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Navigating the Intersections of Religion and Education Reflected in the Institutional Mission: Examining the Case of Dongguk University as a Buddhist-Affiliated Institution in South Korea

Jahyun Gu ¹ and Juhwan Kim ^{2,*} 

¹ Department of Indian Philosophy, Dongguk University, Seoul 04620, Republic of Korea; biomental2@gmail.com

² Research Institute of the Comprehensive School-Safety, Dongguk University, Seoul 04620, Republic of Korea

* Correspondence: jkimmnovice@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the ongoing impact of religiously affiliated private institutions on the dynamics of higher education in South Korea. To do so, this study pays attention to the case of Dongguk University as a renowned Buddhist-affiliated institution. By exploring the university's institutional mission, educational goals, governance, symbolic representations, and curricula, this study illustrates the ways in which Dongguk University integrates its Buddhist identity into various facets of its educational framework. This study especially highlights the university's ongoing efforts to reconcile its religious vision based upon Buddhism with its broader educational responsibilities to our society so as to educate well-rounded citizens who can creatively address contemporary challenges we now face. With an in-depth exploration of Dongguk University rooted in Buddhism, this study sheds light on the distinct characteristics of religiously affiliated private institutions and their influences on the educational landscape in South Korea. In doing so, this study offers valuable insights into the ways to examine the intersections between religions, education, and contemporary society. Such insights elucidate the critical roles of religions in our public life and their implications for the future of education in an era of unprecedented social, cultural, and technological changes.



Citation: Gu, Jahyun, and Juhwan Kim. 2024. Navigating the Intersections of Religion and Education Reflected in the Institutional Mission: Examining the Case of Dongguk University as a Buddhist-Affiliated Institution in South Korea. *Religions* 15: 644. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060644>

Received: 8 April 2024
Revised: 13 May 2024
Accepted: 21 May 2024
Published: 24 May 2024

Keywords: religiously affiliated institutions; Buddhism; institutional mission; higher education; South Korea

1. Introduction

The higher education landscape in South Korea is characterized by a predominance of private institutions. Among these institutions, a substantial number are affiliated with religious organizations, particularly those tied to various denominations of Christianity and Buddhism (Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2018). This distinctive feature of South Korean higher education influences the missions, educational experience, and ongoing dynamics of these institutions.

Religiously affiliated private institutions in South Korea emphasize their institutional missions, which are deeply rooted in the specific religious ideals, worldviews, and visions their affiliated organizations strive to pursue. These missions shape the educational goals, curricula, and overall distinct features of these institutions, differing from the secular private educational institutions. By integrating religious perspectives and values into their educational frameworks, these religiously affiliated institutions strive to provide students with unique learning experiences. These experiences combine academic pursuits with spiritual and moral development, which enables students to explore their chosen fields of study with their respective religious perspectives. This approach often leads students to an in-depth understanding of themselves and the world grounded upon the teachings and values of religions.



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While religiously affiliated institutions significantly influence the dynamics of higher education in South Korea, scholars have primarily focused on universities and colleges tied to Christian denominations. In contrast, researchers have often overlooked the roles and impacts of Buddhist-affiliated educational institutions.¹ This study addresses this gap by examining the case of Dongguk University, a prominent private institution with a history spanning over a century and strong ties to Korean Buddhism. Dongguk University traces its origins back to 1906 when it was established as the Myeongjin School (Kor. 불교연구회; Chi. 明進學校) by the Society of Buddhist Research (Kor. 명진학교; Chi. 佛教研究會), which consisted of a group of Buddhist leaders. The institution was granted university status in 1953 and has since evolved into a multidisciplinary institution of higher education. This history indicates that Dongguk University's institutional mission and fundamental principles are deeply rooted in Buddhism. As the first Buddhist-affiliated university in South Korea, Dongguk University has pioneered the incorporation of Buddhist studies and practices into its general education curriculum. With its long-standing commitment to Buddhist ideals and values and its significant contributions to the educational landscape of South Korea, Dongguk University provides an exemplary case to elucidate the dynamics of religiously affiliated private institutions in the context of higher education.

This study examines the ways in which Dongguk University integrates its Buddhist identity into various aspects of its institutional mission including, importantly, its educational goals, governance, symbolic representations, and curricula. By exploring the university's institutional mission and its manifestations in mandatory courses, specialized programs, and elective course offerings, this study sheds light on the ways in which the religiously affiliated private institution and its mission rooted in particular religious perspectives shape the educational experiences and outcomes of students. Based upon this analysis, this study not only explores the prevalence of religiously affiliated institutions and their influences on the educational landscape, but it also offers an in-depth understanding of the roles of religion in shaping the characteristics of universities and colleges. This in-depth understanding will elucidate the broader implications of religiously affiliated institutions on the dynamics of higher education in South Korea. In addition, given the limited scholarly attention paid to Buddhist-affiliated institutions, this study offers a more balanced and inclusive discourse on religious education in South Korea. Not only does this approach pave the pathways to explore the ways in which different religious perspectives shape distinct institutional missions and features of educational institutions in and beyond South Korea, but it also offers valuable insights into the intersections between religion, education, and contemporary society. These insights will elucidate the critical roles of religions in our public life and their implications for the future of education in an era of unprecedented social, cultural, and technological change.

2. The Current Status of Religiously Affiliated Private Institutions in South Korea

2.1. Religiously Affiliated Private Institutions and Their Enlarged Proportion in Higher Education

In South Korea, the higher education system relies substantially upon the private sector. According to the data disclosed in 2023 under the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Disclosure of Information by Education-Related Institutions, there are 392 institutions of higher education in South Korea.² More specifically, the data show that private educational institutions predominate, constituting 344 (87.8%) institutions of the total. Regarding universities, 154 (84.1%) of the institutions are private. The enrolment figures also demonstrate a predominance of private institutions across the higher education sector. For the 2024 academic year, the total enrolment quota stands at 555,138 for all higher education institutions, with private entities constituting 421,649 (75.9%) of that aggregate. In the case of universities, the total enrolment quota is 396,180, of which 234,114 (76.8%) are enrolled at private universities. This trend is most evident for colleges, where private college enrolments of 137,728 (97.1%) account for nearly the entire 140,960 quota.

This tendency of the higher education system in South Korea differs from the cases of many other countries where the governmental entities establish, manage, and influence most of the institutions for higher education including, importantly, universities and colleges. According to the [OECD \(2023\)](#), there are three types of educational institutions: (a) public institutions, (b) government-dependent private institutions, and (c) independent private institutions. A public institution is controlled and managed by either public education authorities or governmental entities. In the cases of private institutions, the terms “government-dependent” and “independent” refer to the degree of a private institution’s dependence on funding from government sources. While independent private institutions are funded mainly by student fees and/or other private contributions, such as donations and benefactors, those that are government-dependent receive more than 50 percent of their funding from government sources. Given this classification, the data in 2021 offered by the [OECD \(2023\)](#) indicate that most students at the programs for the bachelor’s degree or equivalent level in many countries enroll in public or government-dependent institutions (see [Table 1](#)). South Korea, as one of the few exceptions, is a country where more than 70 percent of students enroll in independent private institutions. These data illustrate the prominent tendency of the higher education system in South Korea to depend substantially upon the private sector, especially the many independent private institutions.

Table 1. The number of students enrolled in educational institutions for higher education.

Countries	All Students	Students in Public Institutions	Students in Government-Dependent Private Institutions	Students in Independent Private Institutions
South Korea	2,027,608	461,585 (22.8%)	-	1,566,023 (77.2%)
Japan	2,588,891	532,241 (20.5%)	-	2,056,650 (79.5%)
USA	7,935,542	5,304,821 (66.8%)	-	2,630,721 (33.2%)
UK	1,691,517	-	1,691,517 (100%)	-
France	1,185,809	1,021,619 (86.2%)	16,636 (1.4%)	147,554 (12.4%)
Italy	1,244,672	999,596 (80.3%)	-	245,076 (19.7%)
New Zealand	141,376	134,685 (95.2%)	6688 (4.798%)	3 (0.002%)
Sweden	187,774	176,936 (94.2%)	10,838 (5.8%)	-
Finland	177,785	63,467 (35.7%)	114,318 (64.3%)	-
Brazil	8,986,554	2,078,661 (23.1%)	-	6,907,893 (76.9%)

Taking the data offered by South Korea and the OECD together, what is noteworthy in this tendency is that many independent private institutions for higher education are established, funded, and managed by religious organizations. According to the data offered by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and [Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism \(2018\)](#),³ there are 86 religiously affiliated institutions which account for over half of all private universities in South Korea. Among these institutions, 75 are established, funded, and managed by organizations directly tied to Christian traditions, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Society of Jesus, and a variety of

Protestant denominations. An additional five institutions are overseen by Buddhist organizations, and the remaining four are administered by entities that represent other religions, such as Confucianism. This situation indicates that the religiously affiliated educational institutions and their characteristics extensively influence the multi-faceted dynamics of higher education in South Korea.

2.2. The Characteristics of the Religiously Affiliated Private Institutions

One of the distinct characteristics of private institutions is the institutional mission(s) that represents a set of aims, goals, and values based upon a particular ideology. This ideology often consists of the fundamental ideas and purposes of education the founder(s) strives to pursue. While all educational institutions, including public ones, have goals and aims, private institutions especially emphasize the spread and development of their institutional mission(s) and the underlying ideology un/officially declared by the founder(s).⁴ The mission(s), in that sense, shapes not just the core of autonomy that private institutions have, but also a specific vision that determines their fundamental modes and principles of existence in our society.

In private institutions, the mission statement provides the contexts of the institutional aims and goals so as to reify the ways in which the institutions and their educational systems are managed. The statement describes the specific purposes of education and their (prospective) outcomes as well as institutional directions for governance decision making as a private educational institution (Bialik and Merhav 2020; Boerema 2006; Holosko et al. 2015; Vanari and Eisenschmidt 2022). In the contexts of higher education, many private institutions emphasize their mission statements, utilizing them as “part[s] of standard practice for strategic planning, accreditation purposes, [and] promoting institutional goods and objectives” (Holosko et al. 2015, p. 223). With these usages of the mission statements, the institutions offer the broad and long-term aspects of the direction towards a desired future they seek to achieve (Vanari and Eisenschmidt 2022). In this sense, Holosko et al. (2015) articulate that the mission statement typically responds to these key questions: “(1) Who we are? (2) What do we do? (3) What makes us unique? and (4) What are our core values?” (p. 223). The mission statement that has a symbolic meaning(s), thus, represents a specific vision(s) that prescribes a set of standards and values, which defines the institutions’ fundamental purposes as a legitimate reason for existence in our society (Bialik and Merhav 2020).

Many private institutions in South Korea and their institutional missions exemplify the mission statement and its features we described. For example, Korea University,⁵ a renowned private institution, articulates its educational objective as “to build character, nurture a capacity for theory and abstraction, and contribute to the nation and human society” underpinned by the mission statement, “education saves the nation” (Korea University 2024). This statement encapsulates the ideology the founder strived to pursue, “national salvation through education (教育救國)” (Korea University 2024). Similarly, Sookmyung Women’s University,⁶ established in 1908 by the royal family during the late Joseon dynasty, advocates its mission as follows: “to establish national legitimacy and women’s education that aims to modesty (貞淑), wisdom (賢明), and justice (正大)” (Sookmyung Women’s University 2024). This statement leads to the specific institutional goal that focuses on cultivating female leaders who contribute to the development of the nation and humanity. Sungkyunkwan University,⁷ another prominent private institution, also exemplifies the importance of institutional missions. This university represents its institutional vision, “cultivating oneself and governing others” (修己治人), by drawing on a verse from *The Analects* (論語), which is a text composed of ideas attributed to Confucius and his followers. This vision encapsulates the notion that the process and power of self-cultivation enables one to positively influence and transform the world. Grounded in the Confucian ideal that emphasizes self-cultivation as the foundation for harmonious societal relations, Sungkyunkwan University upholds the fundamental educational principle that

“students [should] strive to perfect themselves as leaders and contribute to our society” (Sungkyunkwan University 2024).

One crucial point here involves the prominent differences among private institutions, especially between the secular ones and those affiliated with religious organizations. While all private institutions share the educational goals of cultivating students as citizens for our society, those religiously affiliated distinctly emphasize institutional missions rooted in the specific religious ideals, worldviews, and visions. Yonsei University,⁸ a renowned Christian private institution in South Korea, exemplifies this feature through its mission statement: “Yonsei University is dedicated to educate future leaders of our society in *the spirit of Christianity*, fostering a strong and lasting commitment to the principles of truth and freedom” (Yonsei University 2024, emphasis added). With the bible verse the institution highlights, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32 (NIV)); this institutional mission encapsulates the ecumenical spirit of Christian teaching (Yonsei University 2024). In a similar way, Ewha Womans University’s mission statement reflects its Methodist institutional root: “At Ewha, our spirit of education centers on the ideas that women’s education must be modernized under *the spirit of Christianity*” (Ewha Womans University 2024, emphasis added).⁹ Sogang University¹⁰ is affiliated with the Society of Jesus and also manifests a religious vision and worldview through its institutional mission: “[Sogang University] aims to provide an education that teaches *the veneration of God* and understands the true meaning of life” (Sogang University 2024, emphasis added).

In addition, the curricula entwined deeply with the distinctive institutional mission(s) also constitute another prominent characteristic of the private institutions. One crucial purpose of higher education is to develop “students’ general education outcomes and disciplinary expertise as complementary and mutually reinforcing to meet the diverse requirements of contemporary civilization” (Aloi et al. 2003, p. 239). To fulfill this purpose, the institutions shape their distinct curricula that consist of the courses for general education as well as those for disciplinary expertise. In so doing, these institutions aspire to educate students for their academic pursuits or professional careers in various fields. Contrary to the disciplinary-specific courses that develop specialized knowledge and skills as competencies for professional success, those for general education pay close attention to a variety of learning experiences “to cultivate the students’ cultural accomplishments, the wisdom of life, analytical ability, communication skills, and the momentum of lifetime learning” (Shih 2019, p. 310; Lin 2023). With general education, many institutions aim to foster students as good citizens who are “better able to view diverse cultures, lifestyles, and backgrounds from objective and informed perspectives” essential to be responsible and caring members of our society (Vander Schee 2011, p. 382). Therefore, parts of the curricula for general education in many institutions often consist of a grouping(s) of introductory courses in various disciplines within the liberal arts including philosophy, classic literary works, natural and social sciences, and foreign languages.

Inasmuch as the educational purposes and structures of higher education, we can find that many private institutions utilize the curricula to fulfill their distinctive institutional missions. This point is especially evident in (but not limited to) the context of general education. In most cases, the mission statements in many private universities and colleges serve to represent the institutions’ educational philosophy and their core values that suture the loosely distributed courses for general education as one coherent program students can grasp (Warner and Koepfel 2009). Therefore, general education resonates with the institution’s mission(s) and its desired accomplishments (Leskes and Miller 2005). Warner and Koepfel (2009), thus, articulate that “the general education curriculum, shared by all students, demonstrates the institution’s missions, philosophy, values, and cultures” (p. 241).

Notable in this regard is that the religiously affiliated universities and colleges emphasize their curricula and constitutive courses that integrate aspects of religions into specific educational experiences, including teaching and learning. While varied by institutional mission(s) and its underlying religions, these institutions often incorporate general edu-

cation curricula with their associated religious ideals and beliefs. Many universities and colleges affiliated with the Christian denominations, for instance, often mandate courses on Christianity and chapel requirements for degree completion. The institutions affiliated with other religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism also have similar types of mandatory courses that teach and learn their religious ideals, worldviews, and visions. These institutions, in doing so, spotlight and disseminate the values of religious perspectives as the core of the institutional mission(s), which are crucial to educate students as citizens who contribute to establish a just, caring, and flourishing society.

Given the distinct characteristics of the private educational institutions in South Korea we explored, this study focuses specifically on the case of Dongguk University, an institution affiliated with a Korean Buddhist organization. While many studies have investigated South Korean private institutions directly associated with various Christian denominations, scholarly work on those tied to Buddhism has often remained unnoticed. However, Dongguk University, as a prominent private institution established in 1906, has a significant impact on the dynamics of higher education in South Korea. Many South Korean universities (e.g., Dongguk University, Joong-Ang Sangha University,¹¹ Uiduk University,¹² Geumgang University,¹³ etc.) are affiliated with Buddhist organizations, accounting for the second largest proportion of religiously affiliated institutions after those tied to Christian denominations. Among these institutions, Dongguk University holds a unique position as the first Buddhist-affiliated university managed by The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism (大韓佛教曹溪宗). This university is especially pioneering in South Korea for incorporating Buddhist studies into its general education curriculum for all students. With a history spanning over a century, Dongguk University serves as a prominent example of a Buddhist-affiliated private educational institution. By focusing on this exemplary case, this study attempts to shed light on the ways in which the distinct characteristics of religiously affiliated private institutions influence the dynamics of higher education in South Korea. Considering the existence of many South Korean institutions affiliated with diverse religions, this study also contributes to maintaining a balance in the fields related to religious education.

3. An Analysis of the Mission Statement and Its Applications: The Case of Dongguk University

3.1. Institutional Mission and Its Manifestations in Its Purposes, Governance, and Symbols

As described, Dongguk University, affiliated with The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, officially advocates its institutional mission based upon the ideals and values of Buddhism. This mission represents its foundational spirit through three educational goals: (a) to build up one's character based on the Buddhist virtues; (b) to make the nation, mankind, and nature full of wisdom¹⁴ and benevolence;¹⁵ and (c) to realize the ideal society¹⁶ in which people can trust and respect each other (Dongguk University 2024b). This institutional mission provides specific contexts to reify the purposes and prospective outcomes of education. Furthermore, the mission determines the institutional directions for governance, shaping the ways in which the educational system is managed. For instance, the purposes of education declared by Dongguk University revolve around the foundational spirit rooted in Buddhism:

Following the foundational spirit, [Dongguk] University aims at *making the Buddhist spirit* and the Korean culture known worldwide, and further at cultivating persons of talent with leadership skills who will devote themselves to realizing ideals of the nation and mankind by researching and teaching academic theories and their application methods (Dongguk University 2024b, emphasis added).

To reify the Buddhist spirit the institution pursues, Dongguk University uses the term "Hwajaeng" in Buddhism to describe a type of talent necessary for creativity, innovation, and the ability to recognize differences to address issues we now face.¹⁷ In other words, students with this talent are the ideal type that the university strives to cultivate: "Talented

people who solve the problem with creative convergent thinking and practice enlightenment to contribute to human society” (Dongguk University 2024b).

In addition, Dongguk University’s commitment to its institutional mission and fundamental principles grounded in Buddhism is also evident in various aspects of its governance and symbols. For example, Dongguk University employs specific symbols (i.e., the elephant and lotus)¹⁸ to underscore its deep affiliation with Buddhism. These symbols, which serve as the university’s emblems that symbolize “Buddhist truth”, promote the institution’s mission and educational objectives rooted in Buddhist ideals and values. Similarly, the university’s official logos represent the Four Noble Truths¹⁹ and the Noble Eightfold Path,²⁰ two core tenets of Buddhism, further emphasizing and disseminating the institutional mission through a visual representation (see Figure 1).²¹ Moreover, the establishment of *Dharma College* in 2014 as an institution for general education²² reflects the university’s dedication to integrating its Buddhist identity into its educational mission. The term *dharma*, used by Buddhists to encompass everything that was taught by the Buddha (Powers 2021), embodies the college’s aim to foster creative students through a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary exploration of knowledge in various disciplines, grounded upon the University’s institutional mission. In addition to these existing efforts, Dongguk University also established the Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University in 2021 to align its institutional mission based upon Buddhism with its aspiration to become a world-class institution. The committee’s slogan, “the restoration of Buddhism leads to the development of Dongguk University,” even underscores its purpose of pursuing ongoing reforms in the institutional directions for governance and curriculum to implement the university’s mission (Dongguk University 2024a).²³

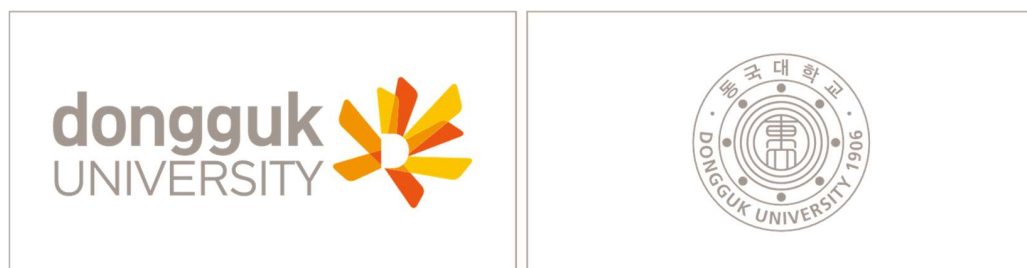


Figure 1. The official logos of Dongguk University.

In the context of religious studies, Nye explains a distinct aspect of symbol in a clear way: “the associations between the object and the ideas are arbitrary in the sense that they are culturally determined. Because of this arbitrariness, the meanings of significances behind symbols may not be immediately obvious” (Nye 2003, p. 129). Symbol, therefore, is an object that has associations with its non-essential meanings (Gu 2023, p. 74). The purposes, governance, and symbols that Dongguk University employs exemplify this point well. In other words, Dongguk University utilizes its symbolic manifestations to actively represent its institutional mission based upon Buddhism. Dongguk University’s symbolic manifestations, in that sense, illustrate the culturally specific connections between Buddhist concepts, the university’s actions, and their symbolic representations. Overall, all these examples demonstrate the ways in which Dongguk University consistently integrates its Buddhist identity into various facets of the institution’s educational missions and their constituents.

3.2. Integrating the Institutional Mission into the General Education Curriculum: The Roles of Mandatory Courses at Dharma College in Dongguk University

Religious organizations in South Korea have long recognized the significance of universities as essential spaces for disseminating their religious beliefs and visions. Many religious organizations have thus established educational institutions and invested substantial resources in them (Lee 2019). In this sense, religiously affiliated universities highlight

their institutional missions that disseminate and promote specific religious perspectives by integrating these perspectives into their curricula. To achieve this goal, these institutions often employ a set of mandatory courses that all students must complete to graduate. The mandatory courses, in this context, serve not only as a manifestation of the institutional missions but also as an implementation of those missions, reflecting the institutions' educational philosophies and their constituting core values (Warner and Koepel 2009). As a unifying thread, these mandatory courses weave together the loosely distributed educational programs into a coherent whole based on the institutional missions rooted in particular religious perspectives, presenting them in a form(s) that all students can comprehend.

However, the presence of mandatory courses in religiously affiliated universities does not always imply that these courses are solely used for the dissemination of specific religious perspectives. Rather, the mandatory courses often strike a harmonious balance between religious perspectives and the crucial purpose of general education, which is to foster students with abilities that can contribute to the development of a caring and thriving society (Lin 2023; Shih 2019; Vander Schee 2011). This harmonious balance in the mandatory courses often elicits unique educational experiences that foster an in-depth understanding of particular religious perspectives in relation to various social, cultural, and intellectual landscapes, which cultivates students as citizens who can engage creatively with a wide range of ongoing contemporary issues, such as the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, climate change, and global health and well-being, amongst others. In the following sections, we explore two mandatory courses at Dongguk University as an exemplary case of that harmonious balance. In doing so, we examine the ways in which these courses integrate the university's institutional mission based on Buddhism into the specific educational experiences that all students are required to undertake, thereby educating well-rounded citizens.

Dongguk University has been offering two mandatory courses, *Buddhism and Human Beings* and *Practice in Seon*.²⁴ These courses have played a pivotal role in providing general education at this Buddhist-affiliated university. The university has maintained these courses as mandatory since 1996, regardless of the many changes in the curricula and institutional governance. Each semester, Dongguk University offers 50 to 70 classes of *Practice in Seon* (each with a capacity of 40 students), and around 30 classes of *Buddhism and Human Beings* (each with a capacity of 60 students).²⁵ Freshmen are the primary target group for these courses, as these serve as the students' first encounter with general education rooted in the university's institutional mission.

These two mandatory courses, which directly embody Dongguk University's institutional mission, have required critical revisions to address issues originating from the constantly changing contexts in South Korea. To tackle these challenges, Dongguk University has periodically implemented various changes to enhance the quality of these courses. In recent years, critical issues have emerged regarding the lack of a consistent curriculum for these courses that led to inconsistencies in teaching, with classes often failing to fulfill their intended educational purposes, with content varying greatly depending on the instructor. For instance, some classes failed to incorporate current social trends, and relied on outdated content or utilized terminology that was unfamiliar to students. This situation often reinforced the students' perception that Buddhism is difficult, which paradoxically created barriers to their engagement with Buddhism. To address these issues, the Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University initiated a project to standardize the course curriculum and teaching materials. This project established consistent lecture methods, content, assignments, and grading evaluations, resulting in the creation of common textbooks that reflect these standardized elements. The university now conducts these courses using standardized materials,²⁶ which constitute a vital component of its general education curriculum. In other words, this reform enables these mandatory courses to incorporate the institutional mission and its foundational Buddhist principles into the spe-

cific educational experiences that all students are required to undertake. We now turn to the details of these mandatory courses.

3.2.1. Practice in Seon (禪)²⁷

Practice in Seon is a course that introduces the fundamentals of Buddhist meditation. The course is year-long (two semesters), consisting of 15 weeks of classes in each semester. These classes engage in various methods of self-reflection and Buddhist meditation (see Table 2). In doing so, this course allows students to acquire basic knowledge and practical experience in meditation techniques. The course aims primarily to help students understand the foundational concepts of meditation, as well as to integrate these practices into their daily lives. Moreover, the course facilitates the development of mental resilience, enabling students to understand and accept themselves while addressing stressful or challenging situations they have. The textbook of this course thus posits that meditation practice fosters the wisdom to discern between sources of happiness and suffering (Dongguk University 2024b). This discernment allows students to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation for themselves and the world. Aligned with the university's institutional mission, this course guides students in reflecting on their authentic selves and establishing meaningful life goals and values grounded in wisdom, compassion, and endeavor (Dongguk University 2024b).

Table 2. A description of the course *Practice in Seon 1*.

Class Schedule	Class Topics	Class Objectives
Week 1	Introduction	
Week 2	What is Meditation?	
Week 3	Breathing Meditation	
Week 4	Loving-kindness Meditation	✓ Understand various methods of self-reflection and Buddhist meditation.
Week 5	Walking Meditation	✓ Acquire basic knowledge and methods of meditation practice.
Week 6	Gratitude Meditation	✓ Develop self-understanding and potential abilities through meditation practice.
Week 7	Mandala Meditation	✓ Establish a desirable direction in life and cultivate a mature attitude towards life.
Week 8	Body Scan Meditation	✓ Practice meditation in daily life to become a wise and compassionate person.
Week 9	Music Meditation	
Week 10	Tea Meditation	
Week 11	Insight Meditation	
Week 12	Movement Meditation	
Week 13	Ganwhaseon (看話禪)	
Week 14	Vow Meditation	
Week 15	Wrapping up the Semester	

The course *Practice in Seon 2* has the same class objectives as *Practice in Seon 1*, but it focuses on different Buddhist meditation methods.

3.2.2. Buddhism and Human Beings²⁸

Buddhism and Human Beings is a course that aims primarily to help students understand Buddhism as a religion that provides insights into the primary sources of suffering in human life and the ways to address them. To achieve this goal, the course consists of 15 weeks of classes that closely examine Buddhist perspectives on human beings, the world, and the ultimate ideals that we should pursue (see Table 3). The textbook, a standardized material provided by the Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University, outlines the educational objectives and goals of this mandatory course:

Humanity has persistently pursued change and progress to attain a better life. The remarkable advancements in science and technology have enabled people

in modern society to enjoy various benefits of civilization. However, albeit with these developments, humanity remains shackled by the fundamental issue of suffering. Buddhism, a religion that directly addresses this issue, offers a profound solution to the predicament of suffering. As a faith that adheres to the teachings of Gautama Buddha, Buddhism suggests paths to liberation from suffering and guides us towards leading a fulfilling life by correctly perceiving the reality of existence. ... Despite its long history, many people often encounter Buddhism through cultural artifacts, which leads to limited knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism was often perceived as an outdated teaching during the process of modernization, and this lack of understanding has led to numerous misconceptions and prejudices. ... While this single work cannot encompass all aspects of Buddhism, it seeks to help students gain an in-depth understanding of Buddha's philosophy and history so as to examine the roles of Buddhism in contemporary society. ([The Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University 2024a](#), pp. 5–6)

Table 3. A description of the course *Buddhism and Human Beings*.

Class Schedule	Class Topics	Class Objectives
Week 1	Introduction	
Week 2	What is Religion?	
Week 3	Indian Society and Thoughts at the Time of Buddha	
Week 4	The Life of Buddha	
Week 5	Four Noble Truths	✓ Comprehend the foundational tenets of Buddhism.
Week 6	Five Aggregates, Twelve Sense Bases, and Eighteen Elements	✓ Examine Buddhist perspectives on the nature of reality, human beings, and ultimate ideals.
Week 7	Three Marks of Existence	
Week 8	Midterm Exam	
Week 9	Dependent Origination	✓ Develop the abilities for reflective thinking based upon the teachings of Buddhism.
Week 10	Karma and Rebirth	
Week 11	Mahāyāna Buddhism Movement	✓ Investigate the applications of the teachings of Buddhism in our daily life.
Week 12	The Globalization of Buddhism, and Meditation	
Week 13	Buddhism and the Contemporary Society 1	
Week 14	Buddhism and the Contemporary Society 2	
Week 15	Final Exam	

This point elucidates the specific educational contexts of the course and its anticipated outcomes as a crucial component of general education, which addresses the fundamental questions posed by the institutional mission statement that we examined.

Furthermore, this course explores the globalization of Buddhism as a widespread religion and culture within the context of contemporary society. To do so, the course investigates Buddhist perspectives on various issues such as human rights, climate change, and artificial intelligence, amongst others. By engaging with these topics, the course seeks to offer valuable insights into how Buddhist teachings can be applied to our daily life.

3.2.3. Mandatory Courses as a Crucial Way to Reconcile the Institutional Mission with the Educational Obligation

The mandatory courses *Buddhism and Human Beings* and *Practice in Seon* serve as prominent examples of the ways in which Dongguk University, a Buddhist-affiliated educational institution, integrates its institutional mission into its general education curriculum. In the context of Buddhism, the primary emphasis lies in achieving self-reflection and the attainment of enlightenment (Lee 2019). This emphasis shapes a key attribute of Korean Buddhism, which eschews coercive proselytization and instead spotlights self-introspection and personal growth. These mandatory courses, as crucial components that represent the university's institutional mission, embody an alignment between the university's educational goals and the core tenets of Korean Buddhism. In this regard, these mandatory courses not only embody the crucial aspects of the university's mission—to establish an ideal world grounded in Buddhist values including, importantly, wisdom, compassion, and endeavor. They also demonstrate an exemplary way in which a religiously affiliated university, as an educational institution in contemporary society, can utilize and reify its institutional mission within the context of the general education curriculum.

Buddhism and Human Beings, for instance, pays close attention to teaching and learning the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism in order to help students develop a comprehensive understanding of various Buddhist perspectives. However, the course objectives extend beyond the mere propagation of Buddhist teachings through the study of specific religious doctrines. Rather, the course seeks to provide students with valuable insights into the ways to approach the myriad challenges encountered in our daily lives from alternative perspectives, grounded in an in-depth understanding of the history and various perspectives within Buddhism. For example, by delving into the globalization of Buddhism as a widespread religion and culture within the context of contemporary society, this course explores critical issues such as human rights, climate change, and artificial intelligence from Buddhist perspectives. In doing so, the course offers students a deeper understanding of how Buddhist insights contribute to creatively addressing these ongoing issues, potentially leading to positive societal changes we need to pursue.

Similarly, *Practice in Seon* focuses on the process of self-reflection through direct engagements with various Buddhist meditation techniques, rather than the mere acquisition of doctrines in coercive ways. This experiential course, which employs a pass/fail grading system without examinations, allows students to dedicate their time to practicing meditation at the spaces of the Buddhist temple in the university.²⁹ These elements reflect the inherent aspects of Buddhist perspectives that prioritize the individual's introspective reflection and the attainment of enlightenment (Lee 2019). Given substantial studies that examine Buddhist-derived meditation practices and their positive impacts on our psychological well-being and cognitive functions (e.g., Kim et al. 2022; Shonin et al. 2014; Sumantry and Stewart 2021), this course helps students to enhance their mental resilience that is crucial to develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. Not only does such resilience enable students to achieve personal growth based on self-reflection, but it also cultivates an in-depth understanding of a meaningful life in the world with others. In other words, Dongguk University utilizes this course to foster students' abilities to navigate their challenges with resilience as well as to disseminate Buddhist perspectives and values entwined with those abilities grounded in wisdom, compassion, and endeavor.

Overall, the harmonious balance in these mandatory courses elicits unique educational experiences that shape an in-depth understanding of particular religious perspectives and its applications in relation to various social, cultural, and intellectual landscapes in our society. These mandatory courses and their recent reforms implemented by the Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University illustrate the fact that religiously affiliated institutions do not merely transmit their religious missions through religious education. With their *distinctive* institutional mission, these institutions rather continuously evolve to serve as educational institutions that can educate students as well-rounded citizens who can engage creatively with a broad spectrum of contemporary is-

sues. As such, our examination here sheds light on Dongguk University's efforts in the mandatory courses for general education to reconcile its particular religious vision as its institutional mission based upon Buddhism with its broader educational responsibilities to our society. These efforts serve a crucial role in establishing the university's fundamental modes and principles of existence within the larger social context.

3.3. Manifestations of the Institutional Mission in Specialized Academic Programs and Unique Courses

Along with these mandatory courses, Dongguk University also embodies and promotes its Buddhist identity through specialized academic programs and unique courses. These academic offerings provide students with opportunities to delve deeper into Buddhist perspectives, practices, and their applications in various fields of study and contemporary contexts. By examining these programs and courses, we illustrate another prominent example in which the university's institutional mission is manifested and applied across its educational framework.

3.3.1. The College of Buddhist Studies

Dongguk University not only integrates its institutional mission into the mandatory courses for the general education curriculum, but also offers specialized programs that directly embody and promote Buddhist perspectives and values. The College of Buddhist Studies, which directly inherits the historical tradition of the first Buddhist-affiliated educational institution in South Korea, serves as a tangible example of the ways in which the university's mission and ideology are explicitly represented and put into practice.³⁰ The college strives to cultivate students who embody wisdom and compassion based upon the spirit of Buddhism. To do so, the college offers a diverse range of subjects for Buddhist theories and practices in the fields of Buddhist studies, Seon (禪) studies, and Indian philosophy. Moreover, recognizing that Korean cultural assets are deeply intertwined with Buddhist cultural heritage, the college also established the Department of Cultural Heritage. This department provides systematic education that integrates and converges research and education in different fields such as art history, archeology, conservation science, and Buddhism. By integrating these fields, the department seeks to combine the domains of theory and practice related deeply to Buddhism.

As the theoretical and pedagogical approaches in the fields of Buddhism continue to evolve, the scope of studies at the College of Buddhist Studies expands to incorporate various adjacent disciplines such as philosophy, religious studies, art, history, and anthropology. This expansion based upon an interdisciplinary perspective is reflected in the diverse range of courses offered by the college, which not only explore the historical, philosophical, and religious dimensions of Buddhism but also engage with various contemporary issues from Buddhist perspectives (see Table 4).^{31,32}

Table 4. The undergraduate courses offered by the College of Buddhist Studies.

Courses Listings	Units	Course Levels
Introduction to Buddhist Studies	3	Year 1
Buddhist Meditation and Regional Practice	3	Year 1
Philosophy and Culture in India	3	Year 1
Study of Seon (Chan/Zen)	3	Year 1
Buddhist Classical Chinese	3	Year 2
History of Indian Buddhism	3	Year 2
Thoughts of Indian Seon (Chan/Zen)	3	Year 2
Early Buddhism	3	Year 2
History of Chinese Buddhism	3	Year 2

Table 4. Cont.

Courses Listings	Units	Course Levels
History of Korean Buddhism	3	Year 2
Study of Pureland Buddhism	3	Year 2
Seon and Contemporary Society	3	Year 2
History of Buddhist Community	3	Year 2
The Classical Yoga	3	Year 2
Jainism	3	Year 2
Abhidharma Buddhism	3	Year 2
Thoughts of Chinese Seon (Chan/Zen)	3	Year 2
Philosophy of Prajna	3	Year 2
Theory of Practice for Buddhist Sangha (I, II)	3	Years 1~2
Introduction to Sanskrit	3	Year 2
Introduction to Religious Studies	3	Years 1~2
Thoughts of Korean Seon and the History of Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism	3	Years 1~2
Understanding of Buddhist Cultural Contents	3	Years 1~2
Psychology of Religion and Interpretations of Buddhist Scriptures	3	Year 2
Buddhism and English in the Era of Globalization	3	Years 1~2
Buddhist Languages and Manuscripts	3	Years 1~2
Southeast Asian Buddhism	3	Years 1~2
Study of Buddhist Precepts and Rules	3	Years 3~4
Study of Tien-Tai	3	Years 3~4
The practice of Korean Seon literature	3	Years 3~4
Yogacara Buddhism	3	Years 3~4
Indian Epistemology and Logic	3	Years 3~4
Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asia	3	Years 3~4
Theory of Seon Culture	3	Years 3~4
Temple Management and Administration of Religious Affairs	3	Years 3~4
Buddhist Ecology	3	Years 3~4
The Practice of Ganwhaseon (看話禪)	3	Years 3~4
Buddhist Thoughts and Western Philosophy	3	Years 3~4
The Understanding and Practice of Vipassana	3	Years 3~4
Hua-Yen Studies	3	Years 3~4
Introduction to Chinese Seon (Chan) Literature	3	Years 3~4
Contemporary Indian Thought	3	Years 3~4
Understanding of the Tathagatagarbha	3	Years 3~4
Social and Economic Thoughts of Buddhism	3	Years 3~4
Theory of Practice for Buddhist (I, II)	3	Years 3~4
Psychology of Religion	3	Years 3~4
Thoughts of Korean Buddhism and Korean Religion	3	Years 3~4
World Religions	3	Years 3~4
Meditation and Counseling Children and Adolescents	3	Years 3~4

Table 4. Cont.

Courses Listings	Units	Course Levels
Theory and Practice of Seon Counseling and Psychotherapy	3	Years 3~4
Buddhist Ethics	3	Years 3~4
Hindu Mythology and Literature	3	Years 3~4
Meditation and Virtual Reality	3	Years 3~4
Ancient Indian Philosophy	3	Years 3~4
Dunhuang Studies	3	Years 3~4
Japanese Buddhism and Culture	3	Years 3~4
Introduction to Pāli	3	Years 3~4
Introduction to Himalayan Buddhism	3	Years 3~4
Introduction to Early Mahāyāna Buddhism	3	Years 3~4
Early Buddhist Scriptures and Manuscripts	3	Years 3~4
Buddhism and Artificial Intelligence	3	Years 3~4

Courses such as *Seon and Contemporary Society*, *Buddhist Ecology*, and *Buddhism and Artificial Intelligence* exemplify the college's commitment to addressing many issues of the current world through the lens of Buddhist thoughts. These courses underscore the relevance of Buddhist teachings in providing insights into the challenges we now face. Furthermore, courses such as *Meditation and Counseling Children and Adolescents* and *Theory and Practice of Seon Counseling and Psychotherapy* demonstrate the college's dedication to applying Buddhist principles to the fields of mental health and well-being. These courses recognize that Buddhism can address various issues in our daily life as well as society.

The wide-ranging curriculum offered by the College of Buddhist Studies, spanning from classical Buddhist studies to contemporary applications of Buddhist thoughts, represents Dongguk University's institutional mission as a Buddhist-affiliated institution for higher education. By providing unique educational experiences that encompass traditional and modern aspects of Buddhism, the college aspires to cultivate students with a profound understanding of Buddhism who can serve as professionals in various fields in society, such as administrators and social workers in Buddhist organizations, academic scholars, religious teachers at Buddhist schools, military chaplains and Buddhist priests, and correspondents and journalists at religious press outlets and media.

Overall, the College of Buddhist Studies exemplifies Dongguk University's commitment to its Buddhist roots represented in its institutional mission. This commitment continues to adapt and expand in our society by cultivating professionals who are capable of applying Buddhist principles to contemporary challenges in various fields. The college, in this sense, plays a crucial role in fulfilling the university's commitment to preserving and promoting Buddhist ideals and values while addressing the needs of the contemporary world.

3.3.2. Unique Courses in the Curricula for General Education and Discipline Expertise

Dongguk University offers a diverse range of distinctive courses on Buddhist theories and practices within the curriculum for general education and discipline expertise (see Table 5). These courses examine the ways in which Buddhism can contribute to addressing contemporary issues we now face.

In the case of general education, *Orientalism and Buddhism* serves as an example of an elective course that explores the encounter between the West and Buddhism during the (post) colonial era. This course investigates the process of reinterpreting Buddhism from a Western perspective, often centering on meditation. By examining the widespread biased view of the East in the context of Buddhism, which has led to distortions and misunder-

standings about culture and religions, this course highlights the pervasive Western-centric orientalist views in our society. *Templestay* is another distinctive elective course offered in collaboration with a Buddhist temple. This course provides students with the opportunity to reside in a temple for two days, exploring its historic buildings, statues, and natural surroundings. During their stay, students participate in meditations and Buddhist rituals so as to gain a deeper understanding of Buddhist practices and their cultural significance. This experience enables students to engage with Buddhism beyond the classroom setting, and to foster a more comprehensive appreciation of Buddhism as a living religion in our society (Moon and Somers 2023). *Modern Yoga and Self-Development* stands as a further example of the unique elective courses that exemplify the distinct features of a Buddhist-affiliated university. Focusing on yoga, which originated in ancient India, as an effective way to address physical and mental health issues, this course not only examines the basic concepts of yoga but also incorporates the practice of yoga and related meditations. By combining theoretical study with practical experiences, this course aims to enhance students' understanding of their body, breathing, and mind so as to foster a holistic approach to self-development.

Table 5. The list of elective courses related to Buddhism.

Sections	Courses	Units
Humanities	Korean Culture and Buddhism	3
	Life Stories of Venerable Monks in Modern Buddhism	2
	Philosophy of Life and Death	3
	Orientalism and Buddhism	3
	Buddhism and Storytelling	3
	The Story of Early Indian Buddhism	1
	Modern Yoga and Self-Development	3
	Templestay ^a	1
	Meditation	3
Society	Religion and Law ^b	3
	Buddhist Culture and Southeast Asia	3
Culture, Art, and Physical Activities	Yoga and Pilates	1
	Japan: Literature and Buddhism	3
Interdisciplinary	Religion and Science ^c	3
	Conversations with the Digital Buddha	3
	Changes in Life and Buddhist Humanity in the Era of Digital Transformation	3

^a: *Templestay* is a new course opening in 2024 which aims to address the demands and interests of many people in contemporary society such as the practice of mindfulness. ^b: This course addresses various topics related to the intersection of religious practices and legal frameworks while incorporating content that reflects Dongguk University's distinct characteristics as a Buddhist-affiliated institution. One of the topics in the course is *the Korean Traditional Temples Preservation and Support Act*, which highlights the university's commitment to its Buddhist heritage. Furthermore, the main text, *The Practices of Buddhist Litigation*, examines the relationship between religious freedom and the administration of Korean temples based on the history of Buddhism, emphasizing the unique perspective Dongguk University brings to the study of religion and law. ^c: Similar to *Religion and Law*, this course explores the complex intersections between religious beliefs and scientific advancements. Reflecting the university's commitment to Buddhism, this course delves into some thought-provoking topics such as the question, "can artificial intelligence achieve enlightenment (*bodhi*)?"

In the case of courses for discipline expertise, many departments at Dongguk University offer diverse unique courses that explore the intersections of Buddhism with various disciplines. These courses employ interdisciplinary approaches by integrating Buddhist perspectives into specific disciplines. This integration provides students with specialized knowledge and practical experience informed by Buddhist insights. For example, the Department of Korean Language Literature and Creative Writing offers the course *Literary Space and Buddhism*, which investigates the diverse spaces of Korean Buddhist literature from ancient times to the present. Students in this course examine the Buddhist meanings,

values, cultural–historical significance, and practical applications of these spaces. This course explores both physical Buddhist spaces in South Korea and imagined spaces created by Buddhist literature. In doing so, this course allows students to gain a deep understanding of Buddhist imagination and the roles of Buddhism in the cultural history of South Korea. Another unique course for discipline expertise, *Buddhism and American Culture*, is offered by the Department of English and Literature. This course pays close attention to Buddhism’s influence on American culture through literature and film from the 19th century to the present day. With a critical exploration regarding literary representations of Buddhism in American literature, this course examines the ways in which Buddhism has been adapted and transformed in American culture. This course especially explores the historical and cultural context of Buddhism in America. In so doing, this course highlights ongoing influences of Buddhism on contemporary American thoughts and art. *Buddhism and Addictive Crimes*, offered by the Department of Policing and Criminal Justice, stands as a third prominent example. This course examines the principles and causes of addiction, and analyzes addictive crimes from Buddhist perspectives. The course aims to help students understand the foundational knowledge of addictions, investigate cases of addictive crimes, and learn the basic principles of mindfulness based upon Buddhist perspectives that can be applied to prevent and treat addictive crimes. The course covers topics such as addiction classification and evaluation, substance addiction, behavioral addiction, addiction counseling theories, and treatment strategies. By covering these topics, the course demonstrates how Buddhist perspectives can contribute to the prevention and treatment of addictive behaviors crucial to address contemporary social issues.

The diverse range of courses we explore here, including both mandatory and elective courses, serves as a prominent illustration of the ways in which Dongguk University’s institutional mission is manifested and applied in practice. These courses, which encompass both general education and discipline expertise, exemplify the institution’s commitment to integrating its institutional mission based upon Buddhism into its educational framework and concomitant curricula. Furthermore, these courses also indicate that Dongguk University, as a Buddhist-affiliated institution, strives to foster an in-depth understanding of Buddhism in relation to various cultural, social, and intellectual landscapes. By providing students with unique learning experiences, these diverse courses attempt not only to shed light on critical insights of Buddhist perspectives into the ways to address contemporary issues across various fields but also to cultivate graduates as engaged and empathetic professionals imbued with the values of wisdom, compassion, and endeavor. Moreover, Dongguk University’s emphasis on integrating Buddhist perspectives into its curricula demonstrates its recognition that religions play pivotal roles in shaping our public secular life. The university’s educational framework and concomitant curricula, which present Buddhism as a living religion with valuable insights that intersect a wide range of disciplines, highlight the potential for religions to enrich our understanding of the life and world, as well as to inform the future of education in an era of unprecedented social, cultural, and technological changes.

4. Conclusions

In this study, we examined the ways in which Dongguk University consistently integrates its Buddhist identity into various facets of the institution’s educational missions and their constituents. The university’s institutional mission, based upon the ideals and values of Buddhism, shapes its educational goals, governance, and symbolic representations. By explicitly articulating its foundational spirit through three educational goals—building character based on Buddhist virtues, promoting wisdom and benevolence, and realizing an ideal society—Dongguk University establishes a close connection between its Buddhist roots and its aspirations as an institution of higher education in South Korea. Moreover, Dongguk University incorporates its institutional mission into the general education curriculum through mandatory courses that impart Buddhist perspectives and foster students’ personal growth, enabling them to address their life challenges with resilience, wisdom,

and endeavor. Furthermore, the university's commitment to integrating its institutional mission into higher education is evident in its specialized academic programs and diverse range of unique courses. All these commitments provide students with distinct learning experiences that contribute to fostering a deep understanding of Buddhism as a living religion intertwined with cultural, social, and intellectual landscapes while cultivating well-rounded citizens who are able to engage creatively with a wide range of contemporary issues in our society.

Dongguk University's efforts to reconcile its particular religious vision with its broader educational responsibilities to our society illustrate a distinct case that religiously affiliated institutions continuously evolve to educate well-rounded citizens who can address creatively contemporary issues we now face. The university's commitment to integrating its Buddhist mission into various aspects of its educational framework, from mandatory courses to specialized programs and unique elective academic offerings, demonstrates the potential for religiously affiliated institutions to provide transformative educational experiences. Such transformative experiences serve crucial roles in shaping the intellectual, spiritual, and moral development of students while contributing to the broader social, cultural, and educational landscape in our society. This study, in that sense, underscores the ongoing influences of religiously affiliated private institutions on the dynamics of higher education, as they continue to shape the crucial parts of the educational landscape in South Korea.

As explored, this study demonstrates its research purpose to investigate the ways in which a religiously affiliated private institution integrates its institutional mission into various facets of its educational framework such as educational goals, governance, symbolic representations, and curricula, amongst others. Focusing on the case of Dongguk University in South Korea, the results of this study indicate the need for further supplementary research. Despite providing an in-depth exploration of the ways in which Dongguk University integrates its Buddhist identity into its educational framework, this study does not directly address students' experiences and perspectives regarding this integration and its ongoing impact on their personal and professional lives. This study thus suggests further qualitative and quantitative research that delves deeper into perspectives from students, alumni, and faculty so as to offer critical insights into the actual dynamics of religiously affiliated private institutions within the educational landscape of South Korea.

The findings we present have important implications for other religiously affiliated institutions in South Korea and beyond, as they seek to navigate the intersections between their religious identities and their educational roles as institutions for higher education in our diverse and globalized world. Therefore, this study also highlights the need for further research on religious affiliations of higher education in different religious contexts. By examining the educational experiences and challenges of religiously affiliated institutions across different religious and cultural contexts, we are able to acquire a deeper understanding of the ways in which religions shape the characteristics and missions of educational institutions and influence the ongoing dynamics of higher education in various ways.

Future research also needs to explore the administrative and accreditation aspects of religiously affiliated private institutions. An investigation into the requirements for professors and the roles of faith in administrative, hiring, development, and institutional processes would provide critical insights into the dynamics of these institutions. Moreover, an examination of the ways in which religiously affiliated private institutions satisfy government accreditation and oversight would also illuminate the issues in relation to the ongoing tensions between their religious identities and secular regulatory education standards in contemporary secular society. These prospective studies will be necessary for elucidating the roles of religions in our public secular life and their implications for the future of the education landscape in an era of unprecedented social, cultural, and technological changes.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.G. and J.K.; writing—original draft preparation, J.G. and J.K.; writing—review and editing, J.G. and J.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ There are only a few studies about Buddhist-affiliated private educational institutions in South Korea. For the details of these studies, see Jeong (2019), Kim (2020), and Park (2001).
- ² For the details of the data here, visit the website <https://www.data.go.kr/data/15107731/standard.do> (accessed on 7 April 2024).
- ³ For the details of the data here, visit the website https://www.mcst.go.kr/kor/s_policy/dept/deptView.jsp?pSeq=1731&pDataCD=0406000000&pType=03 (accessed on 7 April 2024).
- ⁴ In contrast to private institutions, public institutions often have institutional missions that typically emphasize broader societal goals and the general public interest rather than the specific ideologies of the founders. This tendency is similar to public institutions in other countries, where mission statements highlight the values of public education and service to society. For instance, in the United States, each state university system has its own mission statement, focusing on its institutional purposes and visions as public service programs. The State University of New York exemplifies this point with its mission, “to provide to the people of New York educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional and vocational postsecondary programs” (The State University of New York 2024). Similarly, the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom also emphasizes its contribution to society through education and research in its mission statement, without reference to any specific ideological foundations, “The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence” (University of Cambridge 2024). These examples demonstrate how public institutions’ mission statements differ from those of private institutions, which often prioritize the inheritance and development of the founder’s specific ideologies.
- ⁵ Korea University was established on 5 May 1905, as Bosung College. In 1946, with the official approval of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)—the official ruling body of the southern half of the Korean Peninsula from 8 September 1945 to 15 August 1948—Bosung College was reorganized and elevated to the status of a university as Korea University.
- ⁶ Sookmyung Women’s University is a private women’s educational institution founded in 1906 as Myungshin Girls’ School. This school was reestablished and elevated as Sookmyung Women’s University on 22 May 1948.
- ⁷ Sungkyunkwan University is a private university that traces its origins to the historic Sungkyunkwan founded in 1398 in central Seoul as the foremost educational institution during the Joseon period.
- ⁸ The origins of Yonsei University can be traced back to Gwanghyewon, which was established in 1885, and Chosun Christian College, which was founded by American missionaries in 1915. Both schools received university accreditation by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) in 1946 and opened as Yonhi University and Severance Medical College. The two schools merged to become Yonsei University in 1957.
- ⁹ Ewha Womans University is a private women’s university that was originally founded as Ewha Haktang on 31 May 1886 by the Methodist missionary Mary F. Scranton. With the official approval of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), this institution received the official status of a university in South Korea.
- ¹⁰ Sogang University, which was established on 18 April 1960, is a private research university affiliated with the Society of Jesus.
- ¹¹ Joong-Ang Sangha University is a private institution founded in 1979, affiliated with The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. It serves as a modernized educational institution for the cultivation of Buddhist monks.
- ¹² Uiduk University, founded in 1996, is a private education institution affiliated with the Jingak Order of Korean Buddhism (大韓佛教眞覺宗).
- ¹³ Geumgang University, founded on 7 November 2002, is a private education institution affiliated with the Cheontae Order of Korean Buddhism (大韓佛教天台宗).
- ¹⁴ In Buddhism, the term wisdom refers to *Prajñā*. It is described in Buddhist texts as the understanding of the true nature of phenomena.
- ¹⁵ The term benevolence means *Maitrīkaruṇā* in Buddhism, which refers to loving kindness and compassion toward all living beings who are in misfortune or suffering.
- ¹⁶ The concept of an ideal society refers to a society that people consider most desirable and aspire to achieve. In Buddhism, this concept is often explored in combination with various Buddhist perspectives. In South Korea, there exists an in-depth academic discussion regarding the concept of an ideal society from a Buddhist viewpoint. For a detailed examination of this discussion, please see an article available at <https://www.ibulgyo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=203336> (accessed on 11 May 2024).

- 17 Hwajaeng (Kor. 화쟁; Chi. 和諍), a concept developed by Wonhyo (Kor. 원효; Chi. 元曉), refers to the reconciliation and harmony of conflicting theories and doctrines. This concept, which has been inherited as a major stream of Korean Buddhism, illustrates the Buddhist stance of facilitating communications between diverse sects and theoretical confrontations (Kim 2020).
- 18 According to the *Jātaka* that illustrates the births of Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama was born as a prince in the city of Kapilavastu, which was part of India and is now located in Nepal. His father, King Suddhodana, and mother, Queen Maya, had a prophetic dream before his birth. In her dream, a white elephant with six tusks adorned with gold descended from the sky, holding a lotus flower with its trunk. The elephant circled her three times, handed her the lotus flower, and then entered her body. The King recognized that the queen's dream was extraordinary and sought 64 sages from the kingdom for the interpretation. The sages identified the dream as a sign of the Buddha. As the Buddha was born to a mother who received a lotus flower as a gift from a white elephant, Siddhartha Gautama became the incarnation of the lotus flower. Consequently, both the elephant and the lotus emerged as significant symbols that represent the Buddha.
- 19 In Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths (*caturāryasatyāni*) are the truths of the Noble Ones. The four truths are traditionally identified as the first teaching given by the Buddha, and are recognized as one of the oldest and most important teachings in Buddhism. These truths consist of suffering (*dukkha*), the cause or source of suffering (*samudaya*), the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*marga*).
- 20 The Noble Eightfold Path (*aṣṭasamyānmārga*) is a summary of the path of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from the painful cycle of rebirth, ultimately attaining nirvana (*nirvāṇa*). The Eightfold Path consists of eight practices: right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation (or fully unified concentration) or *Samādhi*.
- 21 Dongguk University uses two official logos, each serving a distinct purpose. The left one is the communicative logo that is used for various forms of communication including university promotions. This logo symbolizes the letter 'D' as the initial of Dongguk University. The lights radiating in all directions represent the university's members who will become future leaders in diverse fields within a globalized society, equipped with a wide range of ideas and visions. Moreover, the eight branches of light (*amitābha*) symbolize the Noble Eightfold Path connecting the logo to the university's Buddhist identity. The right one is the authority logo that serves as the university crest in the university's official documents. This authority logo symbolizes the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which represent two core tenets of Buddhism. More specifically, the four circles represent the Four Noble Truths, the eight dots symbolize the Noble Eightfold Path, and the combination of these symbols illustrates *dharmachakra* (the dharma wheel). By using this authority logo, Dongguk University emphasizes its inherited tradition of Buddhism.
- 22 Some South Korean universities have a unique institution that has the characteristics of a liberal arts college. This college as a unique institution, separate from the university's other colleges and faculties, assumes responsibility for overseeing the entire general education curriculum. All students enrolled in the university must complete the general education curriculum administered by this institution. Among these institutions, some South Korean universities administrate this institution as a separate college such as Humanitas College at Kyung Hee University, Minerva College at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Liberal Arts College at Gachon University, Bangmok College of General Education at Myongji University, and so forth. The institution that undertakes this role at Dongguk University is Dharma College. For detailed information about Dharma College, see the webpage <https://dharma.dongguk.edu/main> (accessed on 7 April 2024).
- 23 According to Dongguk University's regulations, the Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University shall perform the following tasks: (1) establish strategies and plans to implement the university's institutional mission, (2) develop educational programs and facilities that embody the university's institutional mission, and (3) support other necessary activities and tasks to fulfill the university's institutional mission (Dongguk University 2024c).
- 24 Seon is the Korean name for Chan Buddhism, a branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism commonly known in English as Zen Buddhism. Seon is the Korean pronunciation of Chan (chi. 禪), which is a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*. The Jogye and Taego orders of Korean Buddhism represent the fact that Seon Buddhism is the most common type of Buddhism in Korea.
- 25 All the classes for *Buddhism and Human Beings* use four main texts: *Buddhism Classes* (The Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University 2024a), *Introduction to Buddhism* (The College of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University 2021), *Introduction to Buddhism through Diagrams* (Lee et al. 2016), and *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Keown 2013). Similarly, all the classes for *Practices in Seon* use two main texts: *Practices in Seon for College Students 1* (The Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University 2024b) and *Practices in Seon for College Students 2* (The Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University 2024c). These texts serve as the standardized materials for these two mandatory courses in Dongguk University.
- 26 In 2024, The Founding Committee for the Development of Dongguk University published three new textbooks: *Buddhism Classes*, *Practices in Seon for College Students 1*, and *Practices in Seon for College Students 2*. Each textbook is used for the mandatory courses, *Buddhism and Human Beings*, *Practices in Seon 1*, and *Practices in Seon 2*, respectively.
- 27 Practice in Seon is a course where all students engage directly and practically in various Buddhist meditation methods. This unique course consists of participatory classes rather than lecture-oriented ones.

- 28 This course introduces the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. In the course, students engage with various Buddhist perspectives in relation to diverse topics that are of interest to them and relevant to the ongoing dynamics of contemporary society.
- 29 Within the campus of Dongguk University, there exist various spaces dedicated to Buddhist practices where students engage in learning and practicing Buddhism. Among these spaces, Jeonggakwon (Kor. 정각원; Chi. 正覺院) stands out as a prominent example that reflects the university's institutional mission based upon its Buddhist identity. Serving as a Buddhist temple within the campus, Jeonggakwon is a religious facility accessible to the university's faculty, staff, students, and the general public. As the temple of a Buddhist-affiliated private educational institution, Jeonggakwon strives to function as a space for religious rituals and educational practices directly connected to the daily lives of all visitors, including Dongguk University students. To fulfill this purpose, Jeonggakwon organizes various Buddhist rituals, ceremonies, and lectures for all visitors, supports many religious activities of diverse Buddhist organizations, and hosts a wide range of Buddhist religious events for the campus community. Practice in Seon courses in this temple thus enables students to learn about the intersection of education and Buddhism as a living religion while developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience. The official and hidden curricula entwined with this Buddhist temple provide students with valuable opportunities to understand the roles of Buddhism in our secular society, experiences they can apply in their future professional roles.
- 30 The College of Buddhist Studies aims to cultivate students with wisdom and compassion grounded in the Buddhist spirit. The curriculum of this college offers two distinct but interrelated tracks: theory/doctrine and practice/application. These two tracks consist of a wide range of courses that strive to integrate Buddhist knowledge and perspectives into practice. The college provides opportunities to explore major research areas in Buddhist Studies, Seon Studies, and Indian Philosophy, as well as to study essential classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pāli, Classical Chinese, and Tibetan. In addition, the college offers various courses related to practical and applied fields in Buddhism and beyond, which engage deeply with the ongoing dynamics of contemporary secular society. By doing so, the College of Buddhist Studies seeks to cultivate students with a profound understanding of Buddhism who can serve as professionals in various fields in our society ([The College of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University 2024](#)).
- 31 The College of Buddhist Studies offers a distinct curriculum that integrates theoretical and practical aspects of Buddhism. As described, the theoretical component has evolved by drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from various fields such as philosophy, religious studies, history, archaeology, anthropology, amongst others. This broader academic scope offers a more comprehensive understanding of Buddhism and its historical, social, and cultural contexts. Simultaneously, the curriculum emphasizes the practical applications of Buddhist teachings to bridge the gap between various Buddhist perspectives and ongoing practices in and for contemporary secular society. With its distinct curriculum, the College of Buddhist Studies aims to educate students to develop an in-depth understanding of Buddhism that combines doctrinal knowledge with practical skills and experiences applicable to their future professional roles in various fields.
- 32 This diverse range of undergraduate courses indicates a distinct feature of the Buddhist-affiliated university. These courses not only provide the educational program for the cultivation of Buddhist monks, but also offer various Buddhist perspectives to all students.

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