

Religious Organization Ecology and Schism in the Contemporary Unification Church

Steven Foertsch

Nebraska Wesleyan University

Heewon Yang

Baylor University

Abstract

Emergent religious groups (frequently referred to as new religious movements) are constantly changing over time, and it is often difficult for academics to follow the many shifts of the tide. One such major change currently underway is a bitter schism within the Unification movement, which has received consistent scholarly attention in the past. Up until this point, though, there has been little academic work focusing exclusively on the ongoing split, and the various organizational reasons as to why it has occurred. Through historical content, qualitative interview, and participant observation analysis of the contemporary Unification movement, we rectify this omission. Findings such as niche mechanics suggest that religious organization ecology is a relevant theory to understand schism in religious organizations and could help reintroduce structure and comparison to cultural studies of religion.

Keywords

Unification Church, Unificationism, Unification Movement, World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, Family Peace Association, Sanctuary Church, Global Peace Foundation, Schism, Religious Economies, Organizational Ecology, Religious Organization Ecology.

Introduction

The Unification Church (formally known as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, later as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, and pejoratively as the “Moonies”) was founded officially by Reverend Sun Myung Moon on May 1, 1954. The Unification Church is recognized by sociologists as an emergent religious group or new religious movement due to its novel beliefs and relatively high tension with external society (Bromley and Melton 2012; Melton 2004; Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1988). The movement is notable for its relative tension with society, especially during the “cult wars” era of the 1980s to early ’90s. Its theology is a syncretic blend of Korean

ancestor worship and Christian messianism. Mass wedding ceremonies are one of its most notable rituals. The Unification Church claims active membership in 192 countries (Melton 2017), and three million members worldwide (District of Columbia Courts 2021).

After Reverend Sun Myung Moon's death in 2012, the Unification Church splintered into three major groups: the mainline Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, and the Family Peace Association. The schism of the Unification Church was generated by complex social processes, struggles over authority, and ideologies that sat heavily over the congregation over the final years of Reverend Moon's life. These schismatic groups have essentially been ignored in sociology of religion schism literature (for exceptions, see Introvigne 2017; Chryssides 2017). This makes an update imperative to the field, so that this and many other gaps in the understanding of emergent religious group schisms are reported.

Using a case study of the Unification movement, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, and the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary organizations, we explain the contribution of *religious organization ecology* (ROE) theory to describe this recent schism. This theoretical framework is then reinforced by evidence from inductive historical content analysis, qualitative interview, and participant observation methods. The conclusion discusses the importance of continued study on the Unification movement, and how religious organization ecology could assist in reintroducing structure and comparison to cultural analyses of contemporary religious organizational form (Pitchford et al. 2001).

A ROE Schismatic Framework

Emergent Religious Groups

The term “new religious movement” (Ellwood Jr. 1985; Barker 2022) has a long history of scholarly attention, but often this terminology does not capture the full nuanced position of any given organizational context in time. The very definition of “new religious movement” is a subject of contestation in application, with some scholars suggesting that the actual “newness” of a belief system confers NRM status (post-1940s), with others pointing to organizational form, stigmatization, etc.

Regardless, the term itself downplays the importance of organizations in favor of “movements,” when in reality organizational-ecological considerations are imperative to understand the survival and propagation of religious groups (Scheitle 2007), including *avant-garde* religious groups (Foertsch 2022a, 2022b). In particular, conversions (central to the “movement” epistemology) are ultimately related to organizational tactics at securing membership resources, which then generates the appearance of a “movement.”

Additionally, NRM literature in the sociology of religion specifically is a nebulous concept that appears within multiple paradigms, such as religious economies, secularization, and cultural schematic frameworks (Barker 1993; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016; Wessinger 2012; etc.). Wholesale integration of the study of NRMs has been attempted by religious economies perspectivist through the process of “church and sect,” where higher-tension movements (such as emergent groups) are labeled as “sects” (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1988) or “cults.” “Sect” could be considered an oversimplification of the plurality found within the upper boundaries of the religious demands curve, and “cult” is a non-academic

pejorative toward atypical religious organizations (Melton 2004).

In the end, “new religious movement” is a label near-exclusively categorized by negatives—“what they are not.” This allows scholars to capture religious groups as diverse as Wicca, ECKANKAR, Santería, Christian Science, etc. The commonality appears to be a *deviation from the environmental norm or typical religious institution/organization schema*.¹ As such, for our analytic purposes, the theoretical position of Bromley and Melton (2012) is taken as an innovation.

In an article titled “Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organizations,” Bromley and Melton (2012) outline a typology of religious groups, based on relative tension with the external environment. They name four types of religious organizations: “dominant,” “sectarian,” “alternative,” and “emergent.”² Emergent groups are located outside the accepted boundaries of organizational religion and seek to gain legitimacy as a religious tradition. They are categorized by their “outsider” status, typically indicated by rejection by the outside world, high tension with the external environment, nonconformity to societal expectation of religious organizational form, and persecution (Bromley and Melton 2012: 7; Melton 2004; Foertsch 2022b, 2025). Thus, their societal label is “religiously deviant.” A good example of this organizational type would be the Church of Scientology (Westbrook 2019) or Satanism (Foertsch 2022a, 2022b; Laycock 2020). For the purposes of this paper, the Unification groups analyzed are considered emergent. This is largely due to consistent discrimination faced by the Unificationists from secular authorities in multiple countries.³

There is variation among emergent groups. The term includes groups as different as the Church of Scientology, the Church of Satan, and the Twelve Tribes of Israel, for instance. Even within the Unification movement, there are differences. We contend that these differences are best explained by religious organization ecology theory.

Religious Organization Ecology (ROE) Theory

To elucidate the schism and the many differences between the Family Federation (Hak Ja Han’s group) and the Sanctuary Church (Hyung Jin “Sean” Moon’s group), we integrate religious economies, new institutionalism, and organizational ecology theories. From religious economies theory (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1988), we draw upon the religious demands curve, consistent demand for religious goods, tension/commitment, impact of environmental regulation, and the consequences of authority and doctrine (Starke and Dyck 1996). From new institutional theory (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Foertsch 2022c, Sutton and Chaves 2004), we derive the ideas of structural isomorphism, charismatic/legitimate authority, and elite innovation. From organizational ecology (Hannan and Freeman 1977; Scheitle 2007;

¹ In the U.S., this deviance is from the expected congregational Protestant model/schema, which is not uniform to all religious belief systems. These contradictions have been noticed and pointed out in the past perceptively by Edgell (2012), Madsen (2009), and Cadge (2004). See also Melton (2004) for a deep discussion of the concept of “new religion.”

² For some examples, *dominant* would be exemplified by the Catholic Church, *sectarian* groups by the Calvary Chapel, and *alternative* groups by the Kabbalah Center (Bromley and Melton 2012).

³ Reverend Moon was arrested for tax evasion and conspiracy in 1981 and was sentenced to prison in the U.S. He served thirteen months in a federal prison before his release. Reverend Moon was also banned entry to multiple countries in Europe, and even faced criticism at the hands of native Protestant groups in his home country of South Korea. Recent developments regarding the assassination of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe have led to intense government scrutiny regarding the Family Federation’s dealings.

Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009), we employ concepts of organizational response, resource competition and dependency, niche expansion and contraction, niche specialization and generalization, and environmental conditions. The outcome is a theory coined by Foertsch (2022b) called *religious organization ecology* or ROE, based on research of other emergent religious groups (Satanism and Setianism).⁴

Religious organization ecology (ROE) enhances the theoretical synthesis initially proposed by Scheitle (2007; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009) with data from “sectarian” religious group schisms (Foertsch 2022b). By consistently holding a focus on schismatics at the highest level of environmental tension (*emergent*—Bromley and Melton 2012) on the demand curve, the wedding of specifically religious economies and organizational ecology theory is reinforced through analyses demonstrating the exclusive effect of *both* competition mechanics and niche on the production of schism (isomorphic organizational form). Thus, ROE cements Scheitle’s (2007) contribution to the literature and extends it, suggesting that religious economies, new institutionalism, or organizational ecology theories cannot by themselves provide a full explanation for individual religious choices and institutional manifestation. By synthesizing them under one umbrella perspective, some of the shortcomings of religious economies (organizational form), new institutionalism (environmental impact), and organizational ecology (individual choice) are buttressed.

Under the umbrella of ROE, the Unification movement and its schismatic organizations compete on the *religious demand curve* for organizational resources to maintain and grow its presence (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005). The religious demand curve posits that there is a consistent demand for spiritual or religious goods, and that religious organizations meet this demand as “suppliers.” Individuals have preferences for higher or lower tension religious goods, and these are reflected in the type of religious organizations or movements they affiliate with or disaffiliate from. The supply of religious goods is impacted by the *environmental conditions* in which this interaction occurs—for example, high-tension religious goods may be inaccessible to individuals due to national laws banning specific religious organizations. Religious organizations may develop different niche specialties within their competitive environment in order to maximize resources, negotiate tension, and regulate membership commitment (Iannaccone 1988).

Religious organizations have an aspiration for fitness and ultimately niche domination. Attempts to generalize may lead to *organizational stretching*. Organizational stretching is when a generalist organization attempts to expand beyond its initial exclusivity to capture more resources, bringing them into competition with niche specialists. This is considered in religious economies theory a “sect-to-church” shift, which is associated with professionalization of clergy and lower tension with the society (Finke and Scheitle 2009). Accordingly, concessionary changes in beliefs and doctrine are typical during these periods (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005; Starke and Dyck 1996). We could consider these innovations a function of structural

⁴ In two studies on left-hand path groups, Foertsch studied schism mechanics. Testing theories largely developed to explain Protestant Christianity, he suggests that similar trends can be found in the history of the Church of Satan, Temple of Set, and the Satanic Temple. By using the “exception” to “prove” the rule, Foertsch then goes on to suggest a general theory of religious organizational form—religious organization ecology. See Foertsch (2022a, 2022b).

isomorphism⁵ and conformity (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Foertsch 2022c). Additionally, the new institutionalist perspective synthesizes well here with religious economic viewpoint on elite innovation and the impact of charismatic or legitimate authority (Sutton and Chaves 2004; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016; Barker 1993).

Institutionalization (or sect-to-church) also leads to less strictness and an increase in free-riding, which is when a member utilizes religious goods but does not contribute to the organizational resource pool (Iannaccone 1992, 1998). This leads some members to disagree with the authority and direction of existing current leaders. Authority disagreements are thus translated into doctrinal disputes (Starke and Dyck 1996), and individuals choose to reassert the earlier beliefs and distinctiveness that initially drew them to their organization (Foertsch 2022a). These authority disputes also have ramifications for organizational (or isomorphic) form and fitness. Normally discussed in terms of charismatic authority within the institutionalist perspective (Sutton and Chaves 2004; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016; Barker 1993), these changes also allow for schismatic groups to establish themselves as niche specialists (Scheitle 2007; Foertsch 2022a) by targeting specific resources, beating out the generalist organization. In summary, institutionalizing religions are prone to schism—and these authority disputes are rationalized through doctrine.

ROE theory ideally does several things for our analysis, which grounded theory and other cultural analyses do not. First, it allows for an inductive and comparative research program analyzing how structural forces (such as environmental conditions) directly impact lived experience (Pitchford et al. 2001; Ammerman 2015) (in this case, of schism). Second, ROE performs the function of allowing phenomenological experience to influence the creation of institutional response (i.e., elite or individual agent influence, conformity to isomorphism, etc.—see Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Foertsch 2022c; or charisma and new institutionalism—see Sutton and Chaves 2004; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016) while still factoring in the analytical importance of generalizability and structure. This allows culturally embedded arguments to respond meaningfully to charges of a lack of empiricism.

ROE theory synthesizes emergent religious groups, religious economies, new institutionalism, and organizational ecology into one paradigm. Although previously explored in piecemeal, this theoretical synthesis has yet to be applied to a religious organization in full. Thus, informed by ROE theory and past research (Bromley and Melton 2012; Pitchford et al. 2001; Scheitle 2007; Foertsch 2022a; Foertsch 2022b), our primary propositions guiding our case study are:

Proposition 1: Institutionalizing religions will be prone to schism (the religious economies and isomorphic perspective).

Proposition 2: Schism occurs due to disagreements over legitimate authority, which is then retroactively rationalized through doctrine (the new institutionalism and charismatic/legitimate authority perspective).

Proposition 3: Organizational attempts at niche domination are prone to stretching and thus schism, with schismatic groups operating as specialist organizations within an existing or new niche in the religious market (the organizational ecology perspective).

⁵ “Isomorphism refers to the way in which organizations mirror themselves in rationalization, narrative construction, organizational form, and power structure—particularly in the case of weaker or smaller organizations modeling themselves after hegemonic examples.” (Foertsch 2022c: 4)

These propositions are reproduced from a study by Foertsch (2022a) on Satanism, another emergent group. It is important to note that these propositions are both theoretically and empirically interrelated—as one example, charismatic authority and legitimacy could be impacted by environmental tension and membership commitment (Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009). The propositions are thus Weberian ideal types (1978). The purpose of synthesis is to combine seemingly disparate theoretical explanations on schism into the holistic perspective of religious organization ecology. By replicating Foertsch’s (2022a) findings on Satanism with a new emergent case, ROE theory and its propositions will yield greater generalizability, which could then be extended to non-emergent cases. Thus, with these propositions set, we now turn to our methodology.

Methodology

The present study incorporates a variety of qualitative research methods, which is replicated from Foertsch’s studies on Satanism and Setianism (2022a, 2022b). A content analysis of Unification-related documents was done between April 2021 and December 2022. Key resources in this process were found in an online archive of primary sources related to Sun Myung Moon, FFWPU, and the Unification Church (www.tparents.org). This website publicly hosts a startling amount of historical documentation cataloguing every step of the schismatic process (Moon 2010; Moon 2010; Balcomb 2013; Kim and Balcomb 2015). Additional resources on the Family Federation were pulled from Unification Theological Seminary publications: the formal *Journal of Unification Studies* (Mickler 2013, 2014, 2015, 2022) and the informal “Applied Unificationism Blog” (Mickler 2015b, 2016).⁶

To mediate bias within pro-Family Federation sources, historical accounts were also pulled from schismatic organizations and followers led by Hyun Jin (Preston) and Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon. Two key sources from Hyun Jin’s supporters were Jongsuk Kim’s *Split of the Unification Movement* (2017) and *Truth Shall Prevail* by Kwak (2019). Although these sources were undoubtedly in favor of Hyun Jin’s leadership, they provide a helpful counterbalance to the pro-Family Federation perspective.

For documentation on Hyung Jin’s Sanctuary Church, their website (<https://www.sanctuary-pa.org/>) was a crucial resource (Moon 2015a, 2015b). Many historical primary accounts can be found here, ranging from Hyung Jin’s sermons to Sun Myung Moon’s past proclamations. Hyung Jin Moon also has authored several books highlighting his own perspective, one of which is used (Moon 2004). His supporters have additionally provided various theological accounts (Williams 2020). Secondary sources were used to corroborate (Hagerty 2010; Tuan 2012; Dunkel 2018; District of Columbia Courts 2021; Barker 2022; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016; Wessinger 2012; Introvigne 2017; Chryssides 2017; etc.). This informed both our context section as well as our analysis.

In addition to content analysis, extensive one-on-one interviews with members of the Unification movement were conducted remotely or in person over a one-year time period, beginning in December 2021 and ending in December 2022. These interviews lasted

⁶ A notable figure in these publications is Michael Mickler, whose thorough account of the historical events within the Unification movement is used as a pro-Family Federation source frequently throughout this work.

approximately one to two hours each and included questions about demographic information,⁷ religious life, opinions on doctrine, and each organization related to the schisms (see Appendix A). This was done using snowball sampling, for a total of 21 interviews.⁸ Members of the research team emailed Unification participants to request interviews. Each interviewee was asked to suggest additional participants for interviews. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized. All names attached to interview quotes are pseudonyms.

Social media content analysis was also employed on Facebook, Rumble, and Twitch during this time, particularly amongst the Sanctuary Church. In-person participant observation was undertaken sporadically in New York, NY. Observations included internet arguments, online lectures and speeches, sermons, church meetings, etc.⁹ This helped to create a more nuanced understanding of church functioning, especially as it related to schisms, niche competition, and the resultant factions.

Analytic Strategy

In order to address longstanding problems of generalizability in the study of high-tension religious groups, we follow the recommendations of Pitchford et al. (2001) on how to approach qualitative study. Therefore, this case study is intended to bring the Unification movement and its schismatic organizations into comparison with other religious organizations. We use Pitchford's analytical categories of 1. *organizational history and context* through descent, timeline, demography, and locations and ecologies; 2. *mobilization* through defection; 3. *organization* through rites and rituals, group solidarity and dynamics, and doctrines, costs, and commitment; 4. *governance* through leadership and success and failure throughout data collection and analysis. By doing so, we answer Pitchford et al.'s call for a more unified study of high-tension religious groups through research programs, which we propose our ROE theoretical framework to be.

Informed by this research design, we performed a historical content analysis by aggregating relevant sources on the schisms into the timeline reported in Table 2. Participant observation utilized field notes. These field notes were then compared between the authors to identify general trends and guarantee internal validity. After this stage, we began inductive data collection. For our interview data, coding choices initially focused on our key theoretical propositions: 1. Institutionalization, 2. Authority, 3. Doctrine, and 4. Niche/Environmental conditions. As we gathered data, we added codes specifically focused on gender, nationality, and race. The internal validity of these codes were also tested among the authors. Using this process, we formed our results.

While Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon's schismatic organization Family Peace Association is included substantively in our timeline and Table 2 below, for space considerations we will not go into it at length within our theoretical analysis.¹⁰ Hyun Jin's ousting is used as a background

⁷ Not reported to preserve anonymity.

⁸ Saturation was reached at roughly 13 interviews. Demographic information not presented to protect participant anonymity, but breakdown by nationality is analytically relevant and can be reported: 3 South Korean, 2 Japanese, 1 New Zealander, 7 American. Countries outside the United States were particularly targeted in order to mitigate bias within the sample.

⁹ The primary focus of our content analysis and participant observation was on gathering data relevant to the schisms.

¹⁰ It is important to note that our analysis also does not go into great detail regarding In Jin (Tatiana) Moon's group "iHome Church." This splinter group is vaguely affiliated with the Unification movement, and unlike the schismatic

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

for our more empirically notable cases: the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Hak Ja Han's organization), and the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary (Hyung Jin's organization). More will be said on these two cases in our results section.

Results

In this results section, we provide a historical overview of schism in the Unification movement and then apply ROE to explain the schism. Our theoretical propositions are reinforced through an analysis of schismatic cases.

A Brief Historical Background on Contemporary Unificationism

Table 1 introduces the key persons involved with the Unification movement. It covers Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han, as well as their children, with a key eye to those who played major roles (intentionally or not) in the development of schismatic organizations.

Table 1: Key Players in the Unification Movement and its Schismatic Organizations (1998-Present)

Key Character Name:	Role:
Sun Myung Moon	The founder and "True Father" of the Unification Movement. Also known as "Rev. Moon," "True Parent," and "Second Adam." Father of many children, most notably Hyun Jin (Preston), Hyung Jin (Sean), Kook Jin (Justin), and In Jin (Tatiana) Moon.
Hak Ja Han	Wife of the late Rev. Moon, and "True Mother" of the Unification Movement. Mother of 14 children by Rev. Moon, such as Hyun Jin, Hyung Jin, Kook Jin, and In Jin Moon. After the death of Rev. Moon, she assumed control of the Unification Movement. She is also known as "Han Mother" and "True Parent."
Hyo Jin Moon	Eldest son of Rev. Moon. A musician, performer, and recording facility executive that unexpectedly died of a heart attack in 2008.
Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon.	Eldest son after the death of Hyo Jin Moon in 2008. The would-be successor of the Unification Movement. He held many leadership positions in Unification related organizations at various times, such as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification International, Youth Federation for World Peace, Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles, to name a few.
Kook Jin (Justin) Moon	Next eldest surviving son of Rev. Moon and Hak Ja Han after Hyun Jin. Known for his command of business matters as CEO of the Tongil Group. Worked to oust Hyun Jin as successor, and later joined Hyung Jin (Sean) to lead the Sanctuary Church.

groups of Hyun Jin (Preston) and Hyung Jin (Sean) was given its blessing by Hak Ja Han (Kim and Balcomb 2015). We limit our analysis to breakaway groups that exit without the blessing of established leaders.

Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon	Youngest successor and son of Rev. Moon. Past leader of multiple Unification related organizations, such as the International Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. Coronated by Rev. Moon to be his successor after the ousting of Hyun Jin. He was pushed out of the Unification Movement after by his mother Hak Ja Han. He later founded a schismatic group called the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, and leads it as "Second King" to this day.
In Jin (Tatiana) Moon	Daughter of Rev. Moon and Hak Ja Han. She was appointed president of the Unification Church of the United States by Hyung Jin for the purposes of weakening Hyun Jin Moon’s position. She was later removed from this position for an adulterous scandal and birth. She later founded her own organization outside the movement-- i-Home Church.

Table 2 is a timeline of the schisms. We begin in 1994, which was when the shift to the Family Federation occurred and is roughly around the time that Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon was being legitimated and “charismatized” (Barker 1993) as heir to the Unification movement.¹¹ This was the time period in which Hyo Jin Moon was judged unsuitable for the task of leading the Unification movement, making Hyun Jin the most discernable heir apparent. Key dates within the table to note for our purposes are the death of Hyo Jin Moon on March 17, 2008 (Mickler 2015a; Kim 2017: 125), the coronations of Hyung Jin (Sean) and his wife Yeoh Ah in January 2009 (Mickler 2013; Kim 2017: 151–3), Hyun Jin founding the Global Peace Foundation on November 4, 2009 (Tuan 2012), the death of Reverend Moon on September 3, 2012 (Mickler 2014; Kim 2017: 225), the establishment of the Sanctuary Church by Hyung Jin and Kook Jin (Justin) Moon on October 11, 2015 (Moon 2015b), and the creation of the Family Peace Association by Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon’s followers in 2016 (Introvigne 2017). A key recurring theme within our timeline is the appointment of an heir apparent to various leadership positions, and the subsequent removal and reappointment of those more favored.

Date	Event
May 1, 1994	Sun Myung Moon declares that the era of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HAS-UWC) is over. A new organization called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) is implemented with commiserate organizational changes (Mickler 2022).
1998	Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon appointed Vice-President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification International (FFWPUI) (Mickler 2015a).
2000	Hyun Jin Moon appointed head of World Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) (Mickler 2015a).
2001	Hyun Jin Moon appointed head of Youth Federation for World Peace (YFWP) (Mickler 2015a).

¹¹ For space considerations, we do not go into depth on earlier schismatic organizations off of the Unification movement, such as the Living Being Church. Our main focus is on the schisms that occurred after the death of Sun Myung Moon.

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

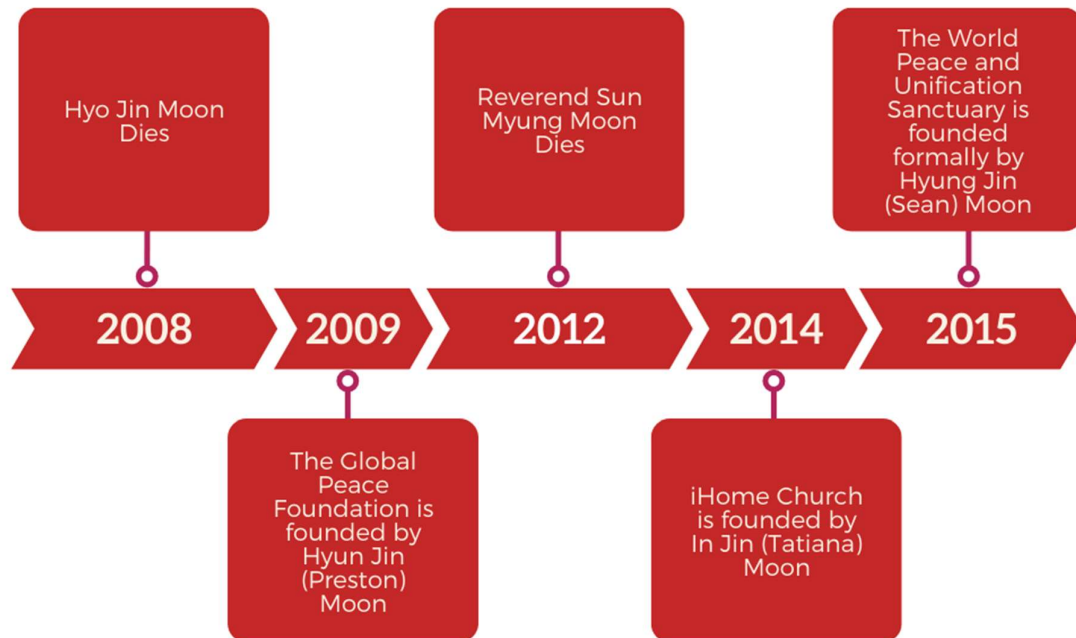
2002	Hyun Jin Moon begins espousing an anti-institutional viewpoint towards the Unification Movement, seeking to transcend religious barriers in what he considered a fulfillment of Rev. Moon's wishes (Kim 2017: 95-6).
2003	Unification holy book <i>Cheon Seong Gyeong</i> by Sun Myung Moon finalized and disseminated (Kim 2017: 233).
2005	Kook Jin (Justin) Moon appointed head of the failing business organization Tongil Group (Mickler 2015a), soon turns its fortunes around.
2006	Hyun Jin inaugurated as Chairman of the Unification Church International (UCI), an organization that controls many assets for the Unification Movement in the Americas (Mickler 2013, 2015a).
2007	Hyun Jin convenes his first Global Peace Seminar and Festival, which begins his world peace tours (Mickler 2015a; Kim 2017: 123).
March 17, 2008	Hyo Jin Moon, the eldest surviving son of the Moons, dies. This has theological ramifications for Hyun Jin's standing as successor (Mickler 2015b; Kim 2017: 125).
April 16, 2008	With support of Hak Ja Han ("True Mother"), Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon appointed Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) International President and President of FFWPU Korea, ousting Hyun Jin (Mickler 2015b).
May 2008	With support of Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin appointed as leader of World Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP), ousting Hyun Jin (Mickler 2015a; Kim 2017: 128).
July 29, 2008	In Jin (Tatiana) Moon was appointed president of the Unification Church of the United States by Hyung Jin for the purposes of weakening Hyun Jin Moon's position (Hagerty 2010; Mickler 2015b, Kim 2017: 134). Some claim this was a purely ceremonial appointment as a pastor rather than chairman (Kim 2017: 142).
August 2008	Kook Jin and Hyung Jin Moon announce the construction of a massive temple called World Unification Temple in Seoul. They criticize Hyun Jin's peace festivals as extravagant and wasteful. Hyun Jin criticizes the temple project, claiming it is contrary to the wishes of the founder (Mickler 2015a).
January 15-31, 2009	With support of Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin and his wife Yeoh Ah are informally coronated three times by Rev. Moon as the inheritors and pillars of the True Parents (Mickler 2013; Kim 2017: 151-3). Sanctuary Church members later claim this appointed Hyung Jin as the "Second King."
February and early March 2009	Hyun Jin attempts to take control of the board of directors at HSA-UWC (USA—another important funding agency), this is foiled by primarily In Jin, Kook Jin, and Hyung Jin (Mickler 2013; Kim 2017: 158-9; Kook Jin Moon 2010).
August 2, 2009	Hyun Jin Moon successfully takes over the board of UCI (Mickler 2013; Kim 2017: 164-5; Kook Jin Moon 2010).

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

November 4, 2009	Hyun Jin severs the formal tie of his Global Peace Festival organization to the Family Federation (Mickler 2013), and then founds the Global Peace Foundation (Tuan 2012), focusing on international and interreligious conferences for dialogues on peace (Kook Jin Moon 2010).
November 18, 2009	Hyung Jin appointed international President of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), likely by Hak Ja Han (Kim 2017: 172-3).
February 5, 2010	Hyun Jin Moon formally removed as Chairman of the Unification Movement in the United States (Kim 2017: 176).
June 5, 2010	At the behest of Hak Ja Han (Kim 2017, 181), Hyung Jin Moon appointed formally as representative and the inheritor in a proclamation by Sun Myung Moon (Sun Myung Moon 2010; Kim 2017: 185-6).
November 27, 2011	Hyung Jin begins giving sermons deifying Hak Ja Han (Kim 2017: 208).
August 3, 2012	Sun Myung Moon is hospitalized in the intensive care unit for a severe cough (Kim 2017: 219). He goes in and out of intensive care.
September 3, 2012	Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Movement, dies at the age of 93 (Mickler 2014; Kim 2017: 225). Hyung Jin deifies him (Kim 2017: 228-9).
September 2012	Hak Ja Han begins espousing “Only Begotten Daughter” theology, sacralizing her authority and placing it at equal or greater authority than Rev. Moon (Kim 2017: 282).
September 17, 2012	Hak Ja Han publicly declares that she would be leading the Unification Movement, not Hyung Jin (Kim 2017: 246-7).
September 19, 2012	Kook Jin is pressured by Hak Ja Han to resign from his positions, he refuses. Hak Ja Han removes him from his positions (Kim 2017: 248-9). She grants a position to Hyung Jin to remove him from Korea (US Chairman of the Unification Church).
2012	Hak Ja Han revises the <i>Cheon Seong Gyeong</i> , which some claim represents only 20% of the original document (Kim 2017: 235-7; Mickler 2014—see footnote 65). She also recalls volumes of <i>The Sermons of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon</i> and redacts specific sections (Kim 2017: 241-4).
October 29, 2013	A Unification member reports that Hyung Jin has been leading a private ministry outside of Hak Ja Han’s authority in Pennsylvania. Hak Ja Han demands that he “unite with True Parents’ direction” (Balcomb 2013).
March 23, 2013	Kook Jin officially fired as chairman of the Unification foundation (Kim 2017: 253)
March 6, 2015	Hyung Jin officially fired from chairman positions in the international and U.S. Family Federation (Kim 2017: 253).
September 13, 2015	Hyung Jin denounces Hak Ja Han as the “Whore of Babylon” (Moon 2015a).
October 11, 2015	Hyung Jin proclaims himself the Second King of the Kingdom of God, based off Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s coronations, and creates a “constitution” for his followers— <i>The Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk</i> (Moon 2015b). This marks the formal and official beginning of the Sanctuary Church, of which Kook Jin also plays a lead role in.
2016	Supporters of Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon establish the Family Peace Association, separate from the Family Federation (Introvigne 2017).
July 8, 2022	Tetsuya Yamagami assassinates former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe. The motive is believed to be Unification related, and the Japanese government launches investigations into the Family Federation, heightening tension with the external environment (McCurry 2022).

Apparent from the tables above, the Unification movement has undergone a bitter schism within the past 20 years, with tensions heightening after the death of Reverend Sun Myung Moon in 2012 (Barker 2022; Introvigne 2017). Before Reverend Moon’s death, major players in the Unification movement (Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin, Kook Jin, and In Jin Moon) systematically undermined the authority of the would-be inheritor, Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon (Kim 2017). After

Figure 1: A Visual Representation of the Unification Movement’s Schismatic Groups (1998-Today)



Reverend Moon’s death, Hak Ja Han has emerged victorious as the leader of the “Mainline Unification movement” (Mickler 2016). Han removed her children Kook Jin (Justin), Hyung Jin (Sean), and In Jin (Tatiana) from their respective leadership positions to secure her standing as top leader. Since then, Hyung Jin and Kook Jin have formed their own schismatic organization—the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary (a.k.a. the Sanctuary Church), which is known for its American identity based around the freedom to bear arms (Dunkel 2018; Chryssides 2017). This organization is led by Hyung Jin, who dubs himself the “Second King.” In Jin Moon has also formed her own organization in May of 2014 (Moon 2014), called “iHome Church,” which was indirectly supported by Hak Ja Han (Kim and Balcomb 2015). See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the Unification Movement’s schismatic groups.

With the historical context set, ROE theoretical analysis follows.

Institutionalization

Our first proposition posits that institutionalizing religions will be prone to schism. Accordingly, due to a sect to church shift, the history of schism within the Unification movement began prior to the death of Reverend Sun Myung Moon in 2012.

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

The 1994–1997 transition from the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC) to the current Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) initiated by Reverend Moon changed the organizational intent of the Unification movement. There was a novel emphasis on international peace (such as the attempt to replace the United Nations, or the declaration of the “Pacific Rim Era”) rather than on the church itself (Mickler 2022). This could be reasonably seen as an attempt to lower tension with the external environment through sect-to-church innovations. These changes, however, did not immediately undermine the legitimated authority of Reverend Moon, although it did have consequences for his heir apparent. This is especially the case when considering the development of internal factions of the charismatic aristocracy that opposed the appointment of Reverend Moon’s sons as successor over his wife (Kwak 2019; Kim 2017; Joosse 2017; Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016).

The appointment of Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon to various positions in the late ’90s and early to mid-2000s (see Table 2) was undoubtedly an attempt to pass on the waning legitimated charismatic authority of Reverend Moon to a successor (Wessinger 2012; Prophet 2016). Hyun Jin Moon’s appointment as the first successor of the Unification Church signified the implementation of reforms befitting the new era. These reforms, often initiated by Reverend Moon at the behest of Reverend Moon, included grandiose public peace programs, summits with political leaders, and large sporting events (Mickler 2014, 2015). The purpose of these programs was undoubtedly to lower tension with the external environment and integrate the Unification movement with larger society, likely to avoid continued stigmatization (Stark and Finke 2000; Foertsch 2022b). This could be meaningfully compared to organizational attempts at isomorphic conformity (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Foertsch 2022c: 4).

First-generation factions of the organization began to resist these expensive outreach programs over time, thereby becoming “the resistance of the secularized first-generation members against Hyun Jin P. Moon’s attempt to invigorate the Unification movement” (Kim 2017:93). Kim and Kwak (2019) view this conflict as the beginning of the contemporary schisms within the organization—notably, attributing strain not to the waning authority of Reverend Moon, but his attempts at structural change and his choice of successor. The other members of Reverend Moon’s family used this as an opportunity to jockey for appointment as successor. As Reverend Moon failed to transfer his charisma to the designated successor due to sect-to-church innovations, the declaration of Hyun Jin Moon as heir was rendered illegitimate (Prophet 2016: 39). This gives credibility to proposition 1.

Authority and Doctrine

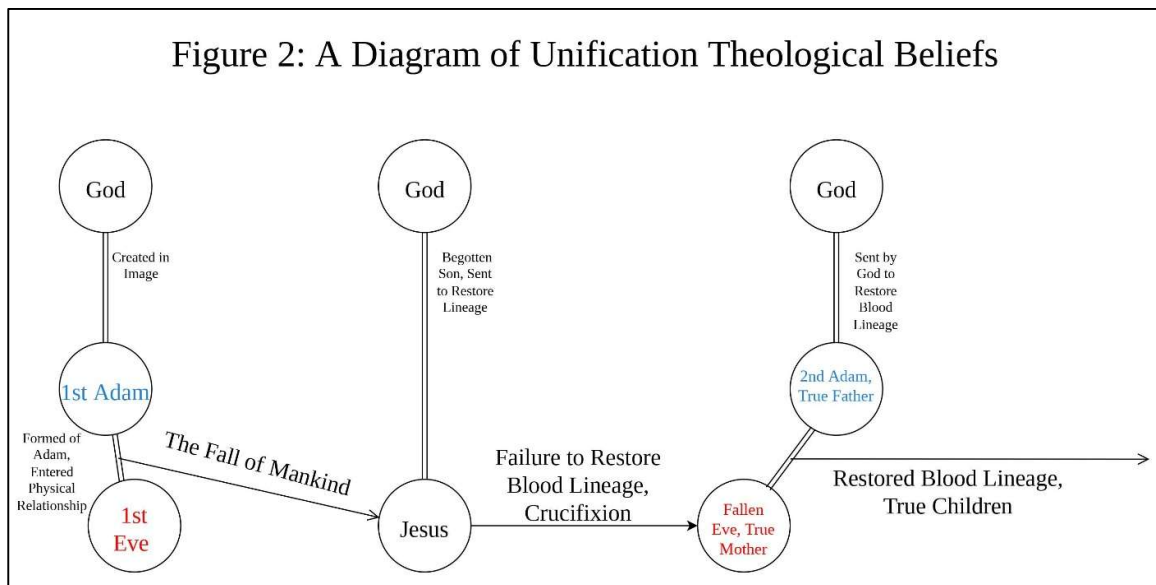
Our second proposition states that schism occurs due to disagreements over legitimate authority, which is then retrospectively rationalized through doctrine. Rightful authority is a recurring theme in the schisms within the Unification movement, with Hyun Jin, Hyung Jin, and Hak Ja Han Moon all claiming to be heir to the legitimized legacy of Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

Hyung Jin Moon was officially named as the successor of Reverend Moon to oust Hyun Jin Moon (Stephens 2015: 2) in 2010. This was a result of an internal power struggle between those seeking to resist reformist elements within the movement, led by Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin Moon, and Kook Jin Moon (Kim 2017; Kwak 2019: 274–5). The children of Reverend Moon and Hak Ja Han were constantly removed from positions of power to weaken their authority

(Kwak 2019: 432–4, 477). Even though at this point we could regard Reverend Moon’s legitimate authority as appropriately “charismatized” (Barker 1993; Prophet 2016; Richardson 2021), his waning ability to command the burgeoning movement in old age led to a crisis of organizational identity (Kim 2017). Moreover, the continued struggle by major familial players to attain the absolute heir apparent appointment within the movement further exacerbated confusion, likely supported by various factions within the movement (Kwak 2019; Kim 2017).

It is unsurprising that Reverend Moon is often regarded as a charismatic leader among many members of the Unification movement (Barker 1993; “John,” Anonymous Family Federation Member, 2022). Although his charisma waned greatly later in life, the presence of Reverend Moon alone was still adequate to postpone the fissures within the organization at least superficially. With the death of the founder, the scene quickly changed, and the holistic social processes that generated schism came to the fore.

The death of Reverend Moon in 2012 marks the official schism among the three leaders within the Unification movement, with their focus on the legitimization of their leadership (Prophet 2016; Richardson 2021), which is a finding in line with Sutton and Chaves (2004). Much of the authority dispute within the Unification movement retrospectively took on theological justification, with various points of contention. Figure 2 is a quick overview of the basic theological premise of the *Divine Principle* of Sun Myung Moon (1977). While it does not capture the nuance or importance of many theological points, it is a good faith attempt at representing the complexity of the restoration of blood lineage doctrine as told through our interview subjects.



A “lower” level is assigned to the Eve characters (the First Biblical and Second “True Mother” Eve), extending the notion of Eve’s corrupting and subordinate relation to Adam from Biblical Genesis. This implies the inherent fallen nature of humanity, and the necessity of Reverend Moon’s role as an uplifter of the human lineage. It places the woman in the object or receptive role of the male subject, which is reaffirmed by interview subjects:

Eve’s role is an object partner by Adam and through Adam. Basically, because Adam

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

is God's manifestation. So, Eve, eventually, is also the wife of God through Adam. Not directly, but through Adam. Eve is, you know, the helper, you know we call objects partner, subject, and object...the object should kind of be subject. Subject has dominion over object. However, if you go back to the Divine Principle, if in a subject object united in love, you know it's certain you know kind of circling motion and object can be subject and subject can be object. You know in love relations that this is not, you know, master and slave relationship, you know. You know object and woman is not just constrained, but you know proper position, but through that you know she can have the same position well enough, you know. ("Akane," Anonymous Sanctuary Member, 2022)

Contention between Family Federation and Sanctuary doctrinal beliefs is most apparent through the theological implications of these concepts, which bear heavily on their respective views of the "True Father," "True Mother," and "True Parents." These theological beliefs are important to note because they change when legitimate authority (Prophet 2016) succession is problematized. We describe these theological beliefs below.

Before major schismatic activity, it seems any perspective on Reverend Moon's nature regarding Original Sin was tolerated. This means that it was left ambiguous whether Sun Myung Moon was originally conceived by God as a divine Messiah without sin, or if he came into his sinlessness after he accepted his divine mission, much like a prophet of the Old Testament. After the schism with Preston (Hyun Jin) Moon's group in 2009 and later with Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon's group in 2015, we see a deification (Messiahship) of Reverend Moon within the schismatic organizations, a comparison to Christ (Williams 2020), and an assertion that Reverend Moon was born without Original Sin. This process of sacralization could be considered an attempt to capitalize on Reverend Moon's now-passed routinized charismatic authority (Wessinger 2012). In the mainline Family Federation led by Hak Ja Han, however, we do not see this type of sacralization, and Hak Ja Han periodically attempts to subvert Reverend Moon's divine image, one way being the assertion of his birth under Original Sin.

Lots of new teachings seem to be coming from Mother. They claim True Father and God are inside of her. She is the only-begotten daughter. She was born sinless. Father fell. She is replacing the texts that Father ordained. The new Constitution does not mention the Bible or the Divine Principle. Even Father's picture is gone and only Mother's is left. There is too much to mention, but it is all there to see and surely more and more will keep coming. (Stephens 2015:4)

Likewise, the nature of "True Mother" Hak Ja Han is called into question on a theological level, reifying challenges to her legitimacy in leading the movement. Schismatic groups such as the Sanctuary Church view Hak Ja Han as the "Whore of Babylon," a "Fallen Eve" only given importance and redemption through her marriage with the Messiah Sun Myung Moon (Moon 2015a; Kwak 2019: 461). This position downplays the role of Hak Ja Han as the progenitor of the restored blood lineage of humanity by birthing the True Children, making her no different or better than any other woman. It also subverts her theological status as the would-be leader of the Unification movement. One anonymous member of the Sanctuary Church deems Hak Ja Han a heretic:

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

Well, we believe she's a she's a heretic...She had, she received so much love from him [Reverend Moon] and he didn't ask much from her...That said, she has taken a position to grab control of Family Fed; Father Moon has designated his youngest son [Hyung Jin Sean Moon] three times publicly and videotaped ceremonies as his sole heir and successor. And then he even wrote a declaration in which he said that. And he said any other is a heretic and destroyer and he asked her to read it out loud. And we have that on videotape. So he couldn't have made it clearer...I think Han is basically a narcissistic money grabbing power hungry person who's surrounded by people who are corrupt and want to use her for their own ends. ("Jerry," Anonymous Sanctuary Church, 2022)

In response to this subversion of her legitimacy, Hak Ja Han and her supporters adopt a stance that deifies herself and downplays the sanctity of the True Father. This perspective had been in development since the waning authority of Reverend Moon in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Kwak 2019; Kim 2017). This is done through the "Only Begotten Daughter" theological innovation, self-divination, and significant revisions to the original meaning of the Divine Principle (Kim 2017; Kwak 2019: 452–3, 459). She argues, along with theologians associated with the Family Federation,¹² that she was the Messiah sent to restore the blood lineage of humanity through the redemption of Eve. She argues that she was born without Original Sin, unlike Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who only received his remission of Original Sin once he was called to lead the Unification movement (or marry her).

Since the passing of the founder in September 2012, the Unification movement had claimed that "True Mother was the God of the day, and True Father of the spiritual realm was the God of the Night." Alongside these claims, some Unification movement theologians at Sun Moon University developed that "True Mother was the female aspect of the messiah" and educated believers accordingly...Going one step beyond the idea that Hak Ja Han was "the female aspect of the messiah," Hak Ja Han began to claim she was "the only begotten daughter" from 2014 onwards, an idea that the Unification movement is teaching as doctrine. (Kim 2017:257).

As we can see, these theological innovations by Hak Ja Han were not present until her authority as the inheritor of the Unification movement was questioned. Likewise, theological arguments made by schismatic groups such as the Sanctuary Church to subvert Hak Ja Han's authority (Wessinger 2012) were solidified after the death of Reverend Moon and the split with the Family Federation. As such, it is concluded that these bitter theological disputes currently underway in the Unification movement are less about doctrine or orthodoxy and more about political legitimacy and authority (Starke and Dyck 1996, Foertsch 2022a, Prophet 2016), in line with proposition 2 and new institutionalism perspectives.

Niche Conditions

Our third proposition is that organizational attempts at niche domination are prone to stretching

¹² Kim 2017 specifically mentions Taek Yong Oh pg. 270–80, 300, Hang Je Kim, pg. 292–4, Seok Byeong Kim pg. 295–6, and Kwak 2019 mentions Jin-Chun Kim pg. 465–6.

and thus schism, with schismatic groups operating as specialist organizations within an existing or new niche in the religious market. A good example of niche domination within the Unification Church's history can be found in its "Mass Wedding Ceremony," which contributed substantially to the movement's rapid growth in membership in the early 1990s (Barker 2018). One of the hallmarks of the Unification Church, this ritual is the most important part of its Blessing Ceremony divided into five parts. The mass wedding was incorporated when Reverend Moon sought to bridge the tense Korea–Japan relationship through international marriages. An anonymous theologian of the Unification movement commented that the mandatory marriage was a tool used by the members of the Unification Church to invite new members who could not find a spouse in a competitive Korean marriage market in the 1980s ("Yuri Han," Anonymous Family Federation, 2021). Through this innovation, the Unification Church successfully utilized untapped resources and capitalized on its Neo-Confucian/Christian eastern and western (international) syncretic niche, leading to increased fitness, survivability, and eventually isomorphic advantage over similar religious institutions like the early breakaway Jesus Morning Star or Shincheonji (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Foertsch 2022c).

This highly unique syncretic niche comes from a blend of western and eastern ideas that appeal to people from international backgrounds. Of course, this syncretic fusion was not possible until after the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, which opened the doors to East Asian immigration to the United States, suggesting the importance of environment on the existence of specific religious niches (Foertsch 2022a, 2025) and membership resources (Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2008). Unificationism theologically draws from Christian concepts such as Original Sin, a Messiah, and Fallen Eve (Kim 2017). Hence, on the surface, the Unification movement may seem to be an isomorphic reiteration of Christianity with minor changes, including the position of Reverend Moon as Messiah (Williams 2020).

Upon closer inspection, however, it is not difficult to discover South Korean Neo-Confucian influence, with some examples being filial piety or the emphasis on hierarchical family structure. Many participants testify to the syncretism of eastern and western identities as a key aspect of the Unification movement. One anonymous member of the Family Federation commented that they felt the name "Unification" fits the characteristic of the movement well:

You know, I mean, there's interesting interaction between the West and the East. Uhm, sometimes often, sometimes friction. So, I would say you know, the tradition is a lot of the Asian culture and traditions filter into our church and at every level in terms of holidays, ritual liturgy. Just basic ways of interacting...I would say that's a big part of the church and the church intentionally, so the church intentionally. The theme is unification, so we try to harmonize the different cultures as best we can. That's not always easy, but it can be very rewarding. ("John," Anonymous Family Federation Member, 2022)

Another participant also described how the Unification movement attempts to harmonize western and eastern ideas together through music:

Uh, there was a long period of time that you know, like the so-called holy music was limited particularly to Korean and the Japanese music. But there's a lot more American songs, even some European songs that have been incorporated into that. I

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

think Africa, that's still—I don't see so much African but I think that I won't be surprised if you look 20 years from now that there will be a lot more incorporation of African song and ritual into our movement as well...I think there's a lot of you know, syncretism. ("Tim," Anonymous Family Federation Member, 2022)

Overall, the Unification movement managed to establish its religious niche in both the East and the West through its idiosyncratic fusion of religious ideas that were familiar to both populations. Furthermore, it secured membership through the promotion of mandatory marriage, a unique feature that enabled it to win a competition for resources (in this case followers) over many new religious movements. This niche domination was tenuous, however, especially along cultural lines.

The latent differences between eastern and western culture would later become prone to exploitation through schismatics, especially after the death of Sun Myung Moon. Although Reverend Moon's death seems to be the trigger to the instrumentalization of these differences, they preexisted his death by decades and contributed to various breakaway groups during his life (a good example being Zimbabwean Cleophas or "Black Heung Jin" who formed a breakaway group in Africa in 1988—see Barker 2018; Fefferman 1990).

Hyung Jin (Sean) Moon's religious innovations to capitalize on new resources (Scheitle and Dougherty 2008) began before his 2015 formal break with the mainline Family Federation. After he was announced as the official heir to Reverend Moon and Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin Moon implemented various rituals from 2009–2010 onward. This can be interpreted as Hyung Jin Moon's attempt to legitimate his position as the future successor after Hyun Jin Moon was ousted due to his frustrated efforts to reform the Unification Church, since Hyung Jin Moon identified himself as the direct opposite of Hyun Jin Moon (Kim 2017; Kwak 2019). Such rituals included uniquely western spiritual healing services (much like Pentecostal rituals), the building of a Seoul megachurch in emulation of U.S. pastors, and the Cheonboksik ceremony, which many eastern members deemed ungrounded in the identity of the Unification Church:

Hyung Jin Moon carried out experiments in which he tried to change the Unification movement's traditional symbols and rituals sometimes in a Buddhist way, sometimes a Catholic way, and sometimes in a Protestant way based on his subjective experience and knowledge. Hyung Jin Moon disregarded the Unification movement's history and traditions without taking into consideration the characteristics that a new religion's rituals should have...Although externally he seems to accept the methods of worship and the culture of other religions, such practice is an affront to those respective religions. Such behavior lacked identity as the international president of the Unification movement. (Kim 2017:117)

Hyung Jin Moon's reformation of the rituals failed to capitalize on the Unification Church's religious niche despite his efforts. This is likely because there was an increasing difference between the eastern and western Unification movement. Hyung Jin received many of these ritual innovations from years of religious study and leadership in the United States, which he discusses in his book *A Bald Head and a Strawberry* (Moon 2004). This meant that when he was recalled to South Korea with the intent to reenergize the eastern dominant Family Federation, his western style of worship was resisted, ultimately losing him support with the traditional South Korean

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

membership “cultic aristocracy” of the movement (Richardson 2021; Prophet 2016; Joosse 2017). This allowed Hak Ja Han to excommunicate Hyung Jin Moon in 2015 following the death of Reverend Moon with the support of the Korean cultic aristocracy. This led to the formation of the Sanctuary Church.

Both the Family Federation and the Sanctuary Church respond to environmental conditions appropriate to their contexts, and as such have developed different niche specialties within the overall international Neo-Confucian/Christian syncretic religious niche using innovations that negotiate tension and commitment (Iannaccone 1988). For example, the Family Federation in recent times has developed “churchlike” features that have lowered tension with the external environment, and the Sanctuary Church has developed an organizational and theological perspective that is geared towards the United States environment. Both organizations have an aspiration of niche domination. The Unification Church before the schism attempted to dominate this syncretic niche, and this led to organizational stretching, which the Sanctuary Church capitalized on.

The Sanctuary Church, led by Hyung Jin Moon, attempts to form exclusivity over resources within its western religious niche even further. Hyung Jin Moon tactfully attempts to gain membership by isomorphically adopting organizational forms familiar to available membership resources—a direct response to his environment (Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009). In the context of Sanctuary’s primary location, the United States of America, this is done by incorporating concepts that appeal to Americans (Dunkel 2018; Moon 2015a, 2015b). For example, the Rod of Iron theology innovation likens firearms to the weapon of God (Dunkel 2018; Chryssides 2017). Although a highly controversial topic, it nevertheless succeeded in attracting American gun rights activists and militia groups, hence reasserting itself as a niche specialist and capitalizing on western membership and financial resources. Contrary to the institutional norm of the Unification movement as a primarily East Asian membership movement, this is an effort to capitalize on specific ethnic resources—White Anglo-Saxon Protestant men. It can be concluded, then, that the Sanctuary Church has different resource dependencies (Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009). Although not a member of the Sanctuary Church, a respondent following the Family Federation described how other schismatic groups differ from the mainline Family Federation in ethnic composition:

I think that that narrative is actually more culturally influenced and has many negative impacts in things because there is a lack of, um, I guess it’s in a sense it kind of kills the individual, you know? Coming from East Asian society it’s like Korea and Japan where they’re homogeneous nations, there is pressure to conform and I see that reflected in our own movement. And so in some ways I see Preston and Sean and Justin’s breakaway schismatic groups as a kind of uh rebellion against the homogeneity and kind of and overemphasis on the individuality which also in and of itself is problematic too. And almost an overcorrection. But I do see that that being a little bit the driving impetus of the splits. (“Mandy,” Anonymous Family Federation Member, 2022)

A member of the Sanctuary Church (“Akane”) confirms the relative lack of ethnic segregation within the organization, saying that “Sanctuary doesn’t actually quite care about nationalities, you know, discrete color blind and you know...the barrier between races should be eliminated.”

Since America is composed of various ethnic backgrounds, contrary to homogenous countries such as Korea and Japan (where Unification membership is found in large numbers), the Sanctuary Church attempts to capitalize on its domestic religious niche by purposefully avoiding discussions on race and ethnicity. One Sanctuary Member (“Jerry”) perceptively noted the potential pitfalls of this effective innovation, however: the difficulties in recruiting populations outside White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, particularly the African American community. The Sanctuary Church nevertheless is more inclusive of other non-eastern members and innovations than the mainline Family Federation, which is composed primarily of Korean and Japanese members.

Other perceptive isomorphic innovations used by Hyung Jin and his Sanctuary Church include the use of the Bible as a legitimator and Christian messianic/eschatological language (Moon 2015a; Williams 2020). Biblical apocalyptic accounts are frequently used in Hyung Jin Moon’s sermons, rather than the scriptures of the Unification movement. The notion of using the Bible instead of Unification-specific sacred texts mostly came about as a response to Hak Ja Han’s leadership. Together with the frequent defamation of Hak Ja Han, Hyung Jin Moon’s sermons can be seen as a way for the Sanctuary Church to carve out a specialization within the syncretic religious niche by establishing itself as an alternative to those who may object to the current trajectory of the Family Federation. This method especially appeals to former American members of the Family Federation, as one member testified to:

It’s crucial that each family understands the Kingdom, not the church organization. Each family or individual needs to have, um, a direct relationship with God and a direct relationship with the King...if we need an organization, we would be returning to Family Fed. We need to avoid that. And people tends to, especially you know, Japanese and Koreans, tends to have organization, because culturally it’s easier. But always we have some sort of fight between Kingdom and organization...It’s always a risk to return to Family Fed situation...[in Sanctuary compared to Family Fed] there’s more individual personal responsibility. Not waiting for each of us to get external instructions but each of us, yeah, each of us have our own responsibility without telling without you know order or command. (“Jerry,” Anonymous Sanctuary Church Member, 2022)

Finally, Hyung Jin Moon attempts to capitalize on the American membership resource through an appeal to the American ideotype of individuality. Decrying the Family Federation as hierarchical and non-democratic, Hyung Jin and Kook Jin Moon have attempted to coopt the idea of American democratic idealism through the creation of *The Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk* (Moon 2015b), which theologically establishes a divine kingdom on Earth. This document speaks to the importance of each individual man as their own “king” within their own family “kingdom,” led by the “Second King” Hyung Jin Moon only symbolically. This undoubtedly appeals to Americans and those easterners who are dissatisfied with the hierarchical organization of the Family Federation, which is largely constructed around eastern concepts of authority.

In sum, the Sanctuary Church seeks to isomorphically capitalize on niche specialization and western membership resource exclusivity (Foertsch 2022a; Scheitle 2007; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009), in line with proposition 3. Hyung Jin Moon’s original

westernizing reforms failed to stretch the Family Federation's ability to operate within its eastern niche, leading to his expulsion. Hence, Hyung Jin's Sanctuary Church operates as a niche specialist and the Family Federation remains a niche generalist. The Family Federation has difficulty competing for American membership resources, which is seen in the Sanctuary Church's apparent membership growth, and relative stagnation within the Family Federation. It is clear that the environment the Unification movement operates within has played a key role in the formation and continuation of niche schismatic organizations.

While the implications are not yet fully evident, the recent assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has undoubtedly increased environmental tension with society in the case of the "mainline" Family Federation (McCurry 2022). The assassin Tetsuya Yamagami allegedly carried out this act due to large financial donations his mother gave to the Unification movement, thus impoverishing his family. Due to Shinzo Abe's political connections with the movement, Yamagami presumably chose him as a target.

This increase in environmental tension was noticeable during our data collection period, when respondents from the Family Federation became much more difficult to contact. This suggests a tightening of membership and information, likely in response to governmental inquiries into the Family Federation's financial dealings in Japan. It is unknown how the increased environmental tension in Japan will impact the future organizational form of the international Unification movement, but it is possible that it may lead to a reversal of sect-to-church (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005).

Conclusions and Implications

The purposes of this study were: 1. To bring scholarly attention to the ongoing schisms within the long-studied Unification movement (Barker 1993, 2022; Introvigne 2017; Chryssides 2017), 2. To bring Unificationism into meaningful comparison with other religious organizations (Pitchford et al. 2001), 3. To forward religious organization ecology as an alternative theory to cultural analyses of contemporary religious organizational form. As the gulf within the Unification movement widens, our results support the relevance of religious organization ecology (ROE) in explaining schisms within emergent religious groups (Bromley and Melton 2012; Melton 2004). In particular, our findings of the impact of church-to-sect mechanics (proposition 1), authority and doctrine (proposition 2), and niche conditions (proposition 3) complement previous research on this topic.

While much of the contemporary research on new religious movements and emergent religious groups exists within the cultural sphere of lived experience (Ammerman 2015), ethnography, and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lichterman 2002), the need for a comparative, institutional, meso-level, organizational theoretic framework remains pressing (Foertsch 2022b; Pitchford et al. 2001). As sociologists attempt to theorize generally about how specific institutions isomorphically influence micro-interaction (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Hannan and Freeman 1977; Foertsch 2022c), the need to reintroduce structure into the conversation surrounding high-tension religious groups remains paramount, especially when faced with positivist criticism.

Schisms within high-tension religious groups are a fruitful and valid case for analyzing the influence of meso-level processes, such as organizational niche and environment on institutional and individual religious choices (the choice to schism). High-tension groups that are perceived

as religiously deviant remain a hallmark case, through the analytic ease of which academic outsiders can gauge their relative environmental tension. But these mechanics can and should be tested on cases with lower-tension environments or exclusivity. By developing ROE theory further, we approach a meso-level perspective with generalizability that can speak not only to high-tension religious groups such as the Unification Church, but also schisms within dominant, sectarian, and alternative religious traditions (Bromley and Melton 2012; Scheitle 2007; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009). Further research is needed (with a keen eye to the ongoing Methodist schism).

These findings are not without their limitations. It is possible that our research participants were not representative of the entire Unification movement. We have tried our best to include demographic variability (gender, race, nationality, and ethnicity) within our sample, and capture structural influences through historical comparative content analysis.

Our analysis does not analyze Hyun Jin's Family Peace Association or In Jin's iHome Church at length for space considerations, but this does not mean that an analysis like ours cannot be done on these organizations. Future studies on Unification schisms should seek to reproduce our findings with other cases, such as the Family Peace Association. It would be meaningful to revisit the impact of Shinzo Abe's assassination on environmental tension. Additionally, content analysis and participant observation, especially online, could misrepresent the movement. Particularly in the case of the Sanctuary Church, online-only content may be made more extreme to conform to the general process of online political extremism (Olteanu et al. 2018). To combat this issue, we have attempted to corroborate our participant observation and content analysis with interview and historical comparative data. Nevertheless, additional data and analysis would be valuable.

Finally, our interview participants could have held biases towards other groups within the Unification movement. The recent creation of these schismatic groups was not without anger and resentment on both sides. We have attempted to remain neutral in our approximation of the events that generated these schisms by corroborating opinions with historical content produced by all sides and including all relevant available perspectives. We hope that our good-faith study provides the movement with some clarity, but we are under no presumption that we have captured the holistic nature of this story in its entirety. The need for continued research is pressing.

Religious organization ecology has a strong potential to expose the importance of race, gender, and nationality as religious resources within an ongoing negotiation with the external environment, which was previously observed by Scheitle and his colleagues (2007; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Finke and Scheitle 2009). To wit, religious organizations typically utilize functions of membership homogeneity—impacting conversion, legitimate authority, leadership choices, institutional structure, and more. In our own study we noticed the importance of nationality and race in generating niche specialization, specifically in the case of Sanctuary Church. By expanding this line of inquiry on the interrelatedness of our propositions, religious organization ecology theory can build upon its predecessors and emerge as a truly meso-level research program (Pitchford et al. 2001) that incorporates intersectional explanations when one analyzes religious organizational form. Some research questions to this effect could be “How often do interracial congregations schism?” “How successful are international religious movements in institutionalizing?” “How does a difference in allocation of resources (financial, membership) change the organizational manifestation of ethnic congregations when compared to

mainline Protestants?” etc. One line of inquiry that could be particularly enlightening, for example, is the relative availability of racial, gendered, and socioeconomic environmental resources and their potential impact on the generation of the recent Methodist schism.

Ultimately, it is our hope that this study sheds light on the Unification movement as a continued case of interest for sociologists and academics generally (Barker 2022; Introvigne 2017; Chryssides 2017), as well as the relevance of religious organization ecology theory in reintroducing structure to conversations surrounding religious schism. By embedding cultural case study within structural explanations, cultural analysis will only grow stronger and become more adept at responding to challenges from the hegemonic positivist camp.

References

- Ammerman, Nancy. 2015. "Lived Religion." In *Emerging Trends in Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Scott and Kosslyn. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Balcomb, Michael. 2013. "Statement on Hyung Jin Nim's Ministries in Pennsylvania." Accessed at <http://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Talks/Balcomb/Balcomb-131029.pdf> on June 14th, 2022.
- Barker, Eileen. 1993. "Charismatization: the social production of 'an methods propitious to the mobilization of sentiments.'" In *Secularization, Rationalism, and Sectarianism*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Barker, Eileen. 2018. "The Unification Church: A Kaleidoscopic Introduction." *Society Register* 2(2): 19-62.
- Barker, Eileen. 2022. "New Religious Movements." *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. Ed. Kurtz. Amsterdam, NL: Elsevier.
- Bromley and Melton. 2012. "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups." *Nova Religio* Vol. 15. Is. 3. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cadge, Wendy. 2004. *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Chryssides, George. 2017. "Sanctuary Church." *World Religions and Spirituality Project*. Accessed at <https://wrldrels.org/2017/08/03/sanctuary-church/> on October 26, 2023.
- District of Columbia Courts. 2021. "Lengthy Lawsuit Exposes Rifts Within Unification Church". *Einpresswire*. Washington, D.C.: EIN News.
- Dunkel, Tom. 2018. "Locked and Loaded for the Lord." *The Washington Post*. Accessed on Sept. 11th, 2021, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/21/feature/two-sons-of-revmoon-have-split-from-his-church-and-their-followers-are-armed/>
- Edgell, Penny. 2012. "A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions". *The Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Ellwood, Robert S. Jr. 1985. "Introduction." In *New Religious Movements in the United States and Canada* comp. Choquette. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Fefferman, Dan. 1990. "Black Heung Jin- The Victory of (All You Need Is) Love." *Unification Sermons and Talks*. Accessed at <https://www.tparents.org/library/unification/talks/feffermn/fefferman-black-heungjin.htm> on October 26, 2023.
- Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 2005. *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Finke, Roger and Christopher P. Scheitle. 2009. "Understanding Schisms: Theoretical Explanations for Their Origins." In *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide*, pp. 11-33. Ed. James R. Lewis and Sarah M. Lewis. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Foertsch, Steven. 2022a. "An Organizational Analysis of the Schismatic Church of Satan". *Review of Religious Research* vol. 64(1): 55-7.
- Foertsch, Steven. 2022b. "A Field Study Update on Organizational Satanism and Setianism in the United States." *Review of Religious Research*. Berlin, DE: Springer.
- Foertsch, Steven. 2022c. "Children of the Mind and the Concept of Edge and Center Nations." *Journal of Science Fiction and Philosophy*, vol. 5.
- Foertsch, Steven. 2025. "Tracking Emergent Religious Groups in the US and Adherence Over Time." *The Journal of CESNUR* 9(2): 26-47.
- Greenwood, Royston, and C. R. Hinings. 1996. "Understanding Radical Organizational Change: Bringing Together the Old and the New Institutionalism." *The Academy of Management*

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- Review 21(4)
- Glaser, Barney, and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Hagerty, Barbara Bradley. 2010. "Unification Church Woos A Second Generation." *NPR*. Accessed at <https://www.npr.org/2010/02/17/123805954/unification-church-woos-a-second-generation?ps=cprs> on June 14, 2022.
- Hannan Michael T. and John Freeman. 1977. "The Population Ecology of Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 83(5):929–984. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1988. "A Formal Model of Church and Sect." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: S241-S268. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1992. "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectivities." *Journal of Political Economy* 100: 271–291.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2017. "Unification Movement Schismatic Groups (2012-Present)." *World Religions and Spiritualities Project*. Accessed at <https://wrldrels.org/2017/04/23/unification-movement-schisms-2/> on October 26, 2023.
- Joosse, Paul. 2017. "Max Weber's Disciples: Theorizing the Charismatic Aristocracy." *Sociological Theory* 35(4): 334-358.
- Kim, Ki Hoon, and Balcomb, Michael. 2015. "True Mother has confirmed her support for Rev. In Jin Moon's iHome church." Accessed at <http://www.tparents.org/Moon-Talks/InJinMoon-12/InJinMoon151228.pdf> on June 15, 2022.
- Kim, Jongsuk. 2017. *Split of the Unification movement*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Kwak, Chung Hwan. 2019. *Truth Shall Prevail: Understanding the Conflict Within the Unification Movement and Its Resolution*. Seoul, KR: Aju Media.
- Laycock, Joseph. 2020. *Speak of the Devil: How the Satanic Temple is Changing the Way We Talk about Religion*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press
- Lichterman, Paul. 2002. "Seeing structure happen: Theory-driven participant observation." *Methods of social movement research* vol. 16: 118-145
- Madsen, Richard. 2009. "The Archipelago of Faith: Religious Individualism and Faith Community in America Today". *American Journal of Sociology* 114(5).
- McCurry, Justin. 2022. "Japan begins inquiry into Unification church in wake of Shinzo Abe killing." *The Guardian*. Accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/22/japan-begins-inquiry-into-unification-church-in-wake-of-shinzo-abe-killing> on 4/30/2023.
- Melton, J. Gordon. 2017. *Melton's Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale.
- Melton, J. Gordon. 2004. "Perspective: Toward a Definition of 'New Religion.'" *Nova Religio* 8(1): 73-87.
- Mickler, Michael. 2013. "Battle for the Americas." *Journal of Unification Studies Vol. 16*. New York, NY: Unification Theological Seminary.
- Mickler, Michael. 2014. "Continuity and Innovation: The Last Years of Rev. Moon's Ministry, 2009-2012." *Journal of Unification Studies Vol. 16*. New York, NY: Unification Theological Seminary.
- Mickler, Michael. 2015a. "The Great Jubilee Years 2007-08: A Transition Period in Unification Movement History." *Journal of Unification Studies Vol. 16*. New York, NY: Unification Theological Seminary.
- Mickler, Michael. 2015b. "The Sanctuary Church Schismatics." *Applied Unificationism Blog*. New York, NY: Unification Theological Seminary.
- Mickler, Michael. 2016. "Mainstream Unificationism." *Applied Unificationism Blog*. New York, NY: Unification Theological Seminary.

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- Mickler, Michael. 2022. "From Korea with Love: Assembling a Chronology of Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon's Activities in the United States." *Journal of Unification Studies* vol. 23: 103-123.
- Moon, Kook Jin. 2010. "An Abbreviated Chronology of Recent Events." Accessed at <http://www.tparents.org/Moon-Talks/HyunJinMoon/HyunJinMoon-100617.htm> on June 14, 2022.
- Moon, Sun Myung. 1977. *Divine Principle*. New York, NY: HSA-UWC Publications
- Moon, Sun Myung. 2010. "June 5th Declaration: The Authority of The True Parents of Mankind From Now Will Be Represented By The Youngest Son." Accessed at <http://www.tparents.org/Moon-Talks/SunMyungMoon10/SunMyungMoon-100605.htm> on June 14, 2022.
- Moon, In Jin. 2014. "What is i-Home Church?" *YouTube Video*. Accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qrxCw21iAA> on June 15th, 2022.
- Moon, Hyung Jin. 2004. *A Bald Head and a Strawberry*. Terrytown, NY: Sincerity Publications Inc.
- Moon, Hyung Jin. 2015a. "The Mystery of Babylon." Sermon given in Newfoundland, PA. Accessed at https://www.sanctuary-pa.org/speeches?03588dba_page=6&ef62da3f_page=2 on June 14th, 2022.
- Moon, Hyung Jin. 2015b. "The Constitution of the United States of Cheon Il Guk." Accessed at <https://www.sanctuary-pa.org/constitution> on June 14th, 2022.
- Olteanu, Alexandra, Castillo, Carlos, Boy, Jeremy, and Kush Varshney. 2018. "The Effect of Extremist Violence on Hateful Speech Online." *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* vol. 12(1).
- Pitchford, Susan, Bader, Chris, and Rodney Stark. 2001. "Doing Field Studies of Religious Movements An Agenda." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40(3): 379-392.
- Prophet, Erin. 2016. "Charisma and Authority in New Religious Movements." In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements, vol. II*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Richardson, James T. 2021. "Myth of the Omnipotent Leader." *Nova Religio, vol. 24 Is. 4*:11-25.
- Scheitle, Christopher P. 2007. "Organizational Niches and Religious Markets: Uniting Two Literatures." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 3: Article 2.
- Scheitle, Christopher P., and Kevin D. Dougherty. 2008. "The Sociology of Religious Organizations." *Sociology Compass* 2(3): 981-999.
- Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Starke, Frederick A., and Bruno Dyck. 1996. "Upheavals in Congregations: The Causes and Consequences of Splits." *Review of Religious Research* 38: 159-174.
- Sutton, John R., and Mark Chaves. 2004. "Explaining Schism in American Protestant Denominations, 1890-1990." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43(2): 171-190.
- Tuan, Chan Cheng. 2012. "Seeking reunification, Korea can learn something from us." *New Straits Times*. Accessed at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140610060223/http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-208311093.html> on June 14, 2022.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Ed. Roth and Wittich. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Wessinger, Catherine. 2012. "Charismatic leaders in new religions." In *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- University Press.
Westbrook, Donald. 2019. *Among the Scientologists: History, Theology, and Praxis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford.
Williams, Kerry. 2020. *Jesus and True Father Are One*. Middletown, DE: Independent Publisher.

Figure 1 made with canva.com