



Engaged Buddhism in Mountain Monasteries Templestay as Wellness Tourism in South Korea

This article examines Templestay, a short-term retreat program held for laypersons at Buddhist monasteries, as a form of wellness tourism amid the prevailing social malaise in South Korea. Initially designed to engage foreign visitors during the 2002 World Cup, Templestay has become popular among Koreans struggling to cope with an ever more competitive and precarious social and economic environment. Drawing on ethnographic research and an examination of the history, statistics, marketing, and program content of Templestay, this article challenges the polarized view that posits socially engaged Buddhism as the opposite of traditional monastic Buddhism and suggests that Templestay facilitates Buddhism's engagement with the prevailing psychological predicament of society. Opening monasteries day and night for a standard fee, a way of formatting staying at temples as an experiential commodity, allows the distressed laity space for self-reflection and a perceived enhancement of their wellbeing. Templestay sheds light on the interplay of wellness tourism and engaged Buddhism in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Templestay—engaged Buddhism—South Korea—(un)happiness—branding—wellness tourism

Traditional Buddhist temples in Korea are found mainly in the mountains and thus are commonly called *sansa*, literally meaning “mountain monasteries” (see figure 1).^{1,2}

They were built in mountainous regions during the Confucian Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), as the dynasty did not allow them to be built in cities or villages (Buswell 1992, 135; Sørensen 1988, 26). Thus, Korean Buddhism came to be called “mountain Buddhism” (Cho S. 2002, 131; Cho E. 2003, 108). This image of socially withdrawn Buddhism, also prevailing in the West due in no small part to the influence of Max Weber, who contrasted it with Protestantism in accordance with “the spirit of capitalism” (Baumann 2000, 375), was a serious concern to reform-minded Buddhists in Korea around 1900. Witnessing Christian missionaries’ growing social influence and eager to take advantage of an opportune time for its revival under the growing Japanese influence in the peninsula, they saw the remote locations as a serious challenge for Korean Buddhism’s survival and future. Han Yongun (1879–1944), a prominent Buddhist monk and scholar, critically described monastic communities as “separate universes” in “devil-inhabited black mountains . . . without sending a single message to the outside world” (2008, 78).

Figure 1. A mountain temple. Photo by Kyoim Yun.





Figure 2. The official Templestay logo.

Few would have imagined a century ago that these monasteries would attract a host of laypeople from the outside world through Templestay (see figure 2 for the logo).³

Literally meaning “staying at a temple,” Templestay refers to a short-term retreat program held for laypersons at Buddhist monasteries. There is a long tradition of pilgrims and travelers staying at mountain temples, going back to the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). Even during the subsequent Chosŏn dynasty, Buddhist pilgrims, both elite and non-elite, stayed at temples for short or longer durations (Stiller 2020). While Templestay can be seen within a spectrum of pilgrims’ use of temple space, it is framed as a secular retreat program that is open to all (see table 1 for the religious affiliation of recent Korean participants).⁴

It is a Buddhist enterprise, managed with government support and following a specific business model.⁵ How should we make sense of the Buddhist establishment’s own marketing of the monastic experience as a secular retreat program?

This article considers Templestay, popular amid a happiness crisis in early twenty-first-century South Korea, at the intersection of engaged Buddhism and wellness

Table 1. Religious Affiliation of Korean Participants, 2017–19

| | Protestants % | Catholics % | Buddhists % | No religion % | Other % |
|------|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------|
| 2017 | 5.1 | 10.8 | 39.6 | 44.1 | 0.3 |
| 2018 | 4.8 | 9.9 | 44.0 | 41.0 | 0.3 |
| 2019 | 5.2 | 9.2 | 37.8 | 47.4 | 0.3 |

Source: Courtesy of the Cultural Corps.

tourism. Templestay is a form of wellness tourism, a rapidly growing sector catering to those individuals seeking the enhancement of wellbeing and quality of their lives away from home in fast-paced, burnout societies. Expanding the previous scholarship on engaged Buddhism, this study challenges the polarized view that posits socially engaged Buddhism as the opposite of traditional monastic Buddhism. Templestay, I argue, facilitates Buddhism's engagement with the prevailing psychological predicament of society and with people's aspirations, and even desperation, to live a good life. This study draws on ethnographic research and an examination of the history, statistics, and program content of Templestay. It first shows the origin and evolution of Templestay into a nationwide wellness franchise, and then discusses what makes Templestay wellness tourism and what social conditions propel its popularity. Next, it analyzes the participants' reception of the program. Finally, the article considers implications of packaging the monastic experience as a wellness journey in light of engaged Buddhism.

Origin and development

At first glance, Templestay is diametrically opposed to engaged Buddhism in terms of goal, history, and scope. Engaged Buddhists aspire to release the suffering of all beings by actively participating in resolving this-worldly problems rather than focusing on personal salvation through Buddhist rituals and prayers (Park P. 2010, 29). By contrast, laypeople participate in Templestay chiefly to withdraw from their ordinary social world for self-reflection. This section investigates how a program, designed to provide ad hoc lodging with a cultural experience for foreigners, has mutated into a new form of tourism, facilitating mountain-dwelling clerics' engagement with a broad spectrum of Koreans.

The origin of Templestay distinguishes it from privately organized temple-experience programs in other Asian countries, such as those offered by Tibetan monasteries in India and Nepal (Kaplan 2007, 45). Templestay was jointly designed by the Chogye Order, the predominant sect of Korean Buddhism, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, to provide alternative lodging to foreign visitors during the 2002 World Cup (May 31–June 30, 2002) cohosted by South Korea and Japan. This collaboration between the state and Korean Buddhism was not entirely by happenstance, especially in view of the historical context of Korean Buddhism in the twentieth century.

During the colonial period (1910–45), Korean Buddhism came under the auspices of the Japanese government, which controlled Korean temple affairs in accordance with the temple ordinance established in 1911 (Park P. 2010, 44n2). Although some young clerics resisted the constraints, most clergy members went along with or welcomed changes brought about by the Japanese, which they might have felt liberating especially after the five-hundred-year Confucian dynasty that significantly undermined Buddhism's prestige and institutional power.⁶ Han, the critic of mountain-centered monasticism, and other reformers took advantage of the opportunity to revive and modernize Korean Buddhism by opening branch temples in residential areas (Park P. 2006, 197). Moreover, Han wrote to Kim Yunsik,

the chairman of the Consultative Committee, and Viscount Terauchi Masatake, the Japanese residency general, requesting policy changes to permit the marriage of monks and nuns, which had already been institutionalized in Japan in 1872 (Han 2008, 111–14; Kim S. 2022, 163–64). By 1929, the ban on clerical marriage had been lifted in some 80 percent of Korean temples (Kim S. 2022, 164), and by around 1945, more than 90 percent of the clergy were married (Kim K. 1998, 293).

In the turmoil of postcolonial politics after the Korean War (1950–53), the celibate minority used their status to establish monastic authority as the only legitimate heirs of Korean Buddhism, while lumping the majority of married clerics together as Japanese collaborators (Kim S. 2022, 162–65). The minority faction backed by Syngman Rhee (r. 1948–60), South Korea's first president with a pro-American and anti-Japanese stance, established the Chogye Order in 1962. The T'aego Order embracing both married and celibate clergy was established in 1970 when the "purification movement" ended. The Chogye Order, which has maintained a symbiotic relationship with most South Korean administrations since Rhee, has become "the face of Korean Buddhism" (Tedesco 2003, 156) with its central image of celibate monasticism, ideal for Templestay.⁷ Although several minority orders, including the T'aego Order, run Templestay, the Chogye Order, the strongest stakeholder in Korean Buddhism, administers the nationwide program.

Focusing on institutional policies and marketing strategies, earlier studies of Templestay emphasized how the program was branded and utilized as a way of promoting traditional Korean Buddhist culture to consumers of global cultural tourism (Kaplan 2010; Kim S. 2017). This view of Templestay as cultural or heritage tourism is undeniable, especially given the program's original purpose and target audience. Barely recovered from the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis, the Kim Dae Jung administration (r. 1998–2003) saw the World Cup as an opportunity to boost the nation's economy and pride. Expecting an inundation of foreign visitors, the Ministry inspected and financially assisted in the renovation of various forms of lodgings to meet the standards of international tourists (Kim C., 2002). At this juncture, a professor of tourism suggested Templestay as an additional option and discussed the possibility with a T'aego Order monk, who proposed it to the Ministry (Kaplan 2007, 10n11).

The crucial feature of Templestay was that, unlike hotels, temples could also provide a cultural experience. In this regard, Templestay is similar to the Japanese temple lodging *shukubō*, where boarders can sample *tatami*-floored rooms, communal baths, and vegetarian temple food and are invited to morning ceremonies (Nicoloff 2008, 15). However, the Korean Templestay was envisioned as something more than a monastery-hostel for overnight guests. The participants were to stay in temples not only at night but also during the day to "thoroughly experience a slice of Korean culture," in the words of the monk who was the executive director of missionary work of the Chogye Order (quoted from Kaplan 2010, 133).

The added value of cultural experience dovetailed with the government's emphasis on culture, both popular and traditional, as a marketable resource to lead economic growth in the twenty-first century. According to this moral order, the unrelenting marketing of culture is viewed as "sensible and even virtuous," rather than

corruptive, for the sake of the wealth of the nation (Yun 2019, 139). The government, acting as the guardian of traditional culture, had already assisted in the promotion of curated Buddhist culture such as rituals and temple food as tourist commodities in the late 1990s (Choi 2022; Moon 2008, 169).⁸ For the Templestay program, it provided 1.07 billion won (circa US \$0.9 million) (Kim C., 2002).⁹

Conceptualizing the program not only as alternative lodging but also as an opportunity to promote a distinctly Korean Buddhist culture to international visitors—though what makes Korean Buddhism particularly Korean can be debatable—was effective in pacifying complaints from some clergy members, especially those dedicated to meditation. They were concerned that opening temples to outsiders for their temporary monastic experience both day and night would disturb their contemplative monastic lives (Kaplan 2010, 132). However, the idea that a cooperative spirit for the national cause would also help Korean Buddhism temper its prevailing image as a cloistered tradition, along with the strong sense of a national tradition of Buddhism (Buswell 1998; Park P. 2006; Vermeersch 2008), quelled such qualms.

While Christianity, one of the two major institutionalized religions in South Korea, is associated with Western modernity, Buddhism, introduced to Korea in the late fourth century CE and thoroughly indigenized since then, is often perceived as a default Korean religion vis-à-vis the foreign religion. Moreover, Buddhist traditions are often represented as Korean traditions (Chung 1997, 95).¹⁰ Framing Templestay as a means of promoting Korean culture precluded the potential accusation from Christians (especially Protestants) that the government lacked impartiality in providing the Buddhist establishment with funding.¹¹

Templestay's development as a centrally structured program with financial support from the national government proved conducive to its mutation into a new form of temple tourism.¹² During the World Cup games, only about one thousand foreigners availed themselves of the program offered by thirty-three temples.¹³ However, their positive responses and related foreign news coverage motivated the Chogye Order and the Ministry to repeat the program for both the Asian Games in Pusan in fall 2002 and the Universiade in Taegu in summer 2003. For these events, Templestay was expanded to include locals, a possibility already considered during the World Cup with the prospect that the five-day workweek, instituted in 2002 and gradually expanded through 2004, might attract more Koreans to traditional temples (*Pulgyo sinmun* 2002).¹⁴ Moreover, influenced by the “blue-eyed” monks coming to Korea, the translations of books by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, the introduction of Vipassanā meditation, and a growing interest in Buddhist psychotherapy at the turn of the century (Joo 2011), many laypeople, increasingly exposed to pluralistic and transnational Buddhism, began to perceive Buddhism as “cool.”

That the number of local participants far surpassed that of their foreign counterparts during these trial periods (see table 2) suggested not only a social demand from laypeople but also that the program could be of value to monastic communities.

Unlike Christian churches, scattered throughout the country both in urban and rural residential areas, and known for their aggressive evangelicalism, traditional Buddhist monasteries have limited access to the laity and influence on the wider

Table 2: Local and Foreign Participants in Three International Games

| Games | Year | Locals | Foreigners |
|-------------|------|--------|------------|
| World Cup | 2002 | - | 991 |
| Asian Games | 2002 | 1,299 | 268 |
| Universiade | 2003 | 33,530 | 1,544 |

Source: Courtesy of the Cultural Corps.

society. The lack of frequent visits by lay Buddhists, potential contributors to temple economy, also presented financial challenges for the survival of insular monasteries in light of the declining number of novices (see table 3 for the frequencies of church visits for Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics).¹⁵

Opening monasteries day and night for a standard fee may have been viewed by the leadership of the Chogye Order as an opportunity to gain new adherents, who might bring in much-needed revenue to mountain monasteries.

In 2004, after operating Templestay three times for the three international sporting events, the Ministry and the Chogye Order established the Cultural Corps of Korean Buddhism (hereafter the Cultural Corps) in order to develop the program more systematically. The Templestay Commission, which had previously operated within the Propagation Division of the Chogye Order, moved to the Cultural Corps, highlighting its business orientation (Kaplan 2010, 134). This semi-autonomous organization is funded in part by the Ministry and staffed by a team of lay experts in heritage, tourism, and marketing. It oversees cultural enterprises with Buddhist content, including souvenirs, Templestay, and temple food.¹⁶ The Templestay manager of the Cultural Corps told me that Templestay is a business serving *kogaek* (clients), a concept that the monks and nuns at first had difficulty in accepting (interview, August 6, 2019).

The Cultural Corps created a sophisticated Templestay website both in Korean and English through which people make reservations by choosing a temple, the type of

Table 3: Percentage of Visitors to Religious Facilities
One or More Times per Week (1984–2021)

| | All religious persons | Buddhists | Protestants | Catholics |
|------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| 1984 | 39 | 10 | 62 | 66 |
| 1989 | 41 | 4 | 73 | 66 |
| 1997 | 42 | 1 | 72 | 60 |
| 2004 | 36 | 4 | 71 | 43 |
| 2014 | 44 | 6 | 80 | 59 |
| 2021 | 32 | 1 | 57 | 42 |

Source: Courtesy of Gallup Korea.

program, and the duration of their stay. They then wire payment for their selection to the temple of their choice. Templestay was extended to a year-round program in 2004, after which both attendance and temples offering the program proliferated (from 36,902 to 286,610, and from 36 to 135, respectively, between 2004 and 2018).¹⁷ Although Templestay continues to attract foreigners who are interested primarily in Korean Buddhist culture and spirituality, far more Koreans are taking advantage of the program (in 2018 there were 233,319 Koreans and 53,291 foreigners). The lodging upgrades, the emphasis on culture rather than religion, and the logistical convenience enhanced by the Cultural Corps' intervention facilitated Templestay's attraction for a wide range of local participants.

Wellness tourism in mountain monasteries

Buddhist temples, a composite site of Korean culture and tradition, have long been major tourism destinations attracting sightseers. By contrast, Templestay allows participants an inward-looking experience in a contemplative surrounding. In the post-retreat surveys of 2018, a combined 74.1 percent of the Korean respondents reported that their primary motivation was to reflect and calm their mind (37.3 percent) and to rest and recharge (36.8 percent), a far more important concern than any inherent interest in Buddhism or traditional Korean culture (11.4 percent) (Cultural Corps 2019, 14). This suggests that participants perceive Templestay chiefly as wellness tourism, or "travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing" or "holistic health" (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.).

Scholars of tourism and recreation have been paying increasing attention to this burgeoning tourism sector, as ever-more people in the world feel burnout and become interested in alternative health modalities (e.g., Bushell and Sheldon 2009). The notion of wellness tourism offered by Melanie Smith and Catherine Kelly, cultural tourism scholars, is particularly helpful in understanding the nature of Templestay. According to them, wellness tourism embraces spiritual, psychological, or emotional dimensions beyond physical movement and is "more of a psychological than a physical state," despite the inseparability of the two (2006, 2). This section explores settings and activities characterizing Templestay as wellness tourism with its distinctive features.¹⁸

Setting

Many Koreans believe that mountains, occupying nearly 70 percent of the peninsula, are repositories of energy, both secular and sacred. Mountain hiking has been a national pastime for many years. Korean shamans visit mountains to pray and to recharge their spiritual energy. Buddhist monks and nuns also go back to mountain temples to restore their depleted "physical and spiritual forces" after periods of residence in city temples (Galmiche 2014, 237). To wellness tourists, no other destination would be more suitable than mountain temples, many of which belong to national and provincial parks. Ironically, the contemplative surroundings generated by forced isolation during the Chosŏn dynasty make these temples fertile grounds for wellness journeys.¹⁹ Moreover, traditional Buddhist art and architecture in mountain

settings provide an environment that is not only culturally rich but also beautiful and restful.

Lodgings for Templestay participants have often been newly added to existing temple complexes. Originally designed to meet the standards of international visitors attending sporting events, the rooms are generally kept very clean. Since the late 2010s, some temples have been adding air conditioning to provide added comfort during the increasingly hot summers. Having once stayed at a temple before the era of Templestay, I can appreciate the dramatic transformation brought about by the program. When I traveled with a friend to Haenam in South Chŏlla Province in summer 2002, a Buddhist monk we met at a temple kindly allowed us to stay overnight. The temple was relatively small with two resident monks and few tourists. It was not particularly well kept. The many mice, especially those in the kitchen, disturbed me, and my sleep was fitful due to the musty bedding. Using the outdoor facilities in the dark of night was also rather eerie. Twelve years later, when I participated in Templestay for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised by the cleanliness and comfort of the lodging.

Another attraction is the food. Previously considered dull and ascetic, vegetarian temple cuisine is now considered a healthy alternative in light of growing concerns about diet-related illness and obesity (Moon 2008, 167; and see figure 3).²⁰

Furthermore, due to government subvention, this wellness package combining tranquility, comfort, and healthy meals is quite reasonably priced, making the experience financially attractive for most participants. As of 2020, the average fee was 70,000 won (US\$58), substantially lower than 90,000 won (US\$75), the aggregate price estimate that consumers who had experienced Templestay were willing to pay.²¹ In fact, many participants I met told me that they felt they had received good value for their money (*kasöngbiga chot'a*).



Figure 3. A temple meal. Photo by Kyoim Yun.

The security of the lodging, along with freedom from cooking, makes Templestay particularly appealing to women. Women are usually discouraged from traveling alone, and the occasional news of sexual crimes and even the death of solo female travelers functions as cautionary tales.²² The fact that Templestay is an official platform helped it to gain rapid public trust with women. When asked why she chose Templestay instead of *kidowŏn*, facilities run mostly by and for Protestants and usually located in quiet areas, often in the mountains, for prayer and worship, a Protestant woman responded that she did not trust such places because many were run by heretical Christians (personal conversation, July 15, 2014).²³ Not surprisingly, women have made up about 70 percent of the participants since 2017, when the Cultural Corps began their comprehensive surveys of Templestay (Cultural Corps 2019, 13; 2020a, 16). Even in a 2005 survey conducted jointly by the Cultural Corps and Kyung Hee University's Hotel Management Department, 55 percent of the participants were women (Chogye Order, quoted from Kaplan 2007, 26).²⁴

Activities

When arriving at a temple in midafternoon, participants are warmly welcomed by Templestay staff, typically a lay staff member. The staff work in a Templestay office, distinct from a temple office (*chongmuso*), which oversees overall temple affairs, including finances, in the pertinent temple. Participants check in and are assigned a room. Following the monastic culture, if they share a room, roommates will be of the same sex.²⁵ They then change into comfortable unisex outfits provided by the temple that they will wear for the duration of their stay. The apparel, a form of neo-traditional Korean outfit consisting of baggy trousers and a hip-length vest, is well suited for a wellness retreat due to its comfort, simplicity, and practicality. Seen as Korean, rather than specifically Buddhist, such garb precludes any sense of discomfort that some participants might otherwise feel.²⁶ Wearing the uniform visually distinguishes retreaters from other non-clerics at the temple site such as lay Buddhists, workers, and passing tourists, and ensures admission to meals in the temple dining room.

After changing clothes, marking a transition from ordinary life to retreat, participants receive a brief orientation regarding temple etiquette, rules, and the program schedule. Temples are primarily religious sites, where monastic communities reside, and routine and special ceremonies are conducted for lay and ordained Buddhists (Buswell 1992, chap. 2). The addition of a Templestay program does not radically alter these core functions of the monastery and monastics (cf. Kaplan 2010, 140); rather, it adds an additional layer. Participants are instructed to show respect for the monastic culture by following basic temple rules such as staying quiet, wearing socks when entering *pŏptang* (dharma halls), and turning off lights early at night, usually around 9 pm.

These rules are minimal in comparison to rules for retreats where lay participants aim to learn Buddhist teachings and deepen their practices in the contemporary world.²⁷ In the fall of 2016, I participated in a four-day, rather rigorous Buddhist retreat, during which the use of cameras, makeup, cell phones, and pen and paper were strictly prohibited. In contrast, most Templestay participants use cell phones

for texting and taking photos, including selfies in the serene temple settings, for which some women even apply makeup. I once shared a room with two women, who were using their smartphones even in bed at night.²⁸ How much one (dis)connects with the outside world is ultimately left to an individual participant's discretion. Stringent rules are not imposed upon consumers of wellness tourism.

Three types of Templestay are available to meet different needs. Lasting just a few hours, a daytime-only (*tangil-hyöng*) program is for those wanting to sample a bit of Korean Buddhist culture.²⁹ The focus of this study is two overnight Templestay programs: rest-oriented (*hyusik-hyöng*) and experience-oriented (*ch'ehöm-hyöng*). People can choose either type, individually or as part of a group. Those interested in devoting some time to the tranquility that temple sites provide would likely choose the rest-oriented Templestay, featuring a single room for solo retreaters. The size of a group signing up for this type of program is relatively small, as people generally come if not alone then with their close friends, colleagues, and family members. Although attending morning and evening ceremonies is recommended, participation in other activities is not required. Participants appreciate time away from home and work; this alone is considered invaluable, as such unscheduled time is otherwise a rarity.

The second type of stay focuses more on experiencing what is deemed traditional Korean (Buddhist) culture. Most temples offer this program only during weekends and the major annual holidays such as lunar New Year and the Harvest Moon Festival (Ch'usökk), when they have enough participants. However, in summer this program is offered during weekdays as well to serve diverse groups, large and small, such as students and workers on vacation. Unlike the rest-oriented type, the participants follow a routine arranged by the staff of individual Templestay programs. The staff at times incorporate particular requests from the group leaders.

Customary activities for the experience-oriented program are a temple tour (figures 4 and 5), 108 prostrations to release 108 sufferings (figure 6), practicing a craft, meditation (sitting and/or walking), teatime with a monk or nun, attending morning and evening ceremonies, *ullyök* (communal work such as weeding or sweeping the temple grounds), and *paru kongyang* (dining in a formal monastic manner).³⁰

Involvement in such activities can be considered a sampling of curated Buddhist culture, but it also helps people to slow down and calm their minds. The staff, mindful of the religious diversity of the participants, often present the activities as a means of relaxation rather than learning Buddhist culture per se. In one temple in Seoul, participants were allowed to sound the *pömjong* (gigantic temple bell) and encouraged to feel its vibrations, not a commonly observed Buddhist practice. In another temple in Kyöngsang Province, when teaching 108 prostrations, the lay staff showed *Miracle on the 0.2 Pyöng*, a documentary demonstrating the mental and physical benefits of prostrations, with testimonials from a broad range of people including medical personnel and a Catholic priest, perhaps to deemphasize the association of the prostrations with Buddhism.³¹ Making lotus lanterns and threading *yömjju* (prayer beads) are simple tasks requiring concentration, and are considered therapeutic. One of the most memorable temple tours that I experienced took place on a snowy winter's day. The crisp fresh air and serenity of the surroundings made an



Figure 4. Temple tour inside. Photo by Kyoim Yun.



Figure 5. Temple tour outside. Photo by Kyoim Yun.



Figure 6. 108 prostrations. Photo by Kyoim Yun.

even stronger impression on me than did the explanations by a student monk of the temple history and Buddhist arts.³²

While lay staff members take care of logistical matters and lead cultural activities, the monks and nuns teach meditation sessions and lead *ch'adam* (conversations over tea). Although most monks spend little or no time on meditation because most of their daily lives are devoted to performing essential tasks in support of their monastic communities, it is perceived as “the putative *raison d'être*” of the clergy in monastic communities in South Korea (Buswell 1992, 107). Thus, a brief (usually an hour or less) meditation session is included in most experience-type Templestay programs. When introducing meditation, the monks and nuns invite the participants to try it out in the spirit of experimentation and emphasize the universal benefit of meditation as a means of quieting a busy mind. Sitting together with the monks and nuns over tea is a new experience for many participants hoping to gain some wisdom from their hosts. In sum, Buddhist culture and tradition, albeit integral to the program, are generally framed as therapeutic.

Yearning for healing in a distressed society

Unlike the itinerary-centered travel genres such as *tapsa* (trekking to heritage sites), and *paenang yŏhaeng* (backpacking mostly abroad), both popular in the 1990s (Oppenheim 2011), Templestay is a journey that one takes to be wholly immersed in a temple site. According to a survey from 2020, in fewer than two decades since the first Templestay, 82 percent of Koreans were aware of the program and about 20 percent had been participants (Yi 2021). Why has this mode of “travel” become appealing to so many Koreans? The popularity is, I contend, closely related both to a sense of crisis in emotional and psychological well-being felt by many Koreans after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, and to the Cultural Corps’ effective promotion of the program as wellness tourism.

It is not that Koreans lived a stress-free life before the crisis, but the impact of the ensuing neoliberal restructuring of society on citizens’ lives was massive and all encompassing: people lost secure jobs, families broke down, and gender discrimination increased (Song 2009). As the labor market became heavily reliant on temporary, flexible, freelance work, people have had to deal with job insecurity even after investing much time and expense in education and self-improvement, including one’s physical looks (*woemo*) (Kim Hyun Mee et al. 2010). Faced with endless competition, prevailing economic uncertainty, and widening inequality, increasing numbers of South Koreans suffer from anxiety and depression, defined both socially and medically.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) fares poorly in cross-national statistical measures of overall life satisfaction. According to the World Happiness Report published by the United Nations in 2020, its happiness ranking for 2017–19 was 61 out of 153, lower than many countries whose citizens have a shorter life expectancy, fewer educational opportunities, and lower per capita incomes. The high suicide rate is another indicator of a larger social malaise. Since late 2006, the ROK has had either the first or second highest suicide rate among member countries of the OECD. We

may not need these cross-national statistical measures to learn that South Korea is not a happy country. The internationally acclaimed film *Parasite* (2019) and TV series *Squid Games* (2021) vividly depict the fierce competitiveness and rapidly increasing inequality in society, often leading to depression.

Despite the increasing awareness of mental health issues, the percentage of the population actually seeking professional attention for mental health issues remains relatively low. In Korean society, as in other East Asian countries, mental illness is only in the early twenty-first century becoming socially accepted and medicalized (e.g., for China see Zhang 2020, 51; and for Japan, Kitanaka 2012). The 2019 survey conducted by the National Center for Mental Health shows that 60 percent of respondents were red flagged for mental health issues, but only 20 percent reported that they had visited a hospital or used counseling services (Ch'oi 2020). According to the survey, some *did* feel the need for help, but they self-assessed that their condition was not all that bad and hoped that it would improve with time. Others felt that mental health problems are something that one should overcome oneself or were unsure about the usefulness of professional help.

The low level of happiness in people's self-reports and their reluctance to seek professional help may explain why the word *haengbok* (happiness) has recently been in vogue in Korea.³³ Moreover, happiness guidebooks, particularly those written by Buddhist monks, have often become bestsellers. For example, as of June 2019 the eponymous *Happiness* by the Venerable Pomnyun, known as the national mentor (*kungmin ment'o*), had been reprinted twenty-nine times since its first publication in January 2016.³⁴

Furthermore, *hillung*, a neologism from the English "healing," has become ubiquitous in the media and everyday conversation. SBS, a major Korean media concern, ran a confessional TV talk show *Hilling K'aemp'ũ* (*Healing camp*) from 2011 to 2016. The Koreanized term *hillung* does not connote a narrowly defined meaning of Western-style medical or clinical treatment but suggests embracive, holistic, and alternative ways of enhancing physical and mental health.³⁵ Although the concept does not exclude the physical, its emphasis is more on the emotional and psychological. This becomes apparent especially when compared with the well-being (*welbing*) boom that emerged around 2003 and petered out in the middle of the 2008 global economic crisis. That rather short-lived trend focused on quality of life defined by physical health, construed as achievable through the consumption of related products such as health food, naturally dyed clothes, and environment-friendly interiors. The marketing of these products was sometimes so outlandish that it was widely criticized and even ridiculed (Sŏ T. 2005).

The subsequent *hillung* boom indicates a paradigm shift in Koreans' view of what comprises a good life. "Let's live well" (*chal sarabose*) was a song and motto representing the developmental philosophy that buttressed South Korea's economic growth.³⁶ The hope for material abundance motivated poverty-stricken Koreans after the Korean War (1950–53) to work diligently to achieve material affluence. Ironically, one of the side effects of the relentless pursuit of material wealth was the "mental poverty" (*chŏngsin jŏk pin'gon*) felt by Koreans, which led to high rates of anxiety and depression. This prompted many to think about the emotional, psychological,

and existential aspects of their individual lives³⁷ that were given little consideration or repressed during the postwar era of militant economic development and democratization. Templestay is a timely option at this juncture of Korean history in which experiential commodities promising happiness, relaxation, and healing are in great demand among those with little desire to explore Korean heritage sites or the world outside Korea.

The Cultural Corps responded to and capitalized on the prevailing social distress. In 2012, ten years after the program's inception, it began to explore a new brand image for the next decade. In fall 2014 it adopted happiness as the overarching theme, with the slogan "Templestay, a journey for my happiness." The new image appeared in an advertisement on its homepage in the autumn of 2014 with the following blurb:

"A journey to console me"

"A journey for my health"

"A journey to dream my dream"

"A journey for me to let things go"

Templestay is advertised as a healing experience providing consolation (*wiro*), health (*kōn'gang*), letting go (*pium*), and dreaming (*kkum*), virtually a panacea for all emotional, physical, and psychological wounds. According to the blueprint for the Cultural Corps published in 2014, the four key words were inspired by Buddhist ideals—consolation by peace, health by vitality, letting go by freedom, and dreaming by the power of prayer (2014, 31–40). Although Buddhist philosophy underpins the new brand concept, the key words are expressed in ordinary parlance to appeal to a wide range of people.

Participants' experiences and perspectives

How is Templestay received? Do participants feel consoled, healthier, as well as more hopeful and relaxed after the end of the program, as the new advertisement suggests? According to surveys conducted by Gallup Korea between 2017 and 2020, the overall average satisfaction with Templestay was above 6 on a scale of 1 to 7 (Cultural Corps 2019, 15; 2020a, 20; 2021a, 164). However, most questionnaires were limited to the quality of the service and the program's operation. Two questions asking about the impact of Templestay on participants' emotional and psychological well-being were added to the survey in 2020, to which more than 95.4 percent of respondents reported an improvement in their emotional stability and 94.2 percent an increased sense of happiness (Cultural Corps 2021a, 89). This high level of customer satisfaction was publicized in various news sources, with catchy titles such as "Emotional Stability and Increased Happiness, the Degree of Satisfaction with Templestay 6.47 on a scale of 7" (Yi 2021). These numerical results are powerful by virtue of their simplicity. However, they provide little information about *why* many deem Templestay worthy of their time and money.

Handwritten, anonymous testimonials in the exit survey offer some clues for the high percentages and reveal more about individual experiences and feelings than the statistical data can provide. Select reviews are scanned and posted on each Templestay

program website. Reviewers are asked to provide a succinct definition of Templestay and then their thoughts about the experience. Here are a few of the comments: “The utmost healing,” “My second home,” “Rest, recharge, and purification,” “All the answers are in me,” “Recovered from my blue and tangled feeling,” “Washing dishes because it is like washing a dish called me” (Cultural Corps n.d.).

One participant defined Templestay in one word: *shwimp’yo*, referring to “comma,” and explained why it was a comma: “How long ago was it that I last spent some time without thinking about anything? The eight-day-long rest was such a precious time for me who had kept running” (Cultural Corps 2021b). The participant traveled alone from Incheon to this temple on Wan Island, located to the west of the southernmost tip of the peninsula, a journey of seven hours’ duration. Talking with a monk over tea and the fellowship of the (lay) staff members made the participant feel comfortable after a couple of awkward days. Satisfied with the restful stay, the reviewer decided to add three more days to the originally planned five days, and ended the review with a promise to revisit: “If I could find a time—no, I will create a time—to come back. Until then, stay healthy everyone, including Sarang [meaning “love” and referring to a dog living in the temple].” These reviews are often filled with gratitude, relaxation, a sense of peace, and of a connection with nature and with other temple residents.

My observations in the field are congruent with the high level of consumer satisfaction, demonstrated both by statistical evidence and by the many heartfelt testimonials. The immediate effect of the program activities seemed obvious from what I observed. In summer 2015, a nun led a walking meditation for about fifty employees working at a hospital in a city near Lotus Temple as part of an experience-type Templestay. The group walked in silence, holding bowls half-full of water in their hands while pausing occasionally—the repetition of walking and pausing was signaled by the sound of a *chukpi* (bamboo clapper) struck by the nun (figure 7).



Figure 7. Walking meditation. Photo by Kyoim Yun.

After a long, steady climb of a hill in the woods, the group reached a pavilion with a beautiful view, located about one mile from the main temple complex. The nun invited them to talk about their experience. I was quite impressed by their openness and articulation of their feelings. Just a few examples from my field notes are: “I thought about people who cannot speak and those who cannot use their hands,” “when I paused, I was able to listen to the sound of birds and to see the water [in the stream along the road],” “I tend to worry too much. I felt my anxious mind becoming calm,” “I have a sinus infection in my nose, but the congestion cleared.”

One member of the group, a self-identified Catholic, said, “It’s not easy to let things go because I worry about getting behind. I usually get more tired when not working because I become too restless, but I had a restful time.” I was a bit surprised by one man’s confession. “I talk a lot at work, but never reveal my *sok maūm* (inner feelings). We [my wife and I] have been married for ten years, but I have never expressed my feelings to her. My wife and my brother-in-law, who are also here, are all working at the hospital.” All of a sudden, he called his wife and told her: “I love you.” The nun’s question “Were you forced to marry her?” generated laughter among the group. During the sharing session, people expressed previously unspoken feelings as well as released anxieties and emotional pressure, and a few shed tears. The participants looked much more lighthearted on the downward climb to the temple than they had on their climb up to the open pavilion.

However, Templestay did not do anything miraculous for my research partners. According to them, they had benefited from Templestay and from other therapeutic activities as well, such as gardening, counseling, psychiatric treatment, happiness guidebooks, and contemplative walks. In summer 2014, Yuna, a civil servant in her early fifties, traveled from Seoul to a Buddhist temple in a southeastern province to find “freedom and space” (*chayu wa yōyu*). Several years earlier, she had taken a yearlong medical leave of absence due to breast cancer. Four years after returning to work, Yuna was transferred to her current division, a transfer that required her to learn many new skills and often mandated both late hours and substantial overtime. While her husband was helpful, responsibility for the household chores rested primarily on her. After free counseling sessions provided by her institution, she decided for the first time in her life to spend a few days at a temple, leaving behind her family consisting of her husband, daughter, and elderly mother.

During her stay, this Protestant woman neither interacted with Buddhist monks nor entered temple buildings except for a museum of Buddhist art. Instead, she read and wrote in her journal in her own room, walked about the tranquil temple complex, and occasionally talked with two other solo retreaters. Yuna extended her originally planned two-night stay by two more days on the spot. When I met her in 2015 and 2019, she expressed a desire to go back if she could afford the time and also told me that she had had art therapy and had bought a tiny house in a small town for weekend gardening. She seemed to continue to expand the freedom and space in her life.

A thirty-eight-year-old single woman whom I shall call Chisu did her first Templestay at a temple in Seoul in 2015. Since that time, Chisu has returned to the temple at first as a Templestay participant with her foreign friends interested in Korean culture and then occasionally as a volunteer interpreter for weekend

programs, which often include foreign visitors.³⁸ She earned an MBA at a prestigious university in Seoul with the dream of becoming an investment banker, but failed to get a job in the financial sector and worked instead in a small company involved in publications for private education. Although she tried to feel content with her job, she continued to suffer from a desire to get ahead of her peers, a common affliction in South Korea's extremely competitive society. Furthermore, she faced a personal and professional crisis when the company's business began to decline, and she was also cast aside at age thirty-three by the first man she had dated seriously. After experiencing panic attacks, she worked with a clinical counselor and began to read books about love, life, and philosophy to better understand the importance of her neglected emotional life.

Still, Chisu felt that counseling and reading self-help books did not seem to be enough and that she needed to take more direct action to find the answers she sought. She considered walking Spain's Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route but feared walking some five hundred miles alone in a foreign country. In order to test herself with something unfamiliar yet less intense and challenging, and hoping for a restful and consoling time in a quiet place away from her family, she joined Templestay during the Ch'usök, the Korean equivalent of Thanksgiving, in 2015. This experience gave her the confidence she needed to request a forty-five-day unpaid vacation and set out for the Camino. Walking about six hours every day for forty days helped her let things go, dampen her resentment, and appreciate the beauty of nature. In her words, "I believed I could find answers if I constantly turned everything over in my mind, but when I let things go, both answers and gratitude came to me." She told me that the nun had helped her learn about letting things go without trying to bind her to the temple, something she would have resented. Templestay provided people like Yuna and Chisu with space to do self-work.³⁹

Reflections

Due to the monasteries' outlying locations and their withdrawal from society, Korean Buddhism was once known as "mountain Buddhism." In an effort to reach out to the laity, since the 1980s Buddhist orders in South Korea have built temples in urban areas (Joo 2011, 616). While the Christian-like propagation earned city temples more lay Buddhists and revenue, Buddhists at the same time idealize and long for remote monasteries, which the reformist Han during the colonial period deemed "Buddhism's grave" (Galmiche 2014, 228). Although Templestay has not contributed to increasing the number of converts, it reconciles the ambivalence toward mountain monasteries by turning their physical and social distance into an asset to gain traction with a wide range of laypeople.

Templestay, a seemingly emblematic example of "disengaged Buddhism," allows us to reimagine engaged Buddhism in a contemporary society. The *minjung Pulgyo* (Buddhism for the masses) led by clerics discontented with monasticism failed to appeal to laypeople, whose suffering they purportedly aspired to ease, due in no small part to their own ambitions and internal politics (Park P. 2010, 31). The subsequent, grassroots community movements of the Jungto Society and Indra's Net provided

new visions for engaged Buddhism by integrating Buddhist principles, such as the interdependence of all sentient beings, into social work (Kim and Choi 2016; Kim S. 2021; Park P. 2010; Tedesco 2003). Their commitment to resolving pressing issues concerning the lives of all in Buddhist ways with compassion and nonviolence has earned much support from Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

By contrast, Templestay is a Buddhist enterprise originally designed by the Chogye Order, in conjunction with the government, to engage foreign visitors with no explicitly stated soteriological goals. Taking advantage of both the substantial government support and exotic images of monastic life, the program transformed traditional temples into popular wellness destinations for Koreans. Templestay can be dismissed as a devious enterprise coopted by the Buddhist establishment and the government “to patch up people’s psychological and spiritual wounds and send them back out into the fray,” but this, Sallie King claims, is not the true purpose of engaged Buddhism (2009, 3).

However, examining how Templestay works on the ground and what people get from the experience suggests that the secular retreat program at a religious site presents for Korean Buddhism an opportunity to engage with ordinary citizens hoping to temporarily disengage from their everyday lives. It allows laypersons lacking any association with the temple, clergy, or Buddhism space for self-reflection and facilitates enhancement of their well-being, free from unwanted commitments. Given the magnitude of the emotional and psychological distress felt by many individuals in Korea and in the world, this is no small matter. According to Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022), who minted the term “engaged Buddhism,” “All of Buddhism is engaged because all of it addresses human suffering” (King 2009, 4, 8). From his view, “Buddhism is already engaged Buddhism. If it is not, it is not Buddhism” (Hunt-Perry and Fine 2000, 36), whether encountered in mountain monasteries or urban mega-temples.

Templestay’s systematic inclusiveness and holistic approach to wellbeing would not be sustainable without the partnership between the state and Korean Buddhism. If it is problematic to believe that Templestay is wholeheartedly dedicated to promoting the happiness of distressed laity, so too is to assume that popular concerns for well-being are purely the object of manipulation by the state and the Buddhist establishment. Opening monasteries day and night for a standard fee is a way of formatting staying at temples as an experiential commodity. This sort of “disentanglement” in the sense of sociologist Michel Callon (1998) is integral to attracting a wide range of people. The participants include those rejecting Buddhism as a religion, those reluctant to seek professional help for their mental health issues, and those seeking something beyond what they get from psychiatrists, counselors, and churches. For them, Templestay is a viable option for a safe, low-key, affordable, and restorative getaway. While this transitory retreat may not provide a lasting impact on many retreatants’ lives, the outcome of this engagement can be more than a restful experience in a cloistered monastery. In response to my question, “Do you feel happier than before?,” Chisu, who did Templestay in preparation for her trip to the Camino de Santiago, responded, “I’ve come to care less about happiness and unhappiness. The nun taught me that happiness is not something you seek.”

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NOTES

1. Romanization of Korean terms in the article follows the McCune-Reischauer system, with the exception of familiar names such as Seoul, for which I have adopted conventional English spellings. All Korean names in the text are pseudonyms, except for those of authors and public figures. All transliterations, transcriptions, and translations are mine. The exchange rate between the Korean won and the US dollar has fluctuated over the years, but I use a rough estimate of 1,200 won to US\$1 throughout the text.

2. In 2020, there existed 968 traditional temples nationwide: Chogye Order with 783, T'aego Order with 96, and Pöphwa Order with 17 (the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, quoted by Kwön O., January 20, 2021).

3. Templestay is a brand name, capitalized and written as one word with no hyphen.

4. Categories such as shamanism, Confucianism, and Daoism are not considered to be on the same footing as Buddhism and Christianity with their well-structured practices and sophisticated doctrines. Participants in the survey were asked to list their religion.
5. For Buddhism's engagement with global market economy, see Brox and Williams-Oerberg 2020.
6. The Confucian dynasty regulated Buddhism rather than persecuting it. Buddhism thrived, fulfilling religious and spiritual needs of a wide range of people during the period (Baker 2014).
7. The Chogye Order has in principle upheld celibacy, but it is an open secret that some monks have a "secret wife" (Kim S. 2022). Moreover, the self-identified "pure" order was not so pure in other regards, prompting lay Buddhists to occasionally call for reform of corruption within the leadership (Tedesco 2003, 162–65, 170–74).
8. For the state's support and control of Buddhism, see Pai (2013, chap. 5) for the colonial period; Kaplan (2010) and Sørensen (1988, 1999) for the post-independence period; and Ahn (2018) and Vermeersch (2008) for the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392).
9. Joan Hubbard, the wife of Thomas C. Hubbard, who was the US Ambassador to South Korea (2001–04), suggested the renovation of toilets (Kwŏn T. 2002).
10. This blur was often seen particularly in the realm of traditional music during the heyday of the *minjung* culture in the 1980s and early 1990s, when Buddhist cultural elements were often represented as Korean traditional culture. For example, meditative music composed by Kim Yŏngdong, known for his contribution to popularizing traditional Korean music (*kugak*), was described as the music of both *kugak* and Sŏn, the Korean counterpart of Zen. Shamanism has also been deployed in the politics of national representation of religion and culture since the colonial period, but the vernacular religion, both romanticized and stigmatized, has not held the same status as Buddhism.
11. In fact, such criticism did arise from the Christian leadership as the amount of funding for Templestay increased significantly over the years (e.g., No 2016).
12. For a longer history of temple tourism in modern Korea, see for example Kaplan (2010); Pai (2013, chap. 5); Sørensen (1999).
13. The number of participants was far lower than the forty-five thousand estimated by the Buddhist establishment (Sŏ 2002). Among the thirty-three temples, twenty-five were from the Chogye Order and the rest from four other minor orders (*Pulgyo sinmun* 2002).
14. Although foreigners continue to participate in Templestay, it is advertised separately for them (e.g., Kim S. 2017, 131), and their expectations and purposes differ from those of Koreans (Cultural Corps 2019, 28; 2020a, 39; Kaplan 2007, 28–30). This article concerns Templestay for Koreans, because Templestay for foreigners requires a separate study.
15. Compared to Christians, who frequently participate in church activities and pay their tithes, most Buddhists visit temples infrequently with no concept of tithes. Aware of this problem, Buddhist monasteries have made efforts to connect with lay Buddhists by creating lay associations affiliated with monasteries (Buswell 1992, chap. 6; Galmiche 2010) and building temples in cities (Galmiche 2014; Joo 2011, 616). According to Gallup Korea, the number of self-reported Buddhists was only 16 percent in 2021, as opposed 19 percent in 1984, while the percentages of Protestants (17 percent) and Catholics (6 percent) remained the same.

16. Before the establishment of the Cultural Corps, the Buddhist culture industry was dependent upon and at times in conflict with the general tourism industry (Moon 2008, 175).
17. The Cultural Corps kindly provided the information in this article regarding the number of people, Koreans and foreigners, and temples participating in Templestay. Each year since 2017, the Cultural Corps has commissioned Gallup Korea to perform a comprehensive survey of participants and their satisfaction with Templestay and to analyze the data. I am very grateful to the staff members for sharing with me Gallup Korea's reports from 2018, 2019, and 2020.
18. For a study of wellness retreat, a subcategory of wellness tourism, focusing on retreat operators' perspectives, see Kelly (2010).
19. Their insularity also made temples favored sites for self-exile, especially for political figures. For example, Chun Doo Hwan, the president of the Fifth Republic of Korea, who rose to power through a military coup in 1979 and was responsible for the Kwangju massacre in 1980, took up a hermit life with his wife in Paekdam Temple, Kangwŏn Province from November 1988 to December 1990 (MBC 2018).
20. Some Buddhist nuns have in the early twenty-first century been drawing global attention for their previously unrecognized culinary talents for temple food (Choi 2022).
21. The fee for Templestay has increased over the years. During the 2002 World Cup, the fee for one day and night was 30,000–50,000 won (US\$25–\$42) (*Pulgyo sinmun* 2002). The estimate of 90,000 won (US\$75) was based on surveys using the Contingent Valuation Method by Yi Ch'unggi, a speaker at a seminar on the social values of Templestay (Cultural Corps 2020b).
22. For example, a woman hiking on the Olle trail was raped and killed by a local resident (Ko 2012); another woman was raped and killed by the owner of the guest house where she was staying (Kim C. 2018). Both women were traveling on Cheju Island, a famous tourist destination in South Korea.
23. For more details of *kidowŏn*, see Baker (2008, 135).
24. Other contributors to the higher participation of women than men in the program may have to do with the fact that men are more constrained due to their work. In 2019, women's employment rate (51.6 percent) is 19.1 percent lower than that of men (70.7 percent) (Korean Statistical Information Service 2023).
25. The rule has appeared to change. In one temple, I saw foreign couples rooming together in 2015, and Korean couples in 2022.
26. The gender-neutrality of the outfit bears a marked resemblance to the elements of the monastic dress code. In contrast to the rather impractical *hanbok* (traditional Korean clothing), which is elaborate, expensive, and donned only for special occasions such as ceremonies and traditional holidays, this new-style *hanbok* is practical for ordinary life (Ruhlen 2003, 123). More strenuous Buddhist training called *suryŏnhoe* requires participants to wear outfits connoting Buddhist association, such as gray jackets and trousers.
27. For example, see Buswell (1992, 141–42), Galmiche (2010), and Nathan (2018, 119–20) for Korea; and Laidlaw and Mair (2019) for Taiwan.
28. Participants voluntarily refrain from using cell phones during the morning and evening services, meals, and tea times with monks and nuns.

29. This type of Templestay was first offered by two temples during the Asian Games in fall 2002, when altogether fourteen temples nationwide ran the Templestay program (*Yōhaeng sinmun*, September 30, 2002).
30. Typically, *paru kongyang* is arranged only once for a large group of participants, particularly when participants include foreigners. The rest of the meals are served buffet style.
31. The documentary was originally broadcast by SBS, one of the major TV broadcasting systems in Korea, on April 8, 2007. One *pyōng* is 3.3058 m²; 0.2 *pyōng* is the typical size of a rectangular floor cushion that people use for prostration and meditation.
32. Temple tours are usually provided by lay staff and, in large temples, by *munhwa haesōlsa* (cultural tour guides). A student monk attending Dongguk University, a Buddhist college in Seoul, led this particular weekend tour as a part-time job.
33. As with many other neologisms, the term came to Korea through Meiji Japan at the end of the nineteenth century (T'ak 2013, 36–37). For definitions of the term “happiness” in Chinese historical and cultural contexts, relevant to those of Korea and Japan, see Chen (2019).
34. For Pomnyun and his engaged Buddhism, see Kim S. (2021) and Park P. (2010, 32–36).
35. The term has come to be widely used in Korea since 2007 (Park J. 2016, 378).
36. According to Kang Sinuk (2016), the song was composed in 1962, a year after the May 16 military coup by Park Chung Hee, the ROK president (1963–79) known for having spearheaded the rapid development of the South Korean economy.
37. For similar changes in China, see Yang (2015) and Zhang (2020).
38. Chisu was introduced to me by the nun running the program at the temple. I interviewed her on August 4, 2019, after her volunteer work.
39. See Chapter 6 in Zhang’s 2020 study for similar experiences among Chinese individuals.

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