

Identity Conflict Amidst Environmental Change: An Ethnography of a Korean Buddhist Temple

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ABSTRACT Drawing on a Buddhist context, this study examines how societal-level environmental changes trigger internal identity conflict within a temple between its traditional identity as a silent meditative space for monks and its emerging identity as an open cultural space for people. It investigates the long-term adaptive process through which the conflict has been recognized and managed amid the environmental changes. The findings reveal that the identity conflict gradually led to the formation of two subgroups of monks: a sacred mediator group and a cultural service provider group. While this separation created mild tension between the subgroups, it paradoxically enabled the temple to simultaneously seek two opposing goals: spiritual meditation practice and cultural service. Consequently, the temple continues to pursue the traditional way of monastic life, while responding to the changing societal demands on religion. These findings extend our understanding of how organizational identity conflict is recognized, interpreted, and managed in response to environmental changes. In particular, they elucidate the link between identity and institutional processes by showing how organizational members, not necessarily through the leaders' agentic actions, spontaneously and organically cope with identity conflict triggered by external changes.

Keywords: Buddhist temple, ethnography, group conflict, institutional complexity, organizational identity

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of traditional Buddhist ordainment is liberation (Nibbāna in Pāḷi), typically understood as 'an amoral or [a] supramoral [status] ... experienced either above or below morality in the sense of thought, word, and deed' (Keown, 1991, p. 10). Buddhist monks often view liberation as one's solitary path 'not to be found in any

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new service to mankind, any heightening of the love for one's neighbor, and any good deeds done by a new person' (Bush, 1960, p. 196f, quoted by Keown, 1991, p. 15). Since the 1970s, however, this sacred belief system has been largely challenged owing to the changes in societal values across Asia, such as the rise of individualism, materialism, and secularization (Harvey, 2012). For example, ordinary social members from East and Southeast Asia increasingly support a secular view of Buddhism, wherein Buddhism is no longer considered a manifestation of absolute spirituality but rather an evolving sociocultural structure that should reflect the changing societal demands on religion. This new perspective led some monks to reject the lonely route to liberation and redefine the temple as a cultural space to serve people and society, while others continued to claim that a Buddhist temple should be exclusively a sacred space for monks' meditation practice. From an organizational perspective, if these contradictory perceptions of organizational identity cannot 'be expected to go together' (Albert and Whetten, 1985, p. 270), they inevitably create an identity conflict that divides members' responses to the question 'Who are we, as an organization?' (Whetten and Mackey, 2002, p. 393).

Previous studies have underlined the leaders' agentic role when exploring such conflicts (Battilana et al., 2017; Smets et al., 2015; Smith and Besharov, 2019). In many studies, leaders are depicted as agents of change, who endorse a competing institutional logic to promote organizational identity change and use a set of rhetorical strategies to internally legitimize the logic (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Glynn, 2000). However, scholars have observed that such leaders' actions inadvertently divide organizational members into those who prefer to maintain the status quo and those who support the leaders' initiatives for changes (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Glynn, 2000). The formation of these subgroups, in turn, transforms the abstract organizational identity conflict into a concrete group-level conflict (Battilana and Dorado, 2010). A critical theoretical concern in this line of research has been to clarify how an organization deals with group conflict to effectively reconcile, integrate, or hybridize contradicting elements of the identities at an organizational level (for reviews, see Battilana and Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2013).

While this leader-centred approach has illuminated the nature of the identity conflict and its integration process, there has been little research to explicitly investigate the link between macro societal-level changes and internal organizational identity dynamics. That is, some of the potential mechanisms through which external changes directly trigger the construction and reconstruction of organizational identity continue to remain unexplored. Thornton et al. (2012, p. 132) claimed that 'changes in organizational practices or identities may be triggered by shifts in, or instability among, institutional logics in a particular setting'. This argument implies that organizational identity conflicts may not necessarily occur only through leaders' agentic actions or fiats, and that they could occur through exogenous changes in an institutional field. However, we lack an in-depth understanding of the process, and thus, how the members may spontaneously deal with the conflicts remains a theoretical white space. Therefore, drawing on a Buddhist context, this study seeks to clarify *how organizational members manage internal identity conflicts triggered by external societal changes that challenge a dominant logic yet endorse a competing logic*.

The empirical setting of this study offers a suitable context in which to address the question. Over the last few decades, Korean Buddhist temples have faced a

significant dilemma of having to choose between preserving traditional monastic life (meditation-oriented) and transforming to meet the changing demands of religion (culture-oriented) triggered by macro societal-level changes. Some monks have begun to embrace a new idea that religion is a cultural service, while others still believe that temples should maintain a sacred meditative life. The division has led to the formation of two subgroups and a subsequent identity conflict. This context offers an opportunity to investigate how societal-level changes trigger an identity conflict and how members cope with it.

The findings of this study contribute to the organizational identity and institutional research. First, this study conceptualizes the environmental impact on organizational identity dynamics as ‘inflows’, defined as new materials, culture, technologies, transaction systems, or even food emerging from external changes that gradually permeate the members’ life. The concept reveals the distinct mechanisms through which societal-level changes trigger field-level changes that in turn gradually create significant conflicts between the emerging organizational identity and the traditional one. This study shows that this multi-level trickling effect can be a key theoretical building block towards understanding identity dynamics in the presence of conflicting logics. The second contribution relates to an organization’s adaptive process in managing identity conflict. This study suggests that identity conflict manifested through subgroup conflict can be mitigated by a sequential separation process. It shows that the process is an outcome of an organic and emerging adaptive mechanism for an organization to pursue two contradicting goals.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Organizational Identity Conflict Amid Environmental Changes

Organizational identity – the distinctive, central, and enduring element of an organization – predetermines how its members believe, perceive, and view their organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985). The literature tends to assume that members develop one organizational identity, yet in some cases, the identity can be internally inconsistent, which may potentially lead to identity conflict. The experiencing of identity conflict by organizational members then leads to disagreements regarding the ultimate goal of their organization (Pratt, 2000), the role that they as members need to fulfil (Ashforth et al., 2000), and the value they need to place on their profession (Chreim et al., 2007). The organization then intervenes to manage the conflict.

The relevant literature has been advanced at the intersection of institutional and organizational identity research (Besharov and Brickson, 2016; Gümüşay et al., 2020; Wry and York, 2017). Studies have investigated how an organization, embedded in a decentralized institutional field, reacts to institutional complexity that provides actors with contradicting criteria to define organizational identity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz and Block, 2008; Sadeh and Zilber, 2019). In a decentralized field, competing institutional logics coexist while prescribing opposing values, belief systems, and issues recognized by the actors (Lounsbury, 2007; Malhotra et al., 2021; Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007). The

institutional field then ‘becomes centers of debates in which competing interests negotiate over issue interpretation’ (Hoffman, 1999, p. 351). This leads organizational members to advocate an institutional logic to advance their interests (Reay and Hinings, 2009; Seo and Creed, 2002). In such a situation, organizational identity conflict becomes inevitable as each member’s preferred logic endorses one of the mutually contradicting identities (Dalpiaz et al., 2016).

In investigating the identity conflict process, most studies highlighted the leaders’ role (Smith, 2014; Smith and Besharov, 2019; Zhang et al., 2015). The leaders are depicted as agents of change, who bring a new logic to reconstruct an organizational identity (Smets et al., 2015) or to initiate strategic change (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Yet, the imposition of change often creates conflict with other organizational members who still follow the existing logic. For example, Glynn (2000) documented how the leaders of a symphony orchestra tried to impose commercial logic to reconfigure the organization’s strategic capabilities and resources. This strategic action led to tension with the artist group that placed more value on artistic excellence than economic utility, which was the core priority for the administrator group, who wished to ensure stable operations (Glynn, 2000). Over time, the tension revealed a latent identity conflict and the distinct professional ideologies of musicians and managers (Glynn, 2000). In such situations, leaders look for alternatives to combine the two logics while developing a set of narratives to legitimize their actions (Smith and Tushman, 2005). Subsequent studies similarly captured leaders’ roles as carriers of a competing logic and as coordinators who help members to create new meanings about the conflict (Smith and Besharov, 2019; Waldman and Bowen, 2016; Zhang et al., 2015).

There has been another set of studies that focused on group tension per se, mainly using social enterprise cases. The context of social enterprises was suitable because the nature of the organization itself is a synthesis of a business enterprise that prioritizes profit (commercial logic) and a charitable organization that pursues a social mission (social welfare logic) (Battilana et al., 2015; Pache and Santos, 2013). Studies suggested that group tension can be mitigated by structurally separating the elements of organizational arrangements, including hiring system, workforce composition, learning practice, and culture (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2013). The separation enables the members to work on a specific set of activities that align with their preferred organizational identity. Consequently, the differentiated focus reduces the tension and allows the organization to maintain its dual organizational identities despite the ongoing tension created by the separation (Battilana et al., 2015). Scholars frame this separation mechanism as ‘separation strategy’ (Hahn et al., 2014), ‘differentiation’ (Smith and Tushman, 2005), ‘splitting’ (Lewis, 2000), or ‘juxtaposition’ (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015).

Altogether, the existing studies have documented the organizational processes regarding how identity conflict arises within an organization, especially in a decentralized field, and how organizations manage the conflicting identities. However, these studies tend to examine specific cases in which the competing logic is brought into the organization via the leader’s agency. Thus, identity conflict directly caused by external societal-level pressure, not necessarily through leaders’ actions, remains relatively unexplored.

There are a few studies that can be useful to fill this gap (e.g., Chreim et al., 2007; Glynn and Abzug, 2002; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Pache and Santos, 2010;

Reay and Hinings, 2009; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). For example, Dunn and Jones (2010) demonstrated that changes in public perceptions about the medical profession triggered an identity reconstruction of US medical institutes. As public care logic and science logic competed in the medical education field, the organizational identity of medical schools underwent repeated reconstruction, either as research institutions or as public medical authorities. In a similar vein, Rao et al. (2003) examined the identity reconstruction process of French fine dining restaurants by documenting how the *nouvelle cuisine* movement challenged the identity of traditional French gastronomy. Others investigated how environmental movements between 1970 and 2010 (York et al., 2016; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), development of shareholder capitalism from 1980 to 2000 (Ioannou and Serafeim, 2015; Meyer and Höllerer, 2010), diffusion of new legal professionalism between 1990 and 2000 (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Sherer and Lee, 2002), and diffusion of the US business education model in Europe from 1990 to 2010 (Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014) directly triggered reconstructions of organizational identity. The longitudinal process gradually divided organizational members into those who shielded the existing organizational identity and those who tried to reclaim the identity by aligning with a newly emerging logic (see also Bartunek, 1984; Thornton et al., 2012). In these studies, an external change initially triggered internal identity dynamics by separating members, not necessarily through a leaders' top-down process. The studies suggest that institutional changes can shape and reshape organizational identity without the leaders' filtering.

From the individual actor's perspective, this means that organizational members, as enactors of institutions, are directly exposed to experiencing institutional changes and thus interpret the meaning of changes in their own context (see Patriotta, 2020a, 2020b; Patriotta and Lanzara, 2006).^[1] To theorize the *encounter* between individual actors and institutional changes, Patriotta (2020b, p. 215) developed a specific concept, 'noise', defined as 'any disturbance that somehow upsets the status quo and calls for interpretation on the part of those who experience it'. When the encounter creates a chasm between the actors' sense of self and the changing world, it then questions the actors' perception of self and gradually initiates their identity reconstruction process, which in turn drives them to develop a new organizational identity claim. Relatedly, recent debates on the role of actors and actorhood in institutional theory have discussed the tension between agency and institutions (Bitektine et al., 2020; Meyer and Vaara, 2020; Voronov and Weber, 2020). In particular, scholars have addressed the issue of whether individuals indeed inhabit institutions and thus directly experience external changes when confronted with institutional changes or competing logics. The articulation of the link between identity and institutional dynamics offers a more complex view of the identity construction process. However, even more recent studies do not explicitly explain how institutional changes produce identity conflict among organizational members and how this conflict is resolved over time.

This gap is also prominent in social enterprise research. Most researchers tend to presume that the identity conflict is inherent in the organizational system, regardless of the characteristics of its institutional environment. As noted earlier, the focus of the studies was largely on the organizational process to address the group tension, for example, including establishing spaces of negotiation (Battilana et al., 2015), selective

coupling strategy (Pache and Santos, 2013), and oscillating decision-making (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014). Thus, we know that such structural mechanisms can help members to reconcile conflicting identities. However, it is unclear whether the separation and reconciliation processes revealed are still effective when radical changes in the external environment significantly alter organizational members' perceptions about their organization's tradition, history, and even core functioning. Filling this gap is important not only due to the lack of research but also because it can provide insights into key organizational mechanisms to tackle identity conflict, especially when charismatic leaders are absent.

Uncovering the link between macro external changes and internal identity dynamics requires a focus on individual members' interpretation of societal changes and their collective and spontaneous reactions, because while some may interpret the external changes as disturbances that threaten the core elements of the organizational identity, others may consider the changes as opportunities to bring a competing logic. This variance perhaps occurs, as 'logics will be more or less cognitively accessible to actors depending upon their experience and how they are situated in an institutional field' (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 132). Therefore, we need to investigate how the values and belief systems of each organizational member are redefined, reconstructed, or reinforced amid societal changes and how their emergent social interactions influence the resolution mechanism of identity conflict at an organizational level.

Religious organizations provide a suitable context for filling this gap, as they are deeply embedded in an uncertain institutional environment in which contradicting criteria of legitimacy and moral interpretations of religious value have coexisted (Bartunek, 1984; Gümüşay et al., 2020). For example, when public perceptions about the Christian belief system changed from the sacred to the secular in the 1970s and the 1980s, some priests increasingly preferred to transform 'traditional-strict churches' to introduce 'secularized-lenient churches', while others chose to follow strict monastic rules to maintain the conventional identity of the church (Iannaccone, 1994; Warner, 1993). In the absence of a strong leadership, priests were increasingly divided in their opinion, and the change finally disclosed the churches' latent identity conflict (Beckford, 1985). Similarly, Buddhist temples face a dilemma of whether to maintain their sacred identity or adapt to the changing societal environment. This study explores how monks from a Korean Buddhist temple, as individual agents, addressed the conflict brought on by societal changes.

METHODS

Empirical Context: A Korean Buddhist Temple

I chose one of the largest Korean Buddhist temples (K-Temple hereafter), which is highly regarded in Korean society for its strict monastic rules and meditative traditions. K-Temple particularly satisfies two important conditions to answer my research question. First, the leaders' roles in K-Temple are highly limited to making important organizational decisions. K-Temple follows a congregation of multiple genealogies to practice meditation. It

therefore has no single charismatic leader who has full control over organizational decision-making, and thus, each monk actively exercises his authority to influence the decision.^[1] Figure 1 presents the organizational chart of K-Temple reflecting the governance system. Although it looks similar to a typical organizational hierarchy, monks in higher positions are recognized as symbolic figures, and each division and department exercises independent authority.

Second, K-Temple is concerned about the radical societal changes witnessed in the dynamic modern history of Korea over the past 20 years. Korean society has become radically urbanized, individualized, and industrialized and highly secularized (Kim and Kim, 2003). Additionally, the public has begun to doubt the benefits of the Buddhist meditative spirit and question how the isolated practice of the monks can be aligned with the role of religion in contemporary society. Furthermore, Buddhist believers demand practical benefits from their commitment to Buddhism, such as a cultural-aesthetic experience and clinical therapy service, which the sacred elements of Buddhism hardly cater to. These are the significant external changes that may be an immediate threat to Korean Buddhist temples, as the lives of Buddhist monks rely on donations from believers and visitors.

Data Sources

Participant observations. The main fieldwork was conducted between May 1 and July 31, 2015. During the fieldwork, I lived with the monks, shadowed their daily lives, and worked with them as a team while adhering to monastic rules and manners. In the temple, I could observe the various organizational functions and the monks' activities. Thus, participant observations formed the primary data source of this study. After the fieldwork, I revisited the temple multiple times between September 2017 and October 2021 to conduct interviews with the key informants.

Monks' ordainment diaries. Another source of data was the ordainment diaries of the senior monks, who recorded their ordainment progress and daily monastic life for the first 6 to 12 months after entering the monastic community. I obtained four diaries that totalled 142 pages describing anecdotes from their daily life and progress in meditation.

Interviews and informal conversations. I also conducted two rounds of formal and informal interviews with the monks. The first round was held during the main fieldwork process, wherein the regular interviews were scheduled usually after lunch. In all, 32 interviews were conducted, spanning 46 hours. Most first-round interviews were used to supplement the observation notes I had assembled from the field. The second round occurred after completing the three-month fieldwork in K-Temple. The focus of these interviews was more specific and aimed to identify how the identity conflict initially arose as a result of the societal-level external changes over the past 20 years. I conducted 27 interviews spanning 68 hours, and 19 of the conversations involved the same monks who were interviewed during the fieldwork.

Archival documents. I drew on two types of archival documents – K-Temple's historical records (comprising the temple's written history, monks' writings, and K-Temple

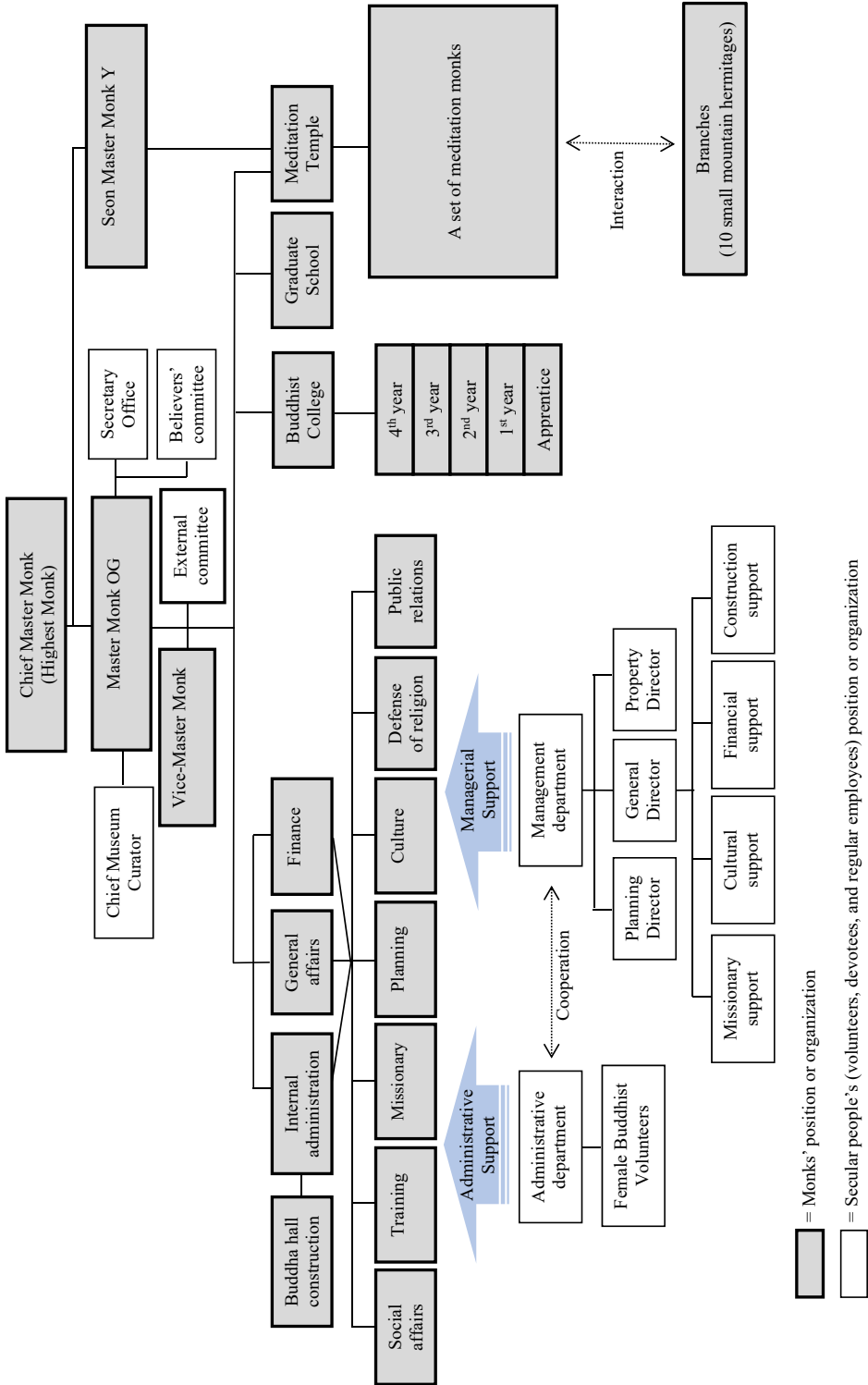


Figure 1. Simplified organizational chart of K-Temple

committee meeting records) and the magazines published by the temple. These documents were mainly used to capture when the identity conflict began, how it became a significant organizational issue, and finally how it manifested in their daily monastic lives. After the fieldwork, I also asked for some descriptive statistics from the Cultural Corps of Korean Buddhism to validate the monks' version from the research site.

Data Analysis

The analysis involved multiple iterations between the data and the relevant theories. In the process, I took three steps. The first step focused on the ways external change impacted the daily lives of the monks; the second step focused on how the identity conflict, triggered by the external change, was manifested in K-Temple's organizational system; and the third step involved combining the results from the first two steps of the analysis to unpack the link between the external changes and the internal identity conflict.

Analysis step one. The first analysis aimed to reveal how the new identity (temple as an open cultural space for people) was initially formed, triggered by the changing environment, and how the external changes influenced the monks' way of life that enshrined the traditional identity (temple as a spiritual space for monks). Specifically, I coded large parts of the observation notes into 'traditions' and 'internal changes', manifested as organizational rules, structures, meditation techniques, authority systems, recruiting systems, and so on. The internal changes in this analysis refer to key organizational alterations that conflicted with the traditional elements of monastic life. Subsequently, I reduced a set of relevant empirical themes into three conceptual categories: (1) inflow of external materials, (2) inflow of external systems, and (3) inflow of a new culture. Inflows are defined in this study as new materials, culture, technologies, transaction systems, or even food emerging from external changes that gradually permeate the members' lives.

Analysis step two. The second step was to dig deeper into the nature of the conflict between the traditional identity and the new identity. To identify those who still endorsed the traditional identity and those who preferred the new, I focused on 11 senior monks and nine junior monks because they collectively took important organizational decisions. The initial in-depth interviews confirmed that their responses to the ongoing organizational changes systematically differed. The disparities were also evident in the multiple meetings and informal teatimes, when they exchanged their views on the organizational changes. Over time, it was possible to identify two distinct groups in the temple whose members shared similar stances on various organizational issues: Monk Y's group (ten monks) and Monk S's group (16 monks). For simplicity in coding, I labelled them as 'meditator group (MG)' and 'service provider group (SG)', respectively.

As reflected in the data, my focus here was on group tension, as it reflected the organizational identity conflict (e.g., Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Battilana and Dorado, 2010;

Glynn, 2000). I thus conducted a comparative group analysis to investigate how group separation manifested in the monks' everyday lives and organizational system. This allowed me to move from relevant empirical themes to theoretical categories that reflected systematic group separation. Consequently, three categories of separation that reinforced the group dispute emerged: (1) task separation, (2) philosophical separation, and (3) spatial separation. Figure 2 summarizes the data structure from the first and second steps of the analysis.

Analysis step three. The third step was aimed at identifying a historical, adaptive process that could reveal potential linkage between the inflows (the impact of external change on monastic life found in analysis step one) and the group separation (manifestation of the impact found in analysis step two). Therefore, I first divided the entire period – the 20 years from 1998 to 2018 – into three phases, based on the significant changes and events in the institutional field. Such periodization enables researchers to capture the temporal process of an interested organizational phenomenon (see Langley, 1999). I then codified the relevant historical data at different levels of analysis. To simplify the coding process, I tagged the salient changes in each period as 'societal-level changes' and 'field-level changes'. At the organizational level, I used the set of concepts I had developed in the previous analyses – the three inflows and the three separation mechanisms – to examine how the external changes in each period trickled down into internal identity dynamics. In doing so, I codified the relevant historical data from each period, by tagging the inflows and separation mechanisms that were salient in each period. In this way, the impact of external changes on the internal identity construction could be revealed.

Through this process, two competing logics were identified – service logic and meditation logic – that coexisted in the field. Further, I found that the series of external changes gradually legitimized the service logic that defined monks as service providers, while marginalizing the meditation logic that depicted monks as ascetics distant from society. I could also ascertain two important observations: (1) how the three modes of the inflow impacted the monastic life, coupled with the societal changes in Korea, and (2) how each mode of inflow leads to identity conflict and finally subgroup formation. Overall, the findings disclose a long-term multi-level process of how a new organizational identity emerged and how conflicting identities have persisted over time.

FINDINGS

Aligning with the analysis steps, I sequentially report (1) the three types of inflow (impact of external changes on monastic life), (2) the group separation, and (3) the results of the third analysis.

Impact of External Changes on Monastic Life

Overview. Societal-level environmental changes influenced traditional monastic life in three different ways that are conceptualized in this study as 'inflow of external materials', 'inflow of external systems', and 'inflow of a new culture'. Altogether, these inflows

triggered the formation of a new organizational identity that shaped monks' roles as service providers. Table I presents the selected evidence.

Inflow of external materials. In response to the changing demands on religion, Buddhist temples were compelled to develop new services, such as tourist programs. Although the programs offered visitors a rich cultural experience, the rise of the tourism business within the temple unexpectedly led to the easy permeation of external-secular materials into the monks' lives.

To illustrate, I often spent teatime with K-Temple monks. After a hard day's work, the monks often introduced me to rare food, including roast coffee from Colombia and Thailand, macaroons from France, and high-quality pu'er tea from Southern China. The new cuisine seemed to flow freely into K-Temple, as these service programs contributed to blurring the boundaries between the temple and society. One day, senior MG Monk G and I had a conversation regarding this observation.

MG Monk G: When I was ordained, monks only had a piece of kimchi and rice. So, we always recognized that even the humble food we had was precious. But monks do not seem to appreciate the meaning of food these days. A lot of good food is now available in the temple. If all external things enter this way, there would be no difference between monastic life and secular life.

The ethnographer (me): You said that 'external things come along'. What does this mean?

MG Monk G: It means that secular things have started to permeate monastic life. If we can see, taste, feel, and touch things in the same way that we used to do in our secular life, the meaning of monastic life withers away for those who decide to pursue monkhood to renounce their secular-material life.

Similar conversations and interview data revealed the nuanced relationship between the monastic community and secular society, which increasingly became blurred. Words such as 'distance', 'external things', and 'inflow' frequently appeared in my observation notes, indicating that Buddhist organizations are unique in that they are distant from society while still requiring support from it. MG Monk G summarized the relationship: 'There is an old saying. Buddhist temples should maintain proper distance from secular society. That proper distance is one where a temple can hear a rooster's morning cry from the village'.

The inflow of external materials was not limited to food. SG Monk T, in charge of the monks' education, talked about his passion for giving monks new opportunities to learn diverse forms of knowledge. In their committee meetings, SG Monk T argued that by introducing external lecturers, a temple could teach monks to apply the knowledge obtained from Buddhism to other intellectual areas, such as social welfare studies and cognitive psychology. However, a few monks (MG monks) opposed the idea and argued that external studies might disrupt monks' concentration on meditation. I had a chance to interview an anonymous MG monk who was opposed to the inflow of external studies.

Anonymous MG monk: Many monks contribute toward various fields of academia. I do not disagree with the idea. I am just worried about external studies flowing into the

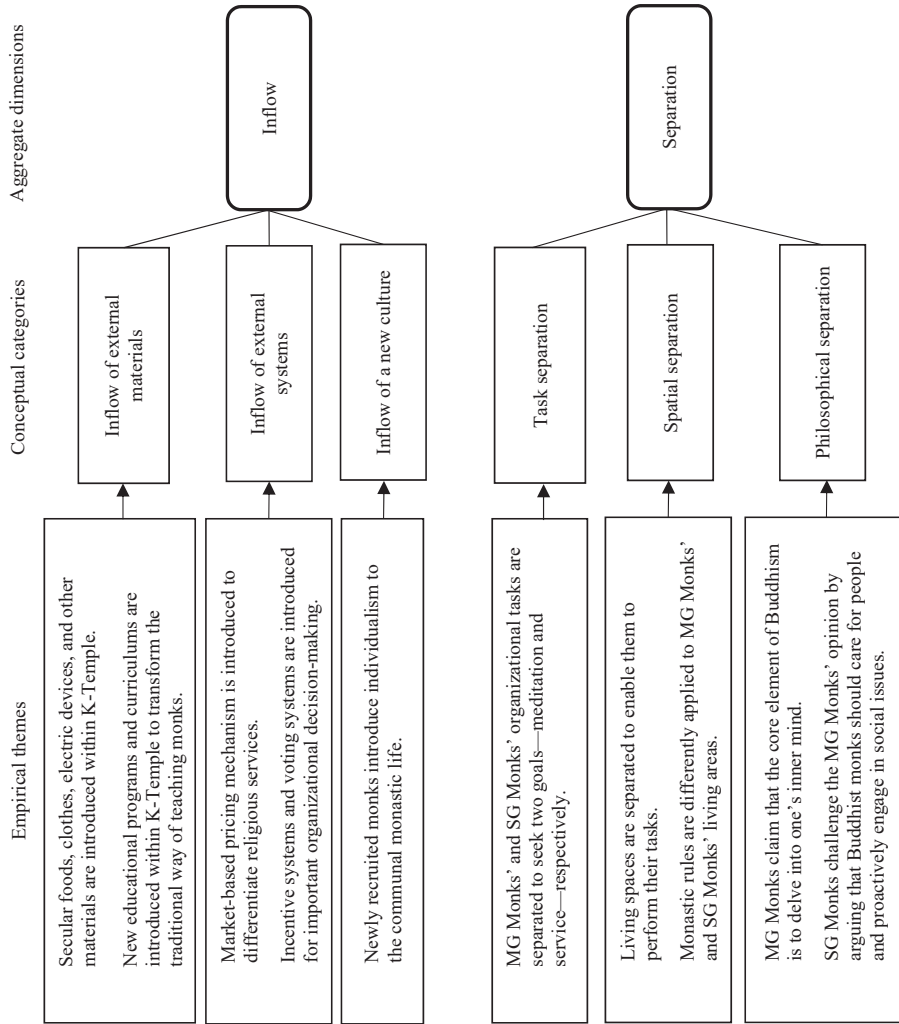


Figure 2. Data structure

Table I. Three types of inflows into K-Temple from changes in the environment

Theoretical theme	Selected quotes from interviews (I) and observations (O)
Inflow of external materials	<p>'Since we opened our door to people, a lot of external things have been introduced to our life. While the external things make our life easy, they somehow threaten the traditional way we live'. (I)</p> <p>'One of the most important reasons for religion losing its identity is that it accepts changes in society without any filtering. We now enjoy good foods, clothes, and even smartphones. But I am not sure how these things help us in being a good mediator'. (I)</p> <p>New cultural programs were launched to attract the local people. Some of the activities of these programs include tea-making and tea-manners classes in the temple. (O)</p> <p>'As the tourist program becomes an important part of our economy, we charge differential prices for Buddhist lanterns. This is because they are different products. Economy is another area of monastic life. We therefore should apply a different rule'. (I)</p> <p>'Over the past decades, the pricing mechanism [market-based pricing] has become a principal way of making decisions in the temple. I think it is a serious matter since the temple is not a market'. (I)</p> <p>K-Temple introduced a voting system as an organizational decision-making process, instead of the traditional unanimous decision-making. (O)</p>
Inflow of new a culture	<p>'I think it is about change. We should change to adapt to a changing society. Most people out there do not care how difficult our ordainment is. They think about how they can benefit from religion. We should accept the change to make a new monastic culture'. (I)</p> <p>K-Temple renovated a part of its building structure to ensure better living conditions (e.g, private spaces) for newly recruited monks. (O)</p> <p>Monks started to use advanced IT devices, such as smartphones, in and out of the temple, enabling them to handle tasks without physical interaction with their colleagues. Smartphones allow them to communicate with secular people, including believers and business partners. (O)</p>

temple ... It is not too late for student monks to be exposed to other areas of academics after completing the entire disciplining phase.

Such conversations revealed how various external materials entered the temple, including food, knowledge, and information-technology devices. These inflows created an implicit tension between SG and MG monks. However, the inflow of external systems into K-Temple triggered more immediate problems.

Inflow of external systems. By external systems, I mean external (secular) organizations' policies and practices that conflict with the temple's traditional organizational norms and rules. These include the market-based transaction and financial incentive system. For example, almost all Buddhist temples across Asia offer funeral services to people. In this service, temples place the believers' ancestral tablets in the Buddha Hall. During my stay at K-Temple, monks discussed the pricing mechanism for ancestral tablets (see Figure 3). An important issue here was whether the price of the tablets had to be differentiated. Tablets can be priced based on their size, quality, and location in the temple. Presumably, a tablet with many shiny decorations can be more expensive than its duller, smaller counterpart. Yet, this pricing mode becomes problematic, as the differentiating price goes against 'equality', a core principle in Buddhism. MG Monk J offered his view on this:

A growing problem is that even monks get used to this [the pricing mechanism]. If a temple is run this way, Buddhism would become an elite religion accessible only for the rich. Buddhism was born against Brahmanism that endorsed the elite classes, but the current temple unfortunately looks like a Brahman one.



Figure 3. Ancestral tablets in Buddhist temples

Source: Korean Buddhist Newspaper (9 September 2017) <http://www.ibulgyo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=160504>.

Note: Mrs. Choon-Ran Jung prays at the Buddhist ancestral tablet of her mother-in-law enshrined in Bul-Gwang temple.

MG Monk J mentioned that the market-based pricing mechanism was introduced in Buddhist temples a long time ago. However, he argued that temples should treat people equally and that the current price gap in obtaining ancestral tablets should be discouraged. This conversation casts a different light on believers' worshipping behaviours. Buddhist believers dressed in relatively nice outfits stood in front of a large, illuminated tablet located in the centre of the Buddha Hall. Those who were dressed in old and shabby outfits went to a corner of the hall, as their ancestral tablets were placed there. When I mentioned it to MG Monk Y, he said:

In the old days, there was a burial custom. It was expensive to bury a body and perform the entire funeral. The undertakers, against their will, were sometimes blamed as people who sold death. I am worried that temples selling tablets would be blamed for the same thing.

The pricing of the ancestral tablets provides strong evidence demonstrating how external changes – marketization and commercialization of religion – have permeated the Buddhist monastic life. MG Monk G finally commented, 'If [a] temple is run by the market system, the distance between secular society and the monastic community will eventually disappear'.

Inflow of a new culture. Another important inflow, I found in K-Temple, was the dispute in the cultural arena of monastic life, particularly between Confucian-based collectivism and Westernized individualism. K-Temple senior monks viewed the newcomer monks as the instigators of this change. Newly recruited monks, who commenced their ordainment in the 21st century, tended to maintain individualistic lifestyles even within the Buddhist temple. However, it directly contradicted the values promulgated by traditional monastic life.

The first relevant anecdote was observed during the temple's collective work time. I mainly worked with seven apprentice monks from K-Temple in my everyday monastic life. The tasks comprised cooking, washing the dishes, and cleaning the temple garden. After a walk in the temple premises, one of the parents waited around the premises to meet apprentice monk No. 4. He greeted his parents in an open space in the temple, and together they ate the humble food that his parents had brought with them. SG Monk G, responsible for internal administration, allowed the parents to visit. However, a one-on-one meeting with a parent is not acceptable in Buddhist temples. Any food donated should be given to the administrative monk first, before distributing it to all apprentice and student monks equally. The personal meetings technically broke the rule of equitable distribution. After a couple of days, I was permitted to interview SG Monk G on this point:

SG Monk G: This practice [of parents having personal meetings with their sons who have decided to become monks] has spread quickly in recent times. But, think about it, in the olden days, people gave birth to three to five children. These days, there are only one or two children per house ... If we strictly prevent personal meetings, it would be harsh on both parents and the apprentice monks who have just started ordainment.

According to the statistics from the Jo-Gye Order of Korean Buddhism, the number of new monks recruited in the 25 regional head temples in Korea had fallen from 363 in

2003 to 213 in 2012. In 2015, only 133 monks began ordainment in the 25 head temples, of which 49 dropped out. A major factor for dropping out was the strict monastic rules. Student Monk K expressed his views on this point:

I do not think that discussing whether drinking Coca-Cola in a temple is important. More important thing is whether all the monastic rules truly help our meditation progress. If the rules are old, I think they must be changed. In fact, most monastic rules, which were developed a thousand years ago, simply do not suit contemporary life.

The in-depth focus group interviews with K-Temple student monks consistently revealed how they considered some of the monastic rules to be misaligned with the contemporary concept of religious life. In a sense, newcomers acted as agents by diffusing individualism to K-Temple and thereby created tension with the existing monastic rules designed to promote communal living. SG Monk B made it clear:

SG Monk B: We have a certain period of apprenticeship for training monks. In the past, even three years was not enough to change them [the newly recruited monks]. It is hard to detach them from the habits they have learned from secular society. Unless they start ordainment in their teens, how can we completely wean them from their habits?

Group Separation

Overview. To identify the impacts of the changing environment on traditional monastic life, I used the term ‘inflows’, which focused on how exogenous changes influence multiple areas of monastic life. In response to the inflows, organizational members were split into those who still stuck to a traditional monastic life by blocking the inflows (Monk Y’s group: MG monks) and those who tried to initiate changes by embracing them (Monk S’s group: SG monks). MG monks strongly argued that the core principle of Buddhist monks is meditation; therefore, Buddhist temples must be a spiritual space for monks’ peaceful meditation practice. In contrast, SG monks were willing to modify traditions to proactively adopt the inflows, thereby quickly adapting to a changing environment. To justify their actions, SG monks claimed that the organizational identity of Buddhist temples should encompass an open cultural space, where monks are seen as providers of cultural services. This tension between them was managed through structural separation. Although implicit tension remained, the complete segregation paradoxically reduced the latent conflict between both groups. This division manifested in three different ways: (1) task separation, (2) philosophical separation, and (3) spatial separation. Table II presents data on this separation.

Task separation. First, the tasks of the two groups in the organization were completely separated. All SG monks attended to the 11 functions (general affairs, finance, internal administration, Buddha-hall construction, social affairs, training, missionary work, planning, culture, defence of religion, and public relations), which they needed to fulfil to run K-Temple (see Figure 1). One SG monk oversaw each function along with several fellow SG monks called secretary monks. They often worked with the administrative and

Table II. Separation between service provider monks and meditator monks in K-Temple

	<i>Service provider group (SG monks)</i>	<i>Meditator group (MG monks)</i>
Task separation	Eleven organizational functions: (strategic) planning, finance, social engagement, internal training and education, internal administration, construction, public relations, general affairs, missionary work, religious law, cultural programs, and museum maintenance	Meditation
Observation data (O)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SG monks manage their time depending on given organizational tasks. • SG monks spend more time developing their specialty in a specific organizational function. • SG monks are willing to learn from secular people about running an organization. • SG monks use smartphones for their works. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MG monks follow a traditional monastic schedule to stably practice meditation. • MG monks go deep within their minds, developing higher-order meditative skills. • MG monks have little motivation to communicate with secular people. • MG monks do not use smartphones.
Spatial separation	Open to local people and visitors	Isolated from society
Observation data (O)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SG monks' living spaces are not limited by the physical boundaries of K-Temple. SG monks freely go to work outside the temple. • SG monks welcome secular Buddhist believers into their living space. • SG monks use their living space as an office to greet business partners and visitors. • Some SG monks commute to other places, including orphanages and schools, which separate their living space from their workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MG monks' living spaces are limited by the boundaries of the spiritual monastery, and people are prohibited from entering their living space. • MG monks cannot meet Buddhist believers in their living space because of the monastic rule. • MG monks use their living space only for meditation practice. • Some MG monks occasionally visit other MG-monks' living spaces, often located much deeper and higher in the mountains in which K-Temple is enshrined.
Philosophical separation	Buddhism is a way of serving people.	Buddhism is a way of exploring the inner mind.
Observation data (O)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SG monks think of the Buddhist temple as a cultural hub for local people. • SG monks offer tourist services to outside people. • SG monks participate in religious events together with secular Buddhist believers. • SG monks sometimes give lectures to people from outside the temple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MG monks think of the Buddhist temple as a meditative space for monks. • MG monks do not engage in any tourist program. • MG monks sometimes miss participating in religious events due to their focus on meditation. • MG monks have no responsibility to give lectures to people from outside the temple.

managerial department, which consists of volunteering believers and regular employees. The routines of SG monks at K-Temple were very similar to those of secular people in any organization. They worked until 6:00 p.m. and practiced meditation in the morning. Thus, although SG monks stayed on a mountain far away from society, they spent much time performing managerial tasks.

MG monks, however, spent most of their time meditating and completing meditation-related research, completely free from administrative duty. Their task was meditation practice directed towards spiritual achievement, which began at 5:00 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m. The monks had several breaks to relax in their daily meditation schedule, and the remaining time was allocated for chanting and walking. As meditation required high levels of concentration, senior MG monks preferred to live in independent hermitages, in relatively higher and deeper locations on the mountain. In the organizational chart (see Figure 1), they are led by Seon Master Monk Y, not Master Monk OG, who mostly interacts with the SG monks. MG monks follow their own norms, which apply only to their daily monastic routine.

Philosophical separation. SG and MG monks also followed distinctive philosophies in their approach to monastic life and the meaning of Buddhism. While SG monks tended to place greater value on active social engagement, modernization, and the globalization of Buddhism, MG monks sought discipline to achieve higher religious enlightenment; hence, their attention was always directed inward.

One of the compelling examples to illustrate the difference was observed in a K-Temple committee meeting. Seventeen senior monks in grey robes sat cross-legged in a circle planning the upcoming lantern festival to celebrate Buddha's birthday. Visitors pay a fee to light a lantern, which is believed to bring good wishes to their family and friends. The festival marks an opportunity for the temple to connect with the community and fundraise. A senior SG Monk S suggested that the temple could even erect a temporary Buddhist tea shop in front of its entrance to offer refreshments, which could also offset the expenses involved in the festival celebrations. Monk S said:

Sometimes, we need to treat visitors as valuable customers. If people feel uncomfortable in hot weather, we should do something for them even though we go cross the budget ... In fact, it is not [only] our ceremony. It is for all people.

In an informal conversation later, most SG monks who worked with him consistently emphasized the *service mindset*. They argued that it is the religious responsibility of Buddhist monks to serve people by welcoming them and listening to their suffering.

However, MG monks claimed that a temple should be a peaceful meditative community that improved monks' meditative practices. MG Monk Y said:

If we build a coffee shop and hold a music concert for Buddha's birthday, visitors might doubt who we are as Buddhist monks ... There are already a lot of constructions and events going on in the temple ... What we truly need is probably to keep this temple as an origin of Seon meditation, not to make it a tourist spot.

Monk Y and his group (MG monks later) consistently highlighted a *meditative mindset* that implies more strict isolation from secular society.

Spatial separation. The living arrangements of SG and MG monks were also separated (see Figure 4 for a simplified organizational map). Both groups rarely met, except during important religious ceremonies. SG monks worked with six older female Buddhist believers who volunteered in the administrative department and 13 regular employees who worked in the management department. The management department was adjacent to the SG monks' living quarters. Owing to the proximity, SG monks could efficiently work with the people.

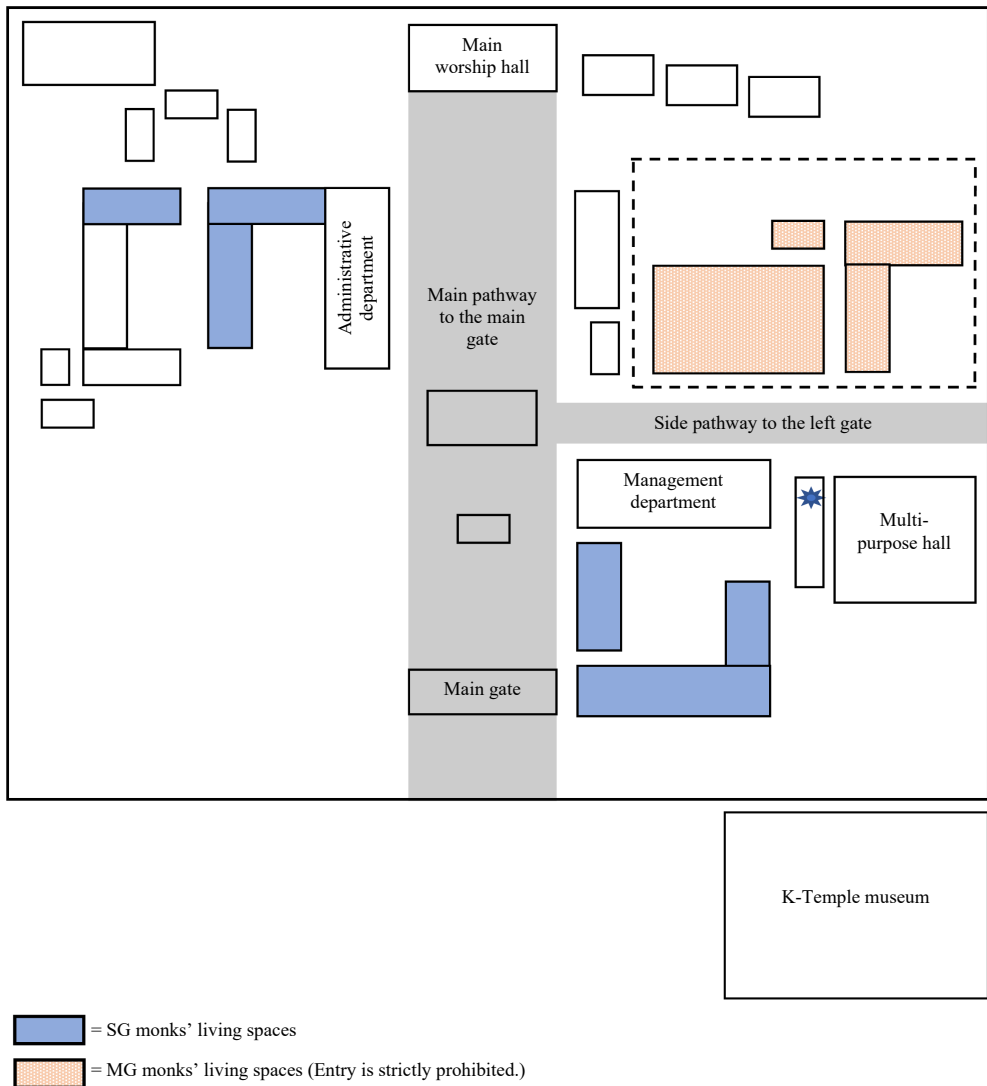


Figure 4. Simplified map of K-Temple
 Note: The star indicates the ethnographer's room.

MG monks, however, lived exclusively in K-Temple's monastery. Tourists were strictly prohibited from entering this space. Even senior SG monks, regardless of their rank, required special permission from Seon Master MG Monk Y to enter the monastery. When MG monks walked around the mountain, they used a small entrance to the temple's east instead of the main one. They went for walks very early in the morning and were rarely observed. Their living area was separated from most spaces in the temple, thus making their monastery an island within the temple grounds. The range of SG monks' activities was broad and diverse within and outside the temple, whereas MG monks' activities were narrow and restricted. Although all monks wore the same grey robes and followed the same religious rules, the separation in living spaces indicated that there were two distinct groups in the temple.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CONFLICT AMID ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Overview

The first analysis of this study focused on how external changes impact monks' daily lives (i.e., the inflows). The second analysis identified how the impact is manifested in K-Temple (i.e., the separations). The third analysis revealed the link between the two by tracing the past 20 years of K-Temple history. [Figure 5](#) presents the result that shows the connection between the external impacts and the internal identity dynamics.

The findings have three important implications. First, there were competing institutional logics – *meditation logic* and *service logic* – in the Korean Buddhist institutional field (See [Table III](#)). Since the 1998 financial crisis, the dominant meditation logic emphasizing tradition and self-discipline has been gradually replaced by a service logic that highlights change and religion's social contribution. This change occurred, along with other societal-level changes – economic depression, secularism, and individualism – identified in analysis step three.

Second, societal-level changes led to field-level changes, which in turn impacted K-Temple monks' daily lives at an organizational level. In fact, this trickle-down effect was implicitly observed in the second analysis step and conceptualized as inflows. The new finding here is that there was a salient inflow in each phase. However, a specific type of inflow does not suddenly appear in one stage and disappear in the next. Instead, it persists and accumulates over time. As time went by, the three types of inflows were all prevalent in K-Temple, as observed from this fieldwork.

The third aspect concerns the monks' reactions. The field data show that K-Temple monks are separated in three distinct ways, yet it does not reveal how and why they are separated. The historical process discloses that the separation was an emergent and spontaneous response to a salient inflow in each period. In other words, the split was an organic step-by-step process for K-Temple to adapt to the ongoing external changes while protecting the traditional way of monastic life. Despite the group formation and

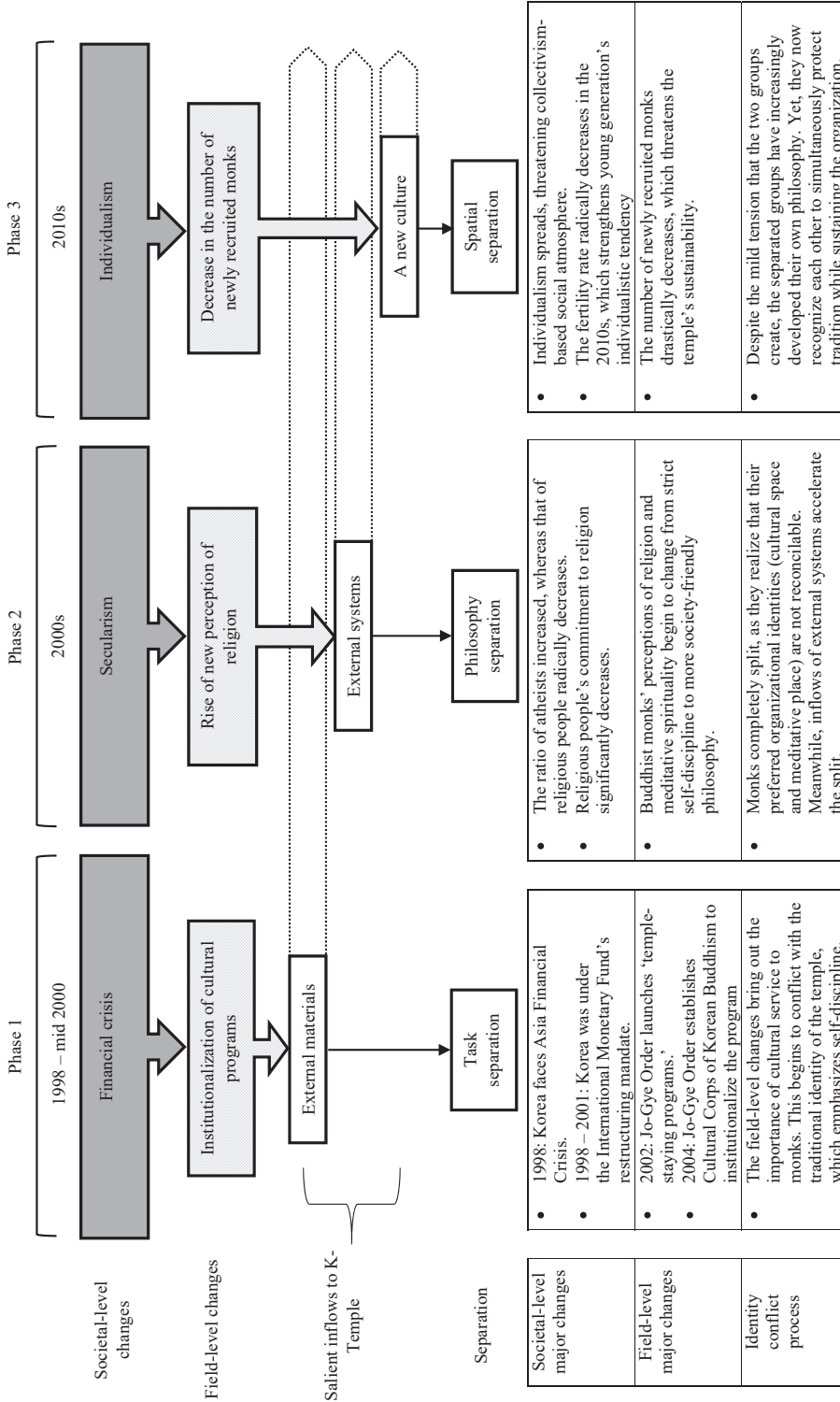


Figure 5. A multi-level process of identity conflict in K-Temple

Table III. Conflicting logics in the Korean Buddhist institutional field

	<i>Meditation logic</i>	<i>Service logic</i>
Organizational identity	Temple is a peaceful meditative place for monks	Temple is an open cultural space for people
Vocational identity	Buddhist monk is an ascetic meditator	Buddhist monk is a service provider
Meaning of religion	Self-discipline (spiritual achievement)	Social contribution
Legitimacy source	Korean meditative tradition	Newly emerging social demands on religion
Monastic rule	Tradition-based strict monastic rules	Lenient rules, friendly to secular people's lifestyles
Economic system	Donation-based monastic economy	Donation plus cultural business
Cultural system	Collectivism	Mixed culture of collectivism and individualism

the tension, the sequential separation allows K-Temple to maintain tradition and adapt to the changing environment simultaneously. In reporting the finding, I indicate the data sources using 'Int-1' to refer to the first-round interview quotes and 'Int-2' for the second-round interviews.

Phase 1: Financial Crisis

Societal-level change. In 1998, the Korean economy almost fell into national bankruptcy owing to a series of failed economic policies, a spillover of the Japanese real estate bubble, and the ongoing economic downturn from Southeast Asia around mid-1990 (Corsetti et al., 1999). Finally, the central government asked international agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and Asian Development Bank (ADB), for a US\$55 billion emergency relief loan to revitalize the economy. Strict mandates were implemented for restructuring in line with the IMF's guidelines (Radelet et al., 1998). Market-based principles and merit-based human resource practices were institutionalized (Radelet et al., 1998).

Impact of societal-level change on field-level change. The 1998 financial crisis radically decreased the donations to religious organizations. It quickly led to a loss of income and the commercialization of religion at the field level. In response, the Jo-Gye Order of Korean Buddhism developed a 'temple-stay program', collaborating with multiple government agencies and believers' associations (Kaplan, 2010). The program was designed to provide tourists with various cultural services. In 2004, the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism established the Cultural Corps of Korean Buddhism to formally institutionalize the program. The program was a huge success. In 2009, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designated it as one of the world's top five

cultural tour programs. In 2014, the Korean National Brand Committee listed it among the top ten national icons.

Salient inflow: External materials. However, as observed during the fieldwork, such tourist programs immediately triggered an inflow of external materials. To illustrate, the increasing demands for cultural service at the time motivated several monks in charge of the temple-stay program to use smartphones. It improved the cultural service and facilitated better communication with people. SG Monk B, who insisted on the use of the smartphone at the time, looked back at his early monastic life in K-Temple and reported:

SG Monk B: It was an important issue whether monks could legitimately use a smartphone. Smartphones allowed monks to easily connect to the outside society, but no one imagined that monks would use the smartphone. In fact, it was not much encouraged at the time at all. (Int-2)

The inflow of high-tech devices to temples gradually removed the boundary between secluded monastic life and society, as noted in MG Monk G's interview on the organizational boundary (Int-1) and SG Monk B's comment on using a smartphone (Int-2). The boundary issue was crucial, as the dominant logic of the period was meditation logic that discouraged monks' exposure to society.

Task separation for managing the increasing demands for cultural service. The growing demands for the service function of the temple empowered the monks who led the relevant administrative roles. In response, K-Temple monks split into those willing to perform the service-related tasks and those reluctant to do so. In this process, K-Temple built a new department dedicated to the service function and formally appointed four monks to lead the department. Thus, competing logics latent in the field manifested through the monks' stance on the temple-stay program at the time. Yet, in this period, the separation did not lead to the formation of the subgroups that were observed during the fieldwork.

Phase 2: Secularism

Societal-level change. The second prominent societal-level change impacting monastic life was the changing perception about religion. K-Temple monks called this societal change 'secularism'. Statistics confirm that people's commitment level to their religion saw a notable decrease (see Table IV), with the percentage of Buddhism decreasing from 23 per cent in 1995 to 15 per cent in 2015. The general public even began to question the benefits of Buddhist meditation practice and how it could fulfil the role of religion in contemporary society (Park, 2010).

Impact of societal-level change on field-level change. Along with the secularization stream, many Korean Buddhist temples joined a new form of Buddhism that includes the so-called Engaged Buddhism, Ecological Buddhism, and Humanistic Buddhism, all of which aim to directly contribute to society and people's everyday lives (Yoon

Table IV. Korea's religious ratio over the past 30 years

<i>Statistics from Gallop Korea</i>						
Year	N	Buddhism	Protestantism	Catholic	Others	Atheist
Importance of religion in believers' daily lives (%) – A respondent ratio of 'Very important' plus 'Important'						
1984	1946	88	97	48	–	–
1989	1990	78	97	44	–	–
1997	1613	77	96	39	–	–
2004	1500	68	90	29	–	–
2014	1500	59	90	30	–	–
Commitment to religion (%) – A respondent ratio of 'Visit more than one per a week'						
1984	1946	10	62	66	–	–
1989	1990	4	73	66	–	–
1997	1613	1	72	60	–	–
2004	1500	4	71	43	–	–
2014	1500	6	80	59	–	–
Statistics from Korean Ministry of Statistics (Census)						
Religion ratio of all Korean population (%)						
1995	All population	23.2	19.4	6.6	–	49.6
2005	All population	22.8	18.2	10.8	–	47.1
2015	All population	15.5	19.7	7.9	–	56.1

and Jones, 2015).^[2] For example, the movement led the *Silsang-sa* (Silsang temple) to establish an alternative secondary school in 2001 that included curriculums of Buddhist economics and ecology, and *Jungto* (*Jungto Buddhist society*) to host the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in 2003. In other words, the emergence of ideological elements of competing logics began, along with the secularization movement. This change makes the latent identity conflict explicit. Some temples chose to reinforce the secluded monastic life to push their monks to focus on spiritual liberation, while others were more motivated by humanitarian goals that encouraged social contribution.

Salient inflow: External systems. Such different perceptions of spirituality and the meaning of religion explicitly surfaced in the 2000s (Suh, 2021). It accelerated the legitimization of the inflow of the external systems that exclusively support the service logic in K-Temple. However, the adoption of external systems again split the K-Temple monks. One of the compelling examples was K-Temple's new organizational policy that invited

renowned monks to provide monks and people with a chance to meet in person. The invited monks received courtesy money, yet some monks (MG monks later) argued that the money could turn out to be a monetary incentive that distorted the meaning of preaching. SG Monk O spoke about the issue:

In my opinion, it does not matter if the money is considered an incentive. The thing is that people can benefit from that. They can meet the monks in person, as we invited them. We should pay the monks for their travel expenses ... I cannot imagine that monks meet people for money. (Int-2)

'Market principle', 'money-based transaction mechanism', and 'incentive system' are all terms typically used to describe businesses and the market. These are antithetical to Buddhism's egalitarian principle. As observed in the fieldwork, senior SG monks took the lead in adopting those systems against the wishes of senior MG monks, who believed that those systems would ultimately end traditional monastic life. The inflow of external systems and the trend of secularization gradually drove the progressive monks (SG monks later) to form their own philosophy and defend their progressive, collective actions.

Rise of the SG monks' society-friendly philosophy. The new philosophy adopted in K-Temple finally separated SG monks from MG monks, facilitating the emergence of a new organizational identity of K-Temple (the temple as a cultural space open to people). According to MG monks' philosophy, the primary purpose of Buddhism is spiritual attainment (Nibbāna in Pāli). It requires an intense meditative journey. However, SG monks, in response to the accumulated inflows of external materials and the new inflow of the outer systems, highlighted the various functional roles of a temple, by emphasizing vocations that can contribute towards benefitting others. SG monks even criticized the ascetic meditation practice recognized by MG monks as the core practice of K-Temple. They claimed that meditation solely for individual religious achievement (Nibbāna in Pāli) could be a mere ego-driven method of practicing Buddhism. Along with the societal changes, such differences of opinion propelled SG monks towards developing their own thoughts on the meaning of Buddhism, and more importantly on the role of Buddhist monks in the community.

This interpretation was apparent in one of my post hoc interviews with SG Monk M. He talked about human desire:

Reflection on human desire is not merely a matter for monks. It occurs when anyone withdraws into themselves too deeply. However, this can be also a trap. Monks should get out of this too. They think too much because they do not have to make money for a living. (Int-2)

He also spoke about the popularity of the temple food and tourist programs that were an important organizational issue at the time:

By viewing temple food as a culture and not a monastic rule, we can think about it differently. All religions, as they spread, develop into various forms over time by aligning with the local geographic characteristics and the existing culture of the region. Religious food is the product of such a cultural hybrid ... If it is considered special by the people, it is because people cherish the cultural characteristics of the temple food (Int-2). Thus, temple food can be promoted by viewing it as a culture that people can enjoy, rather than as a strict monastic rule.

SG Monk M framed eating food as a part of the culture, rather than the sacred ceremony that traditional monastic rule prescribed. The difference in approaching the purpose of Buddhism, the monks' role, and their stance on the ongoing service programs finally led the monks to develop a different perception of organizational identity: the temple as a cultural space open to people.

This bifurcation reinforced the contradicting identities of the organization and finally converted the abstract form of tension between the old and new organizational identities into group identities, namely meditators (Monk Y's group holding on to the old conventional identity) and service providers (Monk S's group adopting the new progressive identity).

Phase 3: Individualism

Societal change. Another distinct societal-level change that significantly impacted K-Temple was the spread of individualism (Kim et al., 2019). The 1998 financial crisis not only transformed the financial structure of Korea but also shifted the societal and cultural landscape (Kim and Kim, 2003). Collectivism-based societal systems became rapidly Westernized and individualized, and the nuclear family system replaced the Confucianism-based extended family system (Kim and Kim, 2003). According to World Bank data, the fertility rate in Korea was 4.54 in 1970, yet it drastically fell to 1.17 in 2001. This record also confirms the change in the family structure.

Impact of societal-level change on field-level change. Such societal change has been critical to the sustainability of Buddhist temples. Internal documents of the Jo-Gye Order of Buddhism reported that the spread of individualism led to a significant decrease in the number of newly recruited monks and that this trend would threaten the temple's survival (Kim et al., 2019). A more recent report shows that the annual number of newly ordained was 532 in 1999, while the number decreased to 151 in 2017 (Kim et al., 2019). Fewer apprentice monks mean fewer next-generation monks to sustain the temples. The Jo-Gye Order of Korean Buddhism finally recognized that people raised in nuclear families are reluctant to join a monastic community where they must dwell in communal living for the rest of their lives (Kim et al., 2019). In 2016, it established a task force committee, 'Special Committee for Improving the Ordination System', to facilitate discussions with prospective newcomers (Kim et al., 2019).

Salient inflow: New culture. Over the last 20 years, several Buddhist temples have disappeared due to a lack of financial resources or monks to sustain the organization. Internally, SG monks claimed that strict discipline-based monastic rules increased the

dropout rate during the apprentice period, and that the high dropout rate was the reason for the inflow of a new culture and individualism. K-Temple needed to accept the individualistic tendency of the young monks to secure the number of monks and sustain the organization.

Increasing need for rearranging monks' living space: Spatial separation. The spread of individualism, secularism, and continued ramifications of the financial crisis drove the progressive monks (SG monks) to reinforce the new organizational identity. Tensions mounted to such an extent that MG monks declared they would apply the traditional, communal monastic rule for monks in their group only. It meant different rules applied to the groups in the temple. Finally, they decided to live separately.

The spatial separation reflected the monks' normative, moral, and ideological interpretations of religion, which seemed irreconcilable. However, the separation process, sequentially reflected in the task, philosophy, and living space, ironically allowed the temple to maintain dual goals: protecting tradition and adapting to external changes. As observed during the fieldwork, MG monks still adhere to traditional monastic life. Consequently, their rigorous and consistent stance has blocked the inflows into their living area. In contrast, SG monks are willing to modify traditions to adapt to inflows, thereby proactively adapting to the changing environment.

In a sense, these two groups have organically performed two distinct organizational functions that are key to maintaining organizational sustainability in the changing environment. The service providers (SG group) have increasingly legitimized the service logic in K-Temple, by adopting societal changes favourable to their outlook. Subsequently, the identity of the temple as an open cultural space arose. In the meantime, the meditators (MG group) have protected the meditation logic, thus preventing it from being delegitimized by the external forces that have pressured the temple to entirely transform. The two logics are now explicitly manifest and persist in K-Temple through the discrete identities of the two groups. Yet, this divide has paradoxically sustained the organizational system.

DISCUSSION

Environmental Changes as a Trigger of Organizational Identity Conflict

This study adds new nuance to accounts of how dual organizational identities are manifested in members' daily lives and how the identity conflict caused by the duality is recognized and managed when leadership roles are absent. The past studies have either highlighted leaders' agency that brings a competing logic in shaping a new organizational identity or focused on the leaders' rhetorical skills to reconcile, integrate, or hybridize the identity conflict (Dalpiaz et al., 2016; Glynn, 2000). Thus, the leaders' strategic actions were central in explaining the identity conflict. Deviating from these, this study examined how external changes at the societal level, not necessarily through the leaders' agentic actions, directly triggered the identity conflict. In K-temple's case, a series of radical societal changes legitimizing a competing logic led to the rise of a new identity that is more suitable to changing demands on the organization's core

functioning, which in turn created internal conflict between the old and new identity claim.

By examining such internal organizational identity dynamics within environmental changes, this study offers several important implications. First, it suggests that the reconstruction process of organizational identity can simultaneously be susceptible to cross-level changes (vertical effect) and accumulate the ramifications of societal changes over a long period of time (horizontal effect). Thornton et al. (2012, p. 13) argued that ‘any true picture of social mechanisms must be observed not only across historical time but also across multiple levels of analysis to capture the cross-level effect’. Extending the research, this study shows that organizational identity is not only an evolving sociohistorical material shaped and reshaped by changing societal conditions (Dunn and Jones, 2010; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) but also a multi-level organizational outcome produced by institutional, organizational, and group-level identity construction processes (Chreim et al., 2007; Thornton et al., 2012).

Second, the findings allow us to unpack how environmental changes produce organizational changes that either reinforce or reshape members’ perceptions of existing organizational identity. The notion of inflows was deployed to capture this dynamic. On the one hand, the three sequential inflows identified in the study reinforced the perception of conventional organizational identity. MG monks interpreted the external changes as threats, as they believed that the changes would disturb the spiritual meditation practice that they had protected. On the other hand, the inflows gradually reshaped some members’ deeply rooted perceptions of the organizational identity and ultimately challenged it. SG monks even utilized the inflows as a stepping stone to legitimize their preferred organizational identity that they believe helped them redirect the core function of the organization (spiritual meditation practice) to a new one (cultural service). Whereas the prior studies tend to predefine environmental changes as threats to existing identity (Bartunek, 1984; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006), the concept of inflow rather views the changes as neutral entities, to which the present members proactively assign meanings for their interest. This nuanced conceptualization is critical for understanding the relationship between external changes and internal identity dynamics, which has not been explicit in the existing studies.

Third, the findings potentially shed light on the other area of organizational identity research – identity discovery – which has only recently received scholars’ attention (Cloutier and Ravasi, 2020; Ravasi et al., 2019). One of the central theses of organizational identity theory is that an organization, like an individual, can possibly have multiple core identities, regardless of how the present organizational members and external stakeholders perceive the identity (Whetten, 2006). If so, an identity construction process may not be genuinely about a new identity creation process. Using a historical case method, Hatch and Schultz (2017) and Sasaki et al. (2020) examined a part of the process and suggested that the identity construction process is a series of internal discovery processes or ‘historicizing processes’ within an organization. From this perspective, organizational identity is defined as a set of shared collective memories that can be strategically discovered, resurrected, or narrated by the present members (Foroughi et al., 2020; Schultz and Hernes, 2013). This study adds to this view. A new organizational identity of Buddhist temples (a cultural space open to people) may

not be something newly constructed but may be discovered by SG monks. The new identity might have merely been hidden or lost, as the other more dominant identity claim – temple as a spiritual meditative space – had been orthodoxically institutionalized in the Korean Buddhist organizational field. Thus, the role of the external changes can be understood as a facilitator that makes the new identity finally visible to the present progressive actors.

Buddhist history may help deepen the third implication above. Buddhist philosophers have indicated that society-friendly Buddhism was formed in ancient Buddhism to reject the solitary path to elite meditative tradition (Harvey, 2012). They suggested that secularized Buddhism developed its own philosophy by modifying the sacred concept of liberalization (Harvey, 2012). Thus, in the broader tradition of Buddhism across Asia, serving people could be seen as equally important to achieving Nibbāna. This historical insight reinforces the interpretation of this study that the new identity of K-Temple is perhaps a latent entity, historically constructed through the past generations of members and impacted by numerous societal changes. The entity may be waiting to be *discovered* by the present actors (Basque and Langley, 2018; Lamertz et al., 2016). This study shows that the discovery process can be constructed by internal subgroup dynamics and tensions on contradicting identity claims along with the ongoing environmental changes.

This insight allows us to recall Whetten and Mackey's (2002, p. 395, italic added) definition of organizational identities: 'institutionalized claims *available* to members'. If the existing, conventional identity of K-Temple is an institutional claim, the discovered identity can also be seen as another institutionalized claim that has been historically formed, inscribed, and fossilized along with 2500 years history of Buddhism. The new identity here may be as central, consistent, and enduring as the sacred identity at some point of history (Swearer, 2010), which finally becomes *available* to some progressive monks in the present.

Organizations' Adaptive Process to Managing Dual Identities

The second contribution of this study is around organizations' adaptive process to respond to the identity conflict that is triggered by environmental changes. On this point, the prior studies highlighted the separation mechanism (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2013). Structural separation enables the members to work on specific activities that align with their preferred organizational identity, thereby preventing the emergence of even worse conflicts in the future (Slawinski and Bansal, 2015; Smith and Tushman, 2005). However, it leads to subgroup formation, which moves the organizational identity conflict to the subgroup conflict (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Battilana and Dorado, 2010). March and Simon (1958) and Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) classic argument similarly suggested that separation alone could be a precondition for group conflict. Aligning with the studies, I also found that the structural separation is vividly manifested in K-Temple, and that the two subgroups emerged once members recognized their different views on organizational change. What makes the K-Temple case different from the previous cases is that neither substantive organizational interventions, such as spaces of negotiation (Battilana et al., 2015),

selective coupling strategy (Pache and Santos, 2013), oscillating decisions and actions (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014), and new hiring practices (Battilana and Dorado, 2010), nor leaders' proactive interventions (Smith and Tushman, 2005) were observed. This raises a compelling question: If the substantive role of the leader is absent and any organizational mechanism aimed at negotiating between separated groups of people is not observed, why and how do the two competing organizational identities and the two subgroups still coexist in K-Temple?

This study found that the adaptive and sequential separation process, which the temple has experienced over 20 years of societal changes, could be a key mechanism towards understanding the coexistence. The separation process started from the area of organizational tasks and proceeded to spatial separation via the philosophical divide. This was an organic separation process that gradually enabled the members to see why they needed to separate themselves and how the separation could protect its traditional identity (a meditative space) while embracing new identity (a cultural space) to meet the growing demands of cultural service. Consequently, K-Temple did not require significant interventions to resolve the conflict despite the mild group tension observed in the fieldwork.

This begs the question of whether the separation of K-Temple could continue in the future. This query can be answered by considering the other side of the question: Why has the separation been effective? Prior studies suggested that when an organization faces conflict, members try to resolve it by taking substantive actions or by using a set of rhetorical strategies (Jarzabkowski and Sillince, 2007; Smith and Besharov, 2019). These interventions occur as people tend to predefine conflict as a problem to be resolved. However, this study confirms that the subgroup tension has persisted over the last 20 years, yet the organization continues to pursue two opposing goals simultaneously, thereby legitimizing both the old and new identities. The findings capture a nuanced organizational duality, manifested in members' two different roles: some members play the guardians' role to protect a traditional organizational practice by blocking the inflows, and the others keep pace with the environmental changes and build trustful relationships with the changing society by embracing the inflows. In a sense, the adaptive sequential separation process found in K-Temple could be understood as a long-term organic, emerging, and sequential responding process to the tension rather than a proactive intervention.

This implication now invites us to a deeper discussion of the meaning of duality at K-Temple. In fact, the opposing identities of K-Temple may reflect the very meaning of *Li* and *Sa* developed across Eastern philosophies, such as Confucianism and Buddhism. In the Buddhist community, *Li* is interpreted as an unwavering principle or knowledge (the sacred), and *Sa* implies change and dynamism (the secular). Borrowing these terms, one can explain that the MG monks' role is to protect *Li* from external changes and interventions, while the SG monks' role is to initiate change to realize *Sa*. A central thesis of the duality is that since the two opposing elements of a system cannot be compromised, they always create tension, yet it is the contradiction that defines the coexistence of the opposing elements.^[3] Thus, unless a strong leader arrives to reconcile the differences or other significant external changes occur in the

future, the duality will persist, and thus, K-Temple will remain a paradoxical system (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study may have many potential theoretical limitations, I focus on the methodological aspects and suggest a potential direction for future research that may combine ethnographical research and historical analysis (Childs, 2002; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

In approaching the uncommon context, researchers may need to examine the present organizational phenomenon, along with its historical context (Bamberger and Pratt, 2010). In fact, the notion of ‘ethnographic history’, also known as ethnohistory and anthropological history, combines the respective advantages of ethnography and historical analysis (Green and Troup, 1999; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Building on these approaches, future research may be able to deepen our understanding of the historical aspects of organizational identity dynamics within societal-level changes.

To illustrate, while societal changes enforce changes in religious organizations, religion also has a profound effect on the society in which the religion is embedded. Thus, one fruitful area for further exploration concerns how radical changes in religious institutional fields trigger changes in non-sacred organizations. Suitable examples related to Buddhism could be the mindfulness revolution in the business world (Kudesia, 2019), sufficiency economy philosophy institutionalized in South-East Asia (Song, 2020), and the Karma management trend in Europe (Hildebrandt and Stadil, 2015). These are all changes triggered by Buddhist thinking. Exploring such phenomena may require researchers to immerse themselves in Buddhism possibly through fieldwork and then seek an overarching understanding of the historical context of how the sacred philosophy triggered changes in the non-sacred institutional field.

CONCLUSION

Societal-level environmental changes not only impact organizational strategy but also influence organizational identity. The changes often serve as a catalyst to construct a new organizational identity, thus resulting in a group tension between those who prefer to reshape the identity and others who wish to protect the existing identity. This study examined how this tension was recognized and managed in the context of a Korean Buddhist temple. The sequential separation process that this study identified was not about the resolution mechanism of the tension but about how the tension still exists and persists despite the potential conflicts among the organizational members. The historical separation process allowed the members to understand their differences and seek a Buddhist identity that they believed was right. The process reveals how and why a duality became the nature of K-Temple. As the Korean national flag reminds us, we can see that duality is one of the central concepts in Eastern philosophy. I conclude this article by hoping that there will be more research on how

duality is manifested in genuine Eastern contexts and within the context of Eastern philosophy.

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NOTES

- [1] In small and medium-sized temples, the leaders' authority is relatively strong. Small temples do not accommodate many senior monks. In an extreme case, only a couple of apprentice and junior monks live with one senior monk. In this case, the senior monk's authority and leadership may determine all the important organizational decisions. However, in a large temple (like K-Temple), there are lots of senior monks, and their collective voice is often more crucial in making decisions.
- [2] Engaged Buddhism is a branch of Buddhism, or Buddhist philosophy, encouraging Buddhists' active social participation. Here, the scope of the involvement covers all areas of society, such as peace, environment, gender, humanitarian relief, development, and art. Depending on the main participation area, it can often be categorized into ecological Buddhism (environment), humanitarian Buddhism (human rights), and so on (Park, 2010; Suh, 2021).
- [3] The dichotomy of *Li* and *Su* indicates the duality of *Yin* and *Yang* that management scholars extensively use to symbolize the concept of paradox (see Chen, 2008; Li, 1998).

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