even on the agenda of the Revision Committee. This paper utilizes qualitative research analysis and participatory observation as its methodologies. The total number of interviewees is twenty-five, including clerics, lay members, and staff of Won Buddhist institutions. While the interviews were conducted in an unstructured method, I carefully selected the interviewees to reflect diverse perspectives on the issue. The answer to my initial hypothesis that the pressure for change from overseas missionary work will influence the national organization turned out to be negative. However, it seems clear that the practical problems overseas temples face in the field present a useful direction for change in the national organization. To the question why the Revision Committee had to stop in the midst of its operations, the majority answered that the organization was not ready for change. Most people thought that any change in the problematic rules would be possible only around the year 2023 (Wŏn-gi 108) when a new patriarch (*chongpŏpsa*) starts his term or the third generation of Won Buddhism begins. In conclusion, the relative autonomy and reasonable management system of the overseas ministry has limited influence on changing the perspectives of the national members. For a major change in Won Buddhism, however, the rules and systems fundamental to the organizational operation should change first through the active persuasion of those members with vested rights.

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