

Assembling the Laity: Standardizing Lay Buddhist Affiliation in Contemporary Korea
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This paper discusses the new system of lay Buddhist education revolutionizing the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism in the 21st century. Already involving over a half a million Buddhist laypeople and 500 monasteries throughout the country, this system is now the hallmark of the Chogye Order's propagation agenda, and it has transformed lay Buddhist activities in contemporary Korea. It is grounded upon a novel lay registration network which requires attending a basic Buddhism course at a designated temple in order to receive an official Lay ID. It now involves a lay ranking structure based on educational achievements, and culminates in the yearly Lay Propagator Exam. Besides delineating the historical construction of this system, this paper will investigate lay attitudes and motivations for joining the programs, analyze official textbook agendas, and provide ethnographic snippets from classroom rituals, in an overall attempt to paint a picture of the new Korean Buddhist lay orthodoxy the Chogye Order is currently in the process of creating