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Behind the Scenes

Vietnamese Immigrants of Buddhist Faith Doing *Communitas* in Switzerland

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Abstract. – The following paper presents empirical findings on the community-building processes (*Vergemeinschaftung*) undertaken by Vietnamese immigrants of Buddhist faith in Switzerland and in the broader European context after their arrival in Europe post-1970. The theoretical aim of the paper is to analyse how these immigrants restructure their ethno-religious communities in Switzerland. For analysis, the concept of "institutional isomorphism" is applied as a heuristic template to the empirical data. It illustrates which models and forms of organisation relevant actors use and which misunderstandings and conflicts are generated. *[Vietnamese Buddhism, Switzerland, organisations, isomorphism, forced migration, refugees, collectivisation (Vergemeinschaftung), immigrant community]*

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1 Re-embedding

Experiences of migration (disembedding), whether voluntary or forced, typically result in people reembedding themselves into a new and, at first, mostly unknown cultural context (Giddens 1991). Diasporic actors search, explicitly and implicitly, for a new mental and emotional sense-world (Berger and Luckmann 1969) or create one anew. This is especially true if the migrants wish to settle permanently in the new context and maintain their collective identity and lifeway's. With time, the new host country will become the migrants' country of residence (Hettlage 1993: 101), and numerous of the immigrants will become citizens. But in the early years, many recognize that the experience of flight, diaspora, and building a life in a new country may require a representation of self and community shaped by the new context.

In this article I recognize "religion," based on the work of the sociologist Peggy Levitt (2001: 10), as one of the main dimensions of ethnic, national, and political identity that migrant communities experience and that channel the affiliations that members of diasporic (im)migrant communities develop. Religion, religious practice, and spiritual needs are often significant identity-markers around which immigrant communities cohere. Exploration of this process, according to the anthropologist and scholar of religion Steven Vertovec (2001: 8–12), can provide insight into socio-religious collectivisation (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and vital patterns of religious dynamics in diasporic situations.

In the process of migrants establishing a permanent settlement scholars have documented the initial emergence of loose and informal structures followed by institutionalisation of an "own" religious tradition.[1] If in a new cultural context a diasporic community develops its own religious institutions

1 Cf. Soucy 1996: 30; cf. Vertovec 1997; cf. Baumann 2000: 10–20.

(Baumann 2000: 10), a number of scholarly questions may arise. Do the immigrants have an opportunity to maintain their previous religious organisational structures? Or do they find themselves in the position of having to adopt an organisational structure from their new country of residence? If so, how might they adapt their native religion to suit the new structural setting? Do these choices lead to independent recognition of the migrants' socio-religious traditions or do the migrants' traditions become blurred with local traditions by conforming to the structural possibilities given by their hosts? In the case of the latter, do the migrants lose all public recognition as a religious community? What are the dynamics in these various cases?

Using the example of Vietnamese immigrants of Buddhist faith in Switzerland, I systematically analyse how the immigrants reorganise their socio-religious community after arriving in Switzerland. In implementing the analysis, I use the theory of institutional isomorphism developed by sociologists Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1991) to argue that in the case of the Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland I witnessed processes of coercive and mimetic isomorphism as the immigrants adjusted their religious traditions to the national conditions of Switzerland. Normative processes[2] also arise emically during the reorganizational process.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section I describe some of the key facts about the arrival of Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland. I also provide preliminary information about the reorganisation of these people as they progress from informal organisation of their community within Switzerland to more formal structural relations, which are those regarded as mostly "standardised" for the residence country. In order to allow the reader an adequate synopsis of the particular situation I provide an overview of the typical structure of the Mahāyāna Buddhist community in Việt Nam. The Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition is the largest Buddhist tradition in Việt Nam. A small minority of Theravāda Buddhists exist in the region of the Mekong Delta of Việt Nam and also in the diaspora. A major factor in this context is the interplay between the Sangha (the community of ordained monks, nuns and novices) and the laity. One of the main questions that arise is who belongs to the Sangha and who does not. One important rationale for answering this question lies in the foundation of the Buddhism reform movement of the Vietnamese Chán Master Thích Nhất Hạnh (*1926) which is gaining importance especially in the European context. In the next section I include descriptions of the organisational field of the receiving country i.e., the issue-related standard institutional arrangements available, and the heuristic template of institutional isomorphism, both of which are used in the subsequent analysis. The determination of the relevant organisational field is regarded as one of the most important analytical requirements. The analysis then focuses on three mechanisms within the concept of institutional isomorphism: coercive isomorphism, normative and mimetic processes. In addition, potentials for conflict that may arise are taken into consideration. I conclude with a summary of my analysis and a brief discussion of significance.

2 Arrival in Switzerland

The Vietnamese Diaspora began between 1946 and 1954 during the first Indochina war. However, most Vietnamese fled their land during and after the second Indochina war (1955–1975), also called the Việt Nam War. The years between 1975 and 1981 were a time when approximately 7,000 Vietnamese refugees came to Switzerland as "contingent refugees". Under its cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Switzerland had committed to an active contingent policy. This included the reception of numerically large groups of refugees as a whole through targeted special programs under the Swiss refugee and asylum policy.

Today more than 13,000 Vietnamese live in Switzerland. According to Swiss Census 2006, about 56% acquired Swiss citizenship. Approximately half of the total population are Buddhists. The other half are Christians; followers of Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo, Confucians or Đạoists. Others practice just the cult of ancestors, which can be seen as the fundamental religious praxis of Vietnamese people.

As Vietnamese refugees were being incorporated into Switzerland, the federation decided to settle them in decentralised patterns in order to avoid the emergence of ghettos. Although refugees were scattered throughout the country, there were three Swiss regions in the low-land areas with a strikingly high number of Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese refugees. In the course of time, three Buddhist pagodas

2 In the original text of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) this mechanism is described by the term "normative pressure". The term is rather seen here as unfavourable. I understand actors not as merely passive, who bow powerless to normative pressures. I understand them as active, shaping the normative structures creatively. For this reason I chose the term "normative process" to describe the content adequately and suitable openly. This perspective fits also more into the Theory of Structuration by Anthony Giddens to which DiMaggio and Powell refer in their work.

emerged in these regions – one pagoda in each region. These regions have been and still are the canton[3] of Vaud, the canton of Bern, and the canton of Lucerne. Close to the town Lausanne (canton of Vaud), the Pagoda Linh Phong was founded in the municipality of Ecublens. Next to the town Lucerne in the canton of the same name the Pagoda Phật Tổ Thích Ca arose in the urban district Emmenbrücke and close to the town of Bern also in the same canton the Pagoda Trí Thủ was founded in the municipality Zollikofen.

2.1 From Informal to Formal Structures in Switzerland

In order to learn more about the first informal social and religious networks in the Swiss diaspora situation I visited different families and single persons of the whole community of Vietnamese immigrants of Buddhist faith in Switzerland. My access to the field happened by visits in the Swiss pagodas. First contacts were made. More contacts arose from the snowball method. In order to obtain information I interviewed a number of persons who lived in Asian reception camps before they settled permanently in Switzerland. The following questions and the answers from informants are my translations from German or French to English. I conducted all interviews in French or German. Most of my interview partners were fluent in this both languages. In most cases I asked them: "How could you practice your faith at the time you arrived in Switzerland?"

One of my informants, a 44-year-old craftsman, told me that most of the Vietnamese refugees had other worries at that time. In particular, they had to learn the new language and get acquainted with the new cultural context. The majority practiced Buddhism independently, without a special place to visit and without devotions in the group. Others indicated that a lot of Vietnamese visited Buddhist seminars or workshops given by Euro-American converts to Buddhism or offered by the Tibetan Institutes in Switzerland. One story of a 66-year-old pensioner when asked about religious practices was:

> One day someone came to me and told me there were a few Vietnamese who would found a *Niệm Phật Đường* ("place of worship") for joint ceremonies. Finally, we were five people who formed a *Niệm Phật Đường* in a private home.

With time Switzerland received more and more refugees from Indochina and Việt Nam and the number of lay practitioners increased. Slowly loose and informal networks of Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland began to take shape.

Some of my informants knew each other already from their time in the Southeast Asian refugee camps, where they were housed with their families after their flight for example to Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia or the Philippines and before their departure to Switzerland. Already at this time, social relationships had originated on the basis of common interests. A 52-year-old home-maker told me:

> I was in search of a Buddha altar in the refugee camp and there we met. We started to meet regularly and to practice together. Today, we all live with our families in Switzerland. (Date of interview 13.01.2009)

With the increasing size of the informal community in Switzerland a demand arose for space for the performance of Vietnamese Buddhist practices. The first informal groups began organising more structured, after the migrants were established in their new country of residence. And then, with and after the arrival of the Vietnamese Sangha the situation changed radically.

In what follows I describe how these early informal social and religious networks manifested and how gradually, drawing on organisational forms of their host country, the immigrants established formal religious institutions. Due to space constrains, I mention only important milestones. I mainly provide the story of the pagoda and the ethno-religious association (*Verein*) Trí Thủ ("wisdom," "wise leader") located in Zollikofen near Bern, which most clearly illustrates the transformation. Today all three pagodas mentioned above demonstrate similar organisational structures taken from the structure of Swiss associations for managing the pagodas. I return to this later.

One of the first milestones in religious formalisation among the Vietnamese in Switzerland was the arrival of the first nun. Thích Nữ Nhu Tuấn was admitted into the reception centre at canton Vaud near Lausanne in 1980. A 40-year-old Vietnamese woman told me, that the nun motivated an increased commitment among lay Buddhists to live and to practice their faith in the new context. Since her arrival, Vietnamese in Switzerland have celebrated and organised regularly and increasingly celebrate the most important Vietnamese Buddhist festivals,

3 In this context a canton is a member state of the federal state of Switzerland. Today there are 26 cantons and half-cantons. Each canton was a fully sovereign state with its own border controls, army and currency from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) until the establishment of the Swiss federal state in 1848.

such as *Tết Nguyên Đán* (New Year), *Phật Đản* (Vesakh), and *Vu Lan* (Ullambana).

Currently the one and only Vietnamese monk in Switzerland is Thích Quảng Hiền. He came to Bern in 1985 as a refugee. During the early years of reembedding, there were very few people who met for joint ceremonies in private homes in the Bern region. After the arrival of Thích Quảng Hiền, which marks a further important milestone for the Vietnamese community in Switzerland especially for the context of Bern, the situation changed and the immigrants thought they might buy a building for the purpose of worship which is also used as a place of residence for the monk. Pagodas are often used as residence for monks and nuns. On the one hand they live there and on the other hand they direct additionally the devotions and meditations. However, the laity did not have enough money. Inspiration came from the monk Thích Như Điển, the founder of the great Pagoda Viên Giác in Hannover, Germany. He told one of my informants, who is a 68-year-old pensioner, that they might get funds from the state. But for this purpose, one would have to found an association (*Verein*) as a contact for the state, the canton, and the social aid organisations. The concept of an association (*Verein*), which in the Swiss context is always a legal "corporate body of persons" (*Körperschaftliche Personenverbindung*) operating under particular rules, however, was unknown to Vietnamese people, as I was told.[4] It took several years before, with the help of social aid organisations and some Swiss people, they ultimately succeeded. After an association was founded in 1992 the refugees finally purchased a dwelling house in Zollikofen near Bern in December 1997. In the beginning of 1998 the Vietnamese took over managing their building for the purpose of worship through their own association, called Trí Thủ (Wisdom, a wise leader). Today Trí Thủ is the only Vietnamese Buddhist pagoda in Switzerland with a monk. The pagoda is also a member of the Unified Buddhist Church of Việt Nam in Europe (*Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất Liên Châu*). This latter is headquartered in Paris at Pagoda Kanh Anh and serves as a centre for Vietnamese Buddhist worship in Europe. It is currently the largest Asian pagoda in Europe, which is architecturally inspired by the construction of pagodas in Việt Nam (cf. Weigelt 2013).

4 I believe this circumstance must not be very different to people who were born and raised in Switzerland and are unfamiliar with founding of an association.

2.2 About the Historically Grown Interplay between Sangha and Laity in Việt Nam

The organisational structure of Vietnamese Buddhism has matured historically since Buddha attained enlightenment in the Gazelle grove. Today its main features are a strictly hierarchical structure of its members and a separation between the levels of the laity and the religious of the Vietnamese Sangha – the community of Buddhist monks, nuns and novices. This includes both members of the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna Tradition. This structure mentioned above results in different role expectations, a division of labour, and action routines (cf. Ho 2003: 121). In detail the historical structure of an early Buddhist community consisted of monks, nuns, candidates, and the male and female laity. The Vietnamese Sangha is arranged hierarchically according to sex, age of ordination, and acquired religious competence (Kieffer-Pülz 2000: 359). The Sangha stands above the laity. Male members are always hierarchically superior to female members, both within the Sangha and within the lay community. The Vietnamese Sangha (*Tăng Già*), i.e., the community of Buddhist religious leaders and aspirants, consists of: *Sa Di* ("male novice"), *Sa Di Ni* ("female novice"), *Nà Sư Lang Thang* ("wandering monk"), *Nam Tu Sĩ* ("monk") and *Nữ Tu Sĩ* ("nun"). The lay community consists of *Cư Sĩ Nam* ("male lay Buddhist") and *Cận Sự Nữ* ("female lay Buddhist"). These roles and their hierarchical ordering, which are typical of Theravāda Buddhist traditions, were later adopted by all Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions in Việt Nam and continue to be maintained (Ho 2003: 121). A large part of this structure is formally fixed in the Pāli Canon[5] (ibid. 281–402). This organisational structure is interpreted as part of an unquestioned way of life expressed in everyday hierarchical relationships. Until the victory of the Communists, Buddhism was considered as a popular religion in Việt Nam. In pre-communist Việt Nam were about 70% of the North and South Vietnamese Buddhists of a total population of 30–33 million inhabitants (Crawford 1966: 77). In South Việt Nam alone practiced 95% of persons Buddhism (ibid.). How many of them are ordinated as a monk or a nun at this time is not comprehensible. There is a lack of statistical data and further-

5 The Pāli Canon (Pali: *Tipitaka*) is the standard collection of Buddhist scriptures. It is the first known and most complete extant early Buddhist canon. It was composed in North India, and preserved orally until it was committed to writing during the Fourth Buddhist Council in Sri Lanka in 29 BCE, approximately four to five hundred years after the death of Buddha Shakyamuni.

more, the existing data are not congruent (Weigelt 2013: 92). For the Vietnamese context, these facts are based inter alia on the ongoing transformation of Việt Nam. In particular, in the last 25 years massive changes have occurred in the cultural and religious policy of the country, which are known as Đổi Moi ("renewal") since 1986 and 2006. However, in the Diaspora, there is a lack of monks and nuns (Baumann 2000, Vertovec 2009). The Vietnamese Sangha in Switzerland currently consists of one monk and eight to twelve nuns who guide about 6,000 lay persons. In addition to the approximately 3,000 laymen from Switzerland came lay Buddhists from the nearby region of France, Italy, and Germany into the pagoda of Bern.

The Vietnamese Sangha was originally organised as a religious umbrella organisation (*Dachverband; Verband*). The Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất (GHPGVNTN; Congregation of the United Buddhist Church) originated 1963 in South Việt Nam (Bechert 1967: 357). The term *Giáo Hội* is here translated by the terms "church" or "congregation." In a stricter sense, the term can also be understood as a word for "Sangha." According to the scholar in religious studies and later Buddhist monk Ho (2003: 44), this organisation is unique in the history of Buddhist traditions in the world. The decisive criterion is that it encompasses all different Buddhist schools in Việt Nam. Within this umbrella organisation Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist schools exist in close cooperation. Its members share common tasks and positions. The education of the order, as well as a variety of other tasks are jointly planned, organised, and conducted (Ho 2003: 45; Weigelt 2013). The same structure has also the German Buddhist Union (GBU), which was founded already eight years before the GHPGVNTN. For the first time in the historical development of Buddhism all main traditions are represented in one organization in a country (<http://www.buddhismus-deutschland.de/wer-ist-die-dbu/>). In the diaspora situation, this umbrella organisation has not been preserved.

2.3 Buddhist Revival Movement and Engaged Buddhism

Beginning in the early 20th century, Buddhism in Việt Nam gradually declined in importance. The reasons for this are manifold including the progressive "proselytizing" of the Vietnamese population by Christian missionaries. However, a Buddhist revival movement emerged in Việt Nam in the 19th century mainly through the inspiration and activism of the Chinese scholar Taixu (DeVito 2009: 413–458). According to Ho (2003: 43), this Vietnamese Buddhist revival movement is regarded as leading to "Buddhist modernism" or "Humanistic Buddhism," characterised by political activism, social reform efforts, an emphasis on rational elements in the teaching of Buddhism and increased activity of the laity. The idea of Taixu's *Nhân Gian Phật Giáo* ("time of Buddhism or Buddhism for the world") was an inspiration for Thích Nhất Hạnh when he coined the term "Engaged Buddhism" (DeVito 2009: 413–415).

Thích Nhất Hạnh is one of the most famous Vietnamese Chán monks and considered one of the most important Vietnamese representatives of Engaged Buddhism. In 1964 he founded the Protestant Buddhist Order Tiếp Hiện, i.e., the Order of "Interbeing." Since the late 1960s he lives in European exile in France because his peace negotiations during the Việt Nam War were viewed by the South Vietnamese government as critical and as a "political betrayal" (Lauser 2008: 153). In exile Thích Nhất Hạnh finally founded the Unified Buddhist Church. Since 1982 the headquarters of this organisation and the Protestant Buddhist Order are in the Buddhist monastery "Plum Village" in the Dordogne, France (cf. von Brück 1997: 566). One important aim of Thích Nhất Hạnh is the practical implementation of the Buddhist teachings in concrete social projects and increased social engagement of all members of both the Buddhist laity and the leadership of monks and nuns.

The Tiếp Hiện Order is open to all interested persons, including those from other "religions." The Sangha includes all practitioners. There is no strict division between ordained and lay persons. In its design the order is mainly aimed at Western people (von Brück 1997). According to Thích Nhất Hạnh (1987: 83 ff.), the development of a "Western Buddhism" must be implemented through dialogue with the intellectual foundations of Europe and America, including Christianity. The aim of the Tiếp Hiện Order is to study, to experiment with, and to apply Buddhism in an intelligently and effective way within modern life both individual and social (von Brück 1997: 566). In the context of a Buddhist modernism the term "Engaged Buddhism" underlines the desire to take active part in society in line with the Buddhist teachings. In a democratic context, this means to promote human rights, social justice, and concrete social projects of any kind from the position of a Buddhist attitude (Thích Nhất Hạnh 1998).

3 Institutional Isomorphism: an Analytical Perspective

In the previous discussion of the religious organisational structures, a clear separation between a protestant and a conservative Buddhist tradition is noticeable. By migration into the European context, the actors, who are behind these structures, had to be open to their new circumstances. On the one hand, a Buddhism reform movement emerged with an organisational self-conception adapted to European requirements. On the other hand, the historically derived organisational structure of Vietnamese Buddhism had and has to be incorporated into the new and largely unfamiliar organisational setting in Switzerland. Incorporation into the new structures (the organisational field) was perceived as necessary for a permanent and continuing settlement in the residence country.

The analytic importance of specifying a field or set of organisations is described by DiMaggio and Powell in their classic article "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). The authors describe the concept of institutional isomorphism or the process by which one unit in a population comes to resemble other units under similar environmental conditions (Hawley 1968: 328–337).[6]

3.1 The Organisational Field

As I have shown above, the Vietnamese Buddhists took over an organisational form (association) that comes from the general "organisational field" of the residence country and the wider socio-cultural context of Europe (Pries 2010: 98). The term "organisational field" refers to the sum of all (other) organisations relevant to a particular organisation as reference units for developing collective action, e.g., state, cantonal, and municipal administrative units, Advisory Board for Foreigners (*Ausländerbeirat*) or social aid organisations (cf. Pries 2010: 98). Each cultural context has certain sets of organisational forms that interact at different levels with each other and take hierarchical form (cf. Cadge 2008: 350). DiMaggio and Powell understand this kind of field as resulting from the process Anthony Giddens termed "structuration," in which sets of organisations interact with one another, establish structures of domination and patterns of coalition, respond to increasing amounts of information, and become aware that they are involved in a common endeavour.[7]

The authors DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 64) notice in accordance with Max Weber, to take over an association arises from the constraints of state and professional bureaucracies as instruments of the rational-legal structure of authority. Furthermore, the processes by which structuration takes place and associations form corresponds to the structural patterns of each cultural context. According to the author Wendy Cadge (2008: 345 f.), diasporic communities tend to adopt a general and socio-cultural organisational model from the host country; often drawing on principles that do not occur in the country of origin. As a consequence, this means that a traditional organisational structure, for example the Sangha, would have to adapt over time to the specific conditions of a larger organisational field in a receiving country of residence. In the case of civil organisations of the European and Swiss context, this corresponds typically to the organisational forms of an association (*Verein*) and of an umbrella-association (*Dachverband*; *Verband*).[8] In the Swiss context, an association is always understood as a legal "corporate body of persons" (*Körperschaftliche Personenverbindung*) operating under established rules.

For the U.S.-American context, Steven Warner (1993, 1994, 1998, 2000) refers to this issue as "de facto congregationalism" (cf. Cadge 2008: 345) when he writes about "post-1965" immigrants establishing religious institutions (Cadge 2008: 345). Yang and Ebaugh (2001: 270) describe the facts as follows: "[A]dopting a congregational form in organisational structure and ritual [is one of the central processes that] contribute to the transformation of immigrant religion in the contemporary United States."

6 The sociologist Jens Beckert (2010) stresses in addition that the mechanisms identified by DiMaggio and Powell as sources of isomorphic change can also support processes of divergent change as well. In this article I focus only on the isomorphic possibilities as they provide analytical access to the empirical processes of the collectivisation.

7 Giddens 1979; DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 64; Cadge 2008: 350. Unlike Cadge (2008: 350) I do not assume multiple fields but one organisational field as part of the socio-cultural context of the receiving country. If the immigrants wish to communicate equally with other organisations and actors they must still adapt to the prevailing rules, norms, values, and cultural action routines of the home country, for example in the process of formal collectivisation or simply for the construction and maintenance of houses and/or other kinds of buildings. Di Maggio and Powell (1991: 151) describe this situation as follows: "The existence of a common legal environment affects many aspects of on organization's behaviour and structure." To put it metaphorically one must use the dominant language (the structures) to be properly heard in public and to be understood.

8 Cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 64 f.; cf. Cadge 2008: 350; Müller-Jentsch 2008: 477.

In the European context, however, "de facto congregationalism" is not relevant. Cadge (2008: 349 ff.) emphasises, based on DiMaggio and Paul (1991), that these processes are dependent on the "organisational field" of the socio-cultural context in which a group of immigrants has to institutionalise and take a stand. For the European and especially the Swiss context there are other requirements than those evidenced in the U.S.-American context. In the European context the primary organisational forms are the association and the umbrella-association. These are the most common organisational forms of civil societies (cf. Müller-Jentsch 2008: 477). Historically, the association served the urban bourgeoisie as a vehicle of emancipation and the workers' and women's movements were the earliest forms of an interest group (Müller-Jentsch 2008: 495).[9] Just as the Sangha for the Asian context, an association and an umbrella-association are interpretable as part of a historically developed and culturally significant socio-cultural environment. The organisational field is therefore defined as a historically developed and culturally significant socio-cultural environment. The analytical focus of the work I present here is on the processes of community-building in Switzerland by Vietnamese immigrants of Buddhist faith.

3.2 The Heuristic Tool

For a systematic examination of how Vietnamese immigrants of Buddhist faith restructures their ethno-religious communities in Switzerland and more generally in Europe the concept of institutional isomorphism of DiMaggio and Powell (1991) is ideal. This heuristic concept is helpful for understanding processes of collectivisation when members of a diasporic community organise themselves within a receiving country. The concept elucidates transformational and stabilising processes before, during, and after the community-building process. In their descriptions of institutional isomorphism, DiMaggio and Powell argue that organisations' developments within a specific organisational field can proceed through a number of mechanisms, described as three ideal types (Cadge 2008: 352)[10]:

1) *Coercive isomorphism* results from external structural and cultural pressures such as common governmental and legal environments that require all immigrants' new religious organisations to obtain certain tax or incorporation statuses, for example, or follow certain rules in their zoning and building codes.
2) *Normative processes* come from professionalization, formal education, professional networks, and other interactional settings in which people are trained in similar ways to define the conditions and methods of their work. Among religious organisations, such isomorphism might result from the ways clergy or lay leaders are trained or are a part of the same professional networks.
3) *Mimetic isomorphism* takes place when organisations model themselves on one another, often from shared uncertainties about their environments, for example through their leadership structures (ibid.).

This typology is an analytic one: the mechanisms are not always empirically distinct and they often take place simultaneously.[11] Yet, while the three mechanisms intermingle in empirical settings, they tend to derive from different conditions and may lead to different outcomes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151).

4 Analysis

In the following, I utilise each mechanism described above. In the case of the Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland, the data can be interpreted as follows:

9 The flowering of modern associational life is closely linked with industrialisation. With the beginning of the 19th century numerous clubs, "societies," corps and frets originated. Throughout history there have been many types of interest groups. The oldest known club is mentioned in 1413 and was in London. The name of this fraternity was "*La Court de Bonne Compagnie*". Crafts guilds and merchant guilds of the Middle Ages and the early modern period were also interest groups. But the present meaning of an interest group – inter alia in the sense of an association as mentioned in the main text above – is close based on the definition in the Civil Code and based on the right of citizens to unite and strive for common goals (freedom of association, right of association), and also the right of free assembly (right of assembly) (cf. Müller-Jentsch 2008).

10 Beckert also offers another mechanism *Competition*, as a mechanism of homogenisation. He assumes "that competitive pressure leads to the institutional convergence of organizations or institutional models of nation states because inefficient institutional solutions are eliminated" (ibid. 2010: 160). DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147–148) deliberately left competition out of their seminal article because they were aiming for a theoretical conceptualization of isomorphism that would provide an alternative to Max Weber's emphasis on the role of competitive market pressures in explaining processes of bureaucratization (cited in Beckert 2010: 160).

11 Cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151; Cadge 2008: 351.

4.1 Coercive Isomorphism

If a new religious tradition wants to share the same privileges as other religious traditions that have existed for many generations in the new country of residence, then, in Switzerland and other European states, followers of this new faith must obey the requirements of the constitutional church law and the law relevant to associations. Both legal contexts are part of the organisational field and *de facto* within the European nation-states. In Switzerland Buddhist traditions are settled in a socio-cultural environment in which a religious tradition, such as Christianity is organised as a public body (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*) or as an association (e.g., of free churches). In other words, a structural incorporation and institutional approximation of a "new" religious tradition in the receiving country is due to coercive isomorphism. This was the coercive reason for the Vietnamese Buddhist community to build and to adopt the structure of an association. Taking this step facilitates contact with the institutions of the state, the canton, the cities, the municipalities, and social organisations. The driving force of this mechanism is given in the structural constraints of the given legal framework in the host country and the migrants' desire to maintain their religious traditions.

4.2 Normative Processes

"Normative processes" existed and continue to exist following the arrival of the Buddhist monk and nuns in Switzerland. These leaders and some of their followers became relevant stakeholders and restructured the hierarchical organisation of their religious tradition. In the Vietnamese context, a hierarchical relationship was part of daily coexistence between members of the Sangha and the laity. The structure of an association as a legal body of persons was not needed in the country of origin. There, the Sangha and the laity were two distinctly noticeable units of an everyday cultural and religious life orientation.

In contrast to the processes of a coercive isomorphism, which is almost identical in all pagodas in Switzerland and is a structural condition of the organisational field of Switzerland, normative processes develop differently within each Swiss pagoda. These processes are the result of professional networks and the ways clergy or lay leaders are trained or interact. Therefore observable differences show up in the religious performance of the religious tradition as well as in the structure of the religious organisation of the various pagodas. This raises the question of what causes these differences. How are they perceived locally? And how can they be understood?

Comparing the Swiss pagodas, for example, it becomes apparent that in the Pagoda Linh Phong of Ecublens there is a greater interest in religious practices of the Buddhism reform movement of the Vietnamese Chán Master Thích Nhất Hạnh than in the pagodas of Zollikofen and Emmenbrücke. In this regard it should be noted that the pagoda in Ecublens is characterised firstly by spatial and linguistic proximity to Thích Nhất Hạnh in Plume Village, France. As noted above, the Chán Master founded the Order of "Interbeing" and teaches an "Engaged Buddhism," i.e., a reform of Vietnamese Buddhist practice and teaching which could be classified before as "conservative." Secondly, the Pagoda Linh Phong and their current nun Thích Nữ Hạnh Giác belong to the Linh Sơn Order of Venerable Thích Huyền Vi in Joinville-Le-Pont, France. Within the Linh Sơn Order the Pagoda has a special position. It is not strictly bound by the Order. According to emic self-expression, this leads to a liberal religious practice. Parts of the laity in the Pagoda Linh Phong prefer a self-understanding of the Sangha within the meaning of the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh and his Buddhist reform movement. The Sangha in this case includes all practitioners. There is no strict division between ordained and lay persons.

The difference between the pagoda in the Romandie (Ecublens) and the two German Swiss pagodas (Bern and Lucerne) is a reflection of the place of the "traditional" organisational structure of Vietnamese Buddhist religiosity in each migrant community. In contrast to the pagoda in Ecublens, the Zollikofener Pagoda Trí Thủ with her monk Thích Quảng Hiền and the Pagoda Phật Tổ Thích Ca in Emmenbrücke are members of the Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất Âu Châu (Congregation of the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Church in Europe) and are in an order line with Thích Như Điển in Hannover and Thich Minh Tâm[12] in Paris. These are characterised by their strict hierarchical organisational structure. The Sangha is understood as a hierarchically structured community of the Buddhist monks, nuns and novices of this group. The laity is interpreted as a separate entity, which is in another hierarchical relationship with the Sangha.

The three pagodas then have developed distinctive normative processes with respect to the hierarchical features of their structural organisation and the social agency of their members. One relevant empirical indicator for the different development

12 The highly venerable monk died in August 2013.

is the significantly greater interest of converts and "Westerners" in Vietnamese Buddhist practices in Ecublens. The data of participant observation show that Ecublens has a higher number of participating converts and "Westerners" than Zollikofen and Emmenbrücke together. The interest of these persons is explained by the religious offerings in Thích Nhất Hạnhs teachings and practices. In Zollikofen however, a larger number of Vietnamese Buddhists are noticeable. They come from all regions of Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany in the pagoda to practice and to talk to the monk in his capacity as traditional religious and cultural authority. They ask for religious care and advice and wish to be educated in the teachings of Buddha.

The analysis of these differences also suggests that long-term development of the pagodas will likely continue along these different lines for the French-speaking and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. These trends can be distinguished as "liberal" and "conservative." While the actors are in and around the pagoda in Ecublens are more open to the influences and the adoption of a reformed Vietnamese Buddhist practice, Buddhist practitioners in and around the pagodas in Zollikofen and Emmenbrücke prefer a more "conservative" stance on the hierarchical structure of the Buddhist Community and practice.

Such variable normative processes of community-building constitute collectivisation and in the cases of Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland these processes vary with locales and the human networks entailed yielding different developments characteristic of each pagoda[13].

4.3 Mimetic Processes

In the context of Switzerland and in Europe more generally the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and its laity are understood as a "unit" of a religious tradition, even if the religious self-understanding can vary depending on the pagoda, as I have just shown. Recognition from the majority society of the immigrants' new country of residence tends to assume a homogeneous religious community. But behind the scenes, one sees that the organisational structure of the Vietnamese Sangha and the Laity varies in important details.

The analysis of my data also shows that four different principles of organisation coexist within the whole Swiss community of Vietnamese Buddhists. This community is engaged in mutual interactions and subject to mutual influences.[14] Mimetic processes take place when such organisations model themselves on one another, often to address shared uncertainties about their environments. Not all institutional isomorphism derives from coercive authority (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). Uncertainty as a human emotion and as a basis for behaviour is also a powerful force that encourages imitation (ibid.). When organisational technologies and modes are poorly understood, when goals are ambiguous, or when the socio-cultural environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organisations may model themselves on other organisations (ibid.).

In the case of my subject of investigation, four organisational forms can be worked out:

1) an informal structure, originating the loose social and everyday interactions of actors;
2) the tightly organised hierarchical structure of the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, consisting in strict order between monks, nuns, novices, and the respective male and female laity;
3) a liberal union of all practitioners in the sense of the Buddhist reform movement of Thích Nhất Hạnh;
4) the existing democratic structures of each pagoda declared as legal "corporative body of persons" (*Körperschaftliche Personenverbindung*) that allows each community to act collectively as a legal entity within the receiving country.

The mimetic moment here is the fact, that there are three more forms of organisation behind the public form of a "corporate body of persons." From the outside the ordained and lay persons are seen as members of a community based on democratic principles, according to the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB Art. 60 ff.). That is, in the external perception each pagoda is organised by local principles of the organisational field of the new country of residence.

Internally however, Vietnamese members of each pagoda see themselves as part of the historically established community of Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhists. In the case of the German speaking communities this takes foremost the shape of a hierarchical organisation between ordained and lay followers. In the French-speaking parts of Switzerland the organisational structure is expanded through the

13 One further important finding is the conceptual realignment creating a socially engaged Buddhism. This is also a significant change that came through the work and the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh. Unfortunately, this aspect needs to be written in another article.

14 Cf. Mayntz 1977: 81–89; cf. Rank 2003: 22.25; cf. Preisendörfer 2008: 58–77.

reform Buddhist self-understanding of the Sangha led by the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh. The latter form of organisation is implemented mainly through converts or "Westerners."

The "mimetic processes" – when organisations model themselves on other organisations, because of several uncertainties – therefore include the finding that Vietnamese Buddhists as a mostly hierarchically organised religious group use a democratic legal and formal organisational model of the residence country for incorporation into Switzerland. This process is both coercive and mimetic. It's a bit a schizophrenic situation. On the one hand, the community must establish associations due to the structural constraints. On the other hand, they use these structural requirements to establish their own "traditional" organisational structures in the background.

4.4 Expectations and Possible Potential for Conflicts

Buddhism is a relatively new phenomenon in Germany, Switzerland and in Europe[15]. The general organising principle of Vietnamese Buddhist religion, which is also reflected in the relationship between laity and the Sangha, is a largely unknown relationship and form of organisation in the European context.[16] This is evident not at least in the function of the monks as spiritual leaders, mentors and supervisors of the laity in everyday life. This also includes the mentoring in everyday affairs. One of the most unfamiliar aspects thereby is among other things the practice of *Dāna*. This practice can be characterised by unattached and unconditional generosity, giving and letting go by the Laity. In the Vietnamese context is it an everyday action but in the diaspora mostly an unusual practice, especially for converts and "Westerners." For the European context, normal donations or membership fees are more common for the support of Buddhist associations. The Sangha is originally established by Gautama Buddha in order to provide a means for those who wish to practice the Dharma[17] full-time, in a direct and highly disciplined way, free from the restrictions and responsibilities of the household life. In this situation conflicts are possible and perceptible. To clarify the situation, the example of the Pagode Trí Thủ in Zollikofen should serve once again, if we keep the recent diaspora situation of Vietnamese Buddhists in mind.

In the long-term settlement of a Vietnamese Buddhist pagoda in Zollikofen a board of trustees (*Trägerverein*) was ultimately necessary for the acquisition of a suitable property because of the general financial situation of the Vietnamese Buddhist immigrants in the canton of Bern. The reason for the founding was due to the conditions for repayment of the church tax surplus in the context of the so-called "financial crisis" in the canton of Bern in the 1980s. The canton of Bern collected church tax for several years among employed persons who were not members of a state church. This collection was inappropriately extended to include the Vietnamese Buddhists. But only the Reformed churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Catholic Church and the Jewish community are recognised state churches by the Canton of Bern. After the error was discovered, a repayment of wrongly kept church tax by the canton was subject to conditions *vis-à-vis* the Vietnamese Buddhist community. The money could only be repaid and used for purchase of a property or for a long-term rent security. Furthermore, a board of trustees (*Trägerverein*) had to be established, consisting in equal parts of Swiss and Vietnamese members.

The monk as the hierarchical head of the entire Vietnamese Buddhist laity in Switzerland became part of a democratically constituted organisation – the board of trustees. He is not an elected official but a leader of the Buddhist community by virtue of his training. However, he fulfilled the role attributed to him within the religious organisation structure. On the other hand, the Swiss citizens who were engaged in the board conceived of their roles as comptrollers within a democratically organised and elected board. But already in the constitution of the board, problems arose. The monk was not ready to take over and manage the bank account and the money, because this could lead to misunderstandings. He conceives of his role as a Buddhist monk, spiritual advisor and leader not as a comptroller. This is to

15 In Switzerland, Buddhism has an approx. 100 year history and is closely connected with the name of Richard Wagner and Arthur Schopenhauer. Richard Wagner lived middle of the 19th century for several years in Zurich in exile. He was fundamentally influenced by the work and ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer saw in Buddhism a counterproposal to the Western metaphysics. He found many connections between his own philosophy and Buddhist teachings. This thinking is reflected in his writings (Baumann 1998, Weigelt 2008).

16 To learn more about the structural characteristics of the Vietnamese and the Sangha in general, please read Bechert 1967; Hutter 2001; Lehmann 2001; Preisendörfer 2008.

17 The term has different meanings in Buddhism: 1) The state of Nature as it is (yathā bhūta); 2) the Laws of Nature considered both collectively and individually; 3) the teaching of the Buddha as an exposition of the Natural Law applied to the problem of human suffering; and 4) a phenomenon and/or its properties.

remember once again that the hierarchical structure of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha is not congruent with the democratic organisational structure of a European model of association. There was and is a difference between the self-conception and corresponding attributions as a venerable monk (*Thượng Tọa Tỳ Kheo*) of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and the expected routine actions of a democratically elected board member of a Swiss board of trustees. The potential for conflict can be imagine, if my comments about the Sangha from above are taken into consideration.

Shortly after the signing of a contract for purchase of a house the situation within the board of trustees escalated. The Vietnamese feared excessive influence by the Swiss members of the board and therefore did not want any further cooperation. This led to a social conflict between the Swiss and the Vietnamese immigrants and the board of trustees disbanded. The Vietnamese Buddhist lay persons then founded their own association, in which the hierarchical structure of Vietnamese Buddhist tradition coexists without conflict beside a democratic structure, which was still necessary for contact with different authorities of the socio-cultural environment in which they now life.

Conflicts challenge the social status quo. My previous arguments demonstrate that the possibility of social conflicts arises when there are differences in the assessment of what is considered compliant and what is considered deviant (cf. Honneth 2008). When the behaviour of a person of unfamiliar cultural background does not correspond to expectations within a cultural setting, there is the possibility that the behaviour is interpreted to be inadequate, and consequently can lead to a social conflict. The acquisition of cultural competence that allows an extension of patterns of interpretation and action routines depends on the willingness of each actor to acquire social and culturally determined ways of thinking and feeling by internalisation and learning of social norms and the language of the cultural "other." This depends also on available time and the personality of the relevant actors as well as the socio-cultural environment.

In the context of the establishment of a pagoda in Bern the social conflict within the board of trustees arose from two diametrically opposed organisational structures, which existed in one artificial collectivisation. Their difference existed in self-conception of leadership and cultural as well as religious legitimacy. I interpret the resulting conflict therefore as a conflict about recognition of cultural differences (cf. Bonacker 2002).

5 Conclusion

The outcomes of the analysis developed above include recognition of coercive and mimetic isomorphism taking into account the national conditions of Switzerland as the main factors of institutional incorporation of Vietnamese Buddhism in the Swiss context. Normative processes were also evident and unfolded most clearly after the arrival of the first Buddhist nun and the Buddhist monk. Lay people in Ecublens started to reconstruct the accustomed hierarchical structure of Vietnamese Buddhism. At the same time interest in the Buddhist reform movement and teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh developed in Ecublens. The latter is most noticeable in the demand of converts to the Buddhism of Ecublens. In the pagodas in Emmenbrücke and also in Zollikofen the Buddhist practice and teachings are more oriented toward the Buddhist teachings and practice of the conservative Buddhist tradition of Việt Nam. The normative processes could be interpreted as emic developments among each subcommunity of immigrants and as their self-conception or religious identity emerged.

Mimetic processes describe the fact that the Vietnamese Buddhists as a hierarchically organised religious group use a formal democratic, legal and official mode of organisation for incorporation. In consequence, this means that on the one hand, immigrants and diasporic groups tend to adopt a common socio-cultural form of organisation of the receiving country, that characteristically did not occur in the country of origin because of their socio-cultural uncertainties (cf. Ebaugh und Chafetz 2000: 135; cf. Cadge 2008). But on the other hand, they also established a previously unknown form of organisation in the host country: the Vietnamese Sangha. The actors were on the one hand forced by the legal framework to assume the structure of an association. On the other hand, they were able to establish the traditional structures of the Sangha under the guise of an association because of different uncertainties of the new and mostly unknown situation.

The data and analysis also result in the following conclusions. First, the early religious and diasporic networks of Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland emerged on the basis of shared living conditions, place, language, ethnicity, social, and religious needs. Identity is always context-bound and must accept and manage multiple forms flexibly and process-related. Immigrants as people within a diaspora situation have to reinterpret their collective identity within the new cultural context in which they live, as in the broader transnational setting. Many authors

note that religion, religious practice and spiritual needs are often among the main identity-markers to create a new and stable collective identity. Religious symbol systems exert a lasting effect on processes of settlement and group formation by immigrants as Martin Baumann (2005) remarked. One of the most important milestones for the community-building process was the arrival of the first members of the Vietnamese Sangha. The arrival of the monk and nuns marked a radical change in the networking and organisation of Vietnamese Buddhists in Switzerland and a qualitatively different level of organisation. Their arrival in Switzerland was a moment of certainty and security for the laity presaging a willingness on the part of the laity to express their needs for religious care and practice and a willingness to engage with the local organisational field in achieving their ends.

Second, a self-administrated, sheltered, and defined place is an important resource for immigrants to restructure and re-embed themselves as a stable group in a new context. It is also a focal point and safe haven in a new and mostly unknown context.

But physical space is limited and the resource is managed through powerful actors of the new socio-cultural context. Vietnamese Buddhists had to react to social facts of the new socio-cultural context, if they were to acquire their own place within the power-geometry (Massey 2006) of the relevant organisational field. The accustomed and hierarchically structured religious group of Vietnamese Buddhists had to found legal, official, and democratically organised associations in Switzerland and the broader European context. This generated misunderstandings and conflicts as the data outlined above reveal and promises to underlie continued dynamics within the Vietnamese Buddhist communities in Switzerland and between these communities and their Swiss fellow citizens.

To take the discipline one step further and to show how my work may advance the theory within it is developed, I can say that the mechanisms identified by Di Maggio and Powell can also illuminate the establishment of new organisational structures under the guise of already known structures. This raises the question here, however, if these hidden structures become accepted over time. As Beckert already noted, "the theoretical challenge is to identify conditions under which these mechanisms [identified by DiMaggio and Powell] push institutional change toward homogenisation or divergence." (ibid. 2010: 150) Will the Buddhist Sangha a new and state-recognised form of religious organisation, who stands on equal footing with the state churches? It would be a possible option, when the Swiss framework would amend and accept the Buddhist Sangha as a public body and as an independent new form of organisation.

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