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THE SOUL OF KOREAN CHRISTIANITY: HOW THE SHAMANS, BUDDHA, AND CONFUCIUS
PAVED THE WAY FOR JESUS IN THE LAND OF THE MORNING CALM

by

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Seattle Pacific University

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Approved _____

Date _____

Abstract

Whether one is speaking of its progressive elements or its charismatic characteristics, Korean Christianity exhibits a vibrancy that stands out among the religious traditions of modern East Asia. Its evangelistic zeal and enormous growth have led to its being a locus point of Christian faith for those in non-Western contexts. In light of its vibrancy and prominence, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the church in Korea is proof that Christianity may thrive outside of the West.

At the same time, the reasons for Christianity's success on the Korean peninsula are more difficult to pin down. *Why* has it been so profoundly successful? *What* has influenced it? *How* has the Christian faith come to be so meaningful to the Korean people? Studies abound which relate the "answers" to these questions, and many of them have much to contribute to the study of Christianity in Korea. There is no doubt that answers will be multi-faceted and varied, just as Korean Christianity itself is. If one examines, however, both the theological and practical emphases of Korean Christianity in conjunction with the religious history of the Korean peninsula, it will become obvious that the former can be attributed in large part to the latter's influence. In light of this, the following study will examine how non-Christian religious traditions have influenced the unique emphases of Korean Christianity. This will entail an examination of the pneumatological impact of Shamanism, the soteriological and eschatological influence of Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism's effect on Christian morality and ideology.

Introduction

If a Western visitor were to walk into a Korean¹ church on any given Sunday morning, he or she would at once be met with what can only be described as a uniquely Korean religious phenomenon. Members of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, seen as staid denominations in the West, are praying loudly, crying out for healing, speaking in tongues, and clapping their hands rapidly.² Following this ecstatic and emotional worship, a preacher of great authority climbs the pulpit in order to deliver a thundering sermon on both the material and physical benefits of Christian spirituality, urging his congregation to devote themselves entirely to God in order to guarantee both earthly blessings and heavenly salvation.³ Later on, this same visitor might witness other distinctly Korean worship practices, such as ascending “prayer mountains” in order to supplicate the Holy Spirit through wailing prayer or honoring the ancestors in a memorial service called *chudosik*. At the end of the day, this visitor would undoubtedly feel as if he or she has experienced something truly “other,” something that does not necessarily match up to the Christianity traditionally expressed in the West. It would almost seem as if what has been observed is in fact something similar to other religious traditions with a bit of Christianity mixed in.

Though it may seem as if this portrait is a rather odd depiction of Christian religion, the aforementioned practices of Korean worship are actually hallmarks of the Korean Christian experience and thereby serve as the particular expressions of one of the most prominent non-Western churches in existence today. In fact, as Wesley Granberg-Michaelson notes, Korean

¹ When speaking of Korea after 1953, I will be speaking exclusively of South Korea due to the non-existent nature of Christianity in the North.

² Allan H. Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity?” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 87, 3 (1999), 330.

³ See Andrew E. Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea,” *Sociology of Religion* (2000), 61, no. 2 (2000), 120-123.

Christianity “has grown faster over the past century—at 6.17 percent—than anywhere else in Asia.”⁴ From being home to only 50,600 Christians in 1910, the Korean peninsula now has an estimated 20.15 million Christians, making up 41.4 percent of the population.⁵ It is a largely undisputed claim that Christianity has not only been successful in South Korea, but has actually been so fruitful as to in many ways define the Korean religious experience in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Several Korean presidents have been members of the church and many of the world’s largest congregations, including the largest (Yoido Full Gospel Church), are to be found in this peninsular nation, casting the Korean relationship with Christianity in a distinctly different light when compared to its East Asian neighbors.

All that being said, the question of how and why the Church has been so numerically successful, along with why it exhibits the characteristics it does, is a hotly debated topic. Some attribute the ecstatic worship to Western Pentecostal influence. These same critics, wary of any form of Western imperialism, often view the strongly materialistic orientation of Korean sermons to the influence of a corrupting Western worldview that arrived along with American missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Others, however, view much of what we described above as being thoroughly pagan in nature and therefore profoundly anti-Christian. Ecstatic worship or ancestor memorials, they say, cannot and should not be a part of Christian worship. It is my belief, however, that proponents of both positions are in fact missing the entire point. What our visitor was experiencing was neither imported Western Christianity nor the worship of a confused and heathen heretical sect. Instead, it is my contention that the

⁴ Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 9.

⁵ Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 140.

visitor was observing the worship practices of what is a thoroughly indigenized and contextualized Christian faith.

This contextualization, though, must be taken into account in light of the religious history of the peninsula. The rapid pace of growth and enthusiastic involvement of its devotees necessitates the realization that Christianity in Korea must have been contextualized in such a way as to, at the very least, provide the same type of spiritual nourishment that other religions have historically provided and, at the most, enter into a dialogical relationship that shaped it into something amenable to the Korean psyche. In addition to these speculations, if Stephan Bevans is correct to assert that contextual theology is both a “theological imperative” and “a process that is part of the very nature of theology itself,” then it seems even more reasonable to assert that an understanding of Christianity in any given context will by its very nature take into account the traditional religious heritage of said context.⁶ Thus, when considering a culture as religiously rich as that of Korea, proper understanding of theological contextualization will mean an analysis of a variety of religious systems, including Shamanism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism, in order to determine how Christianity has come to be contextually situated. In short, to understand the way Christianity functions in Korea we must acknowledge the fact that it is a recipient of the philosophical and religious traditions that have preceded it.

This paper will therefore argue that the syncretic interaction between the Christian faith and Korean religions has aided in the creation of an indigenous, though mostly orthodox, Korean Christianity. In pursuing this claim, I will posit that Shamanism’s supremely significant influence on Christianity’s pneumatological emphasis; Buddhism’s soteriological and eschatological impact on the Korean Christian understanding of salvation; and Neo-Confucianism’s effect upon the ethical and ideological structure of the Korean church all

⁶ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Marknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

combine to make up what are the emphases of Korean Christianity. By closely examining each of these areas of religious impact, especially that of Shamanism, we will see that Korean Christianity devoid of any influence from traditional Korean religion would most assuredly not exist in the form we see today. Rather than portraying Christianity in Korea as being solely caused by the imposition of Christian dogma from outside (i.e. Western) culture, we will see that much of its success can be found in tracing its emphases to the most historically dominant religious traditions that preceded it. In light of this, this paper will present an understanding of Korean Christianity by drawing out main features of Korean theology and ministry, with the purpose of tying their emphasis to the influence of non-Christian religion.

Methodological Approach

In order to craft a viable methodological approach, we must acknowledge that Korea, though a nation in many ways defined by religious plurality, has been dominated by four particular religious traditions, each of which was at one time the peninsula's status quo religious faith. We can, in fact, roughly situate these times of religious dominance in the following manner: Shamanism (earliest recorded history-688 CE), Mahayana Buddhism (688-1392 CE), Neo-Confucianism (1392-1910 CE), and Christianity (middle of the twentieth century-today).⁷ It must be noted that though each religion was at one point in time the establishment religious tradition, this did not mean the extinction of the other religions—religious plurality has been and continues to be a defining feature of Korean society.

Regardless of whichever religious tradition occupied the status quo position, the preceding religions inevitably affected those that followed. This has been aptly illustrated by the layer theory of Korean theologian Ryu Tong-Shik. In his estimation, Korean culture is made up

⁷ Charles S. Prebish, *Introducing Buddhism*. 2nd ed. World Religion Series (London: Routledge, 2010), 172; The gap found between 1910 and the beginning of Christianity's rise is due to Japanese colonialism. At that time, the Christian church was growing as a sign of opposition to the state-sponsored and state-enforced Shinto rituals.

of four religio-cultural layers. At the top and indicating the most recent influence is Western civilization. I find the term “civilization” to be problematic terminology, however, when considering Korean religious culture; while industrialization and economic growth may perhaps be related to Western influence, to equate Christianity and Western civilization seems to me to be a reductive move. Instead, it would behoove us to be cautious with our language by saying that while Western civilization may have been the bearer of Christian faith, making them one and the same thing would nevertheless be an inaccurate assertion. In fact, the following paper’s purpose is to debunk that myth, and therefore we may take the liberty of re-labeling the top layer as “Christianity.” The layer beneath Christianity, which is much less controversial, is Confucianism. Though having lost its political influence in 1910, this philosophy continues to play an active role in Korean society. Lying beneath it are Chinese civilization and Buddhism.⁸ Lastly, beneath all of these and acting as the foundational layer is Korean “primitive religiosity or Shamanism.”⁹

According to Tong-shik, any understanding of both Korean religions and Korean culture must take this theory into account; no one religious tradition, whether Christianity or otherwise, can be understood without an examination of the other layers. In light of this, the scholar of Korean Christianity must begin with that foundational layer of shamanic religion in order to “acknowledge the sustaining influence of traditional religious elements, channeled through culture, on the Korean people, regardless of their formal religious affiliation.”¹⁰ I will therefore

⁸ Ryu Tong-Shik, *The History and Structure of the Korean Shamanism* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1983), 14-15, quoted in Moonjang Lee, “Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea,” *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 351 (Oct. 1999), 400.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.; “Koreans by culture carry the Shamanic, Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist elements in their body, which form their actual beliefs. Buddhists are not free from the influence of Shamanic and Confucian culture in Korea. However, the influence of traditional religious elements through culture should not be confused with the commitment to a particular religion. Even though we are ready to agree that Koreans live under the influence of

be using Tong-Shik's structure as the methodological foundation of my own study, with special emphasis on this foundational layer. That is, we will begin with an examination of the Shamanic influence on the relationship between the divine and the human, move to Buddhism's soteriological and eschatological impact, and end with Neo-Confucianism's ethical and ideological effect on Korean Christianity. This will be an effort to construct a similar layer theory that explains the development of Korean Protestantism's primary emphases from the most essential, namely the divine-human connection, to the ethico-practical consequences of this connection. In this way, I hope to provide insight into how the most influential aspects of Korean Christianity are not by-products of Western influence, but are actually products of Christianity's *interaction with* Korea's profoundly rich religious heritage. As a caveat, though, I wish the reader to know that the word "interaction" should not lead anyone to think that I am attempting to argue that Korean traditional religion has in any way "made" Korean Christianity. Instead, Christianity and the Korean religions have been in a dialogical relationship in which Christianity has supplied the doctrines and practices that Korean traditional religions have contributed to shaping in a Korean manner.

Chapter One: The Spirits of Shamanism and the Holy Spirit

What is shamanism?

Using Tong-shik's theory as the structural basis of this paper, I will begin with the foundational layer of Korean religion in an effort to show how it contributes to the first building block of any Christian theology, namely the question of the divine-human connection.

Though any systematic or clean-cut definition of shamanism is impossible, we can say that in its most basic form it is a "polytheistic and poly-demonic religion based on the animistic

Shamanism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, it is completely wrong to describe the religious identity of Koreans as Shamanic-Confucian-Buddhist" (Lee, 409).

worship of spirit beings...In brief, spiritual exorcism, direct communication with the spirits and healing are the major aspects of Shamanism.”¹¹ Most likely descended from the shamanic systems of ancient Siberia, Korean shamanism is defined by a profound reverence for the natural world and a strong belief in the permeation of spirits.¹² The head of the spirit realm and supreme leader of the 287-member divine pantheon is *Hanamim*, the god of Heaven, to whom Koreans have no direct access.¹³ The pantheon of lower deities is therefore the spirit-group that serves as the bridge to the transcendent deity within this system.¹⁴

The spirit deities who rank below *Hanamim* fit into a variety of categories. Gods of the air, spirits of the earth, spirits of water, nameless spirits and ancestral spirits comprise the spiritual realm of Korean shamanic devotion.¹⁵ In terms of power, these range from majestic gods of the mountains to gods of the mundane things of daily life, including a god of the toilet.¹⁶ Each Korean would be highly cognizant of the fact that every aspect of his or her life and every area of the home and village are in some way inhabited by divine spirits. Knowledge of this would thus affect both the daily practices within the home and the attitude of those who lived there, causing Koreans to live with a profound awareness of the divine and a serious fear of spiritual retribution.

Among this pantheon exist certain spirits whose primary purpose is to agitate the human race. These “nameless” ones are essentially imps and ghosts who are “full of vengeance towards

¹¹ Sung-Gun Kim, “Pentecostalism, Shamanism, and Capitalism within Contemporary Korean Society,” in *Spirits of Globalization: The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age*, ed. Sturla J. Stalsett (London: SCM Press, 2006), 27.

¹² James Huntley Grayson, *Korea: A religious history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 23.

¹³ Sun-Deuk Oak, “Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounters with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea,” *Asian Ethnology* 69, no. 1 (2010) 107; Haengup Chung, *Ariang Theology (2)* (Seoul: Korean Christianity Literature, 1997), 170, quoted in Jung Han Kim, “Christianity and Korean Culture: The Reasons for the Success of Christianity in Korea,” *Exchange* 33, no. 2 (2004), 142.

¹⁴ Lee, “Experience of religious plurality in Korea,” 400.

¹⁵ Grayson, *Korea* 260-264.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

humanity. These spirits are often the souls of those who have died before fulfilling themselves, such as drowned persons, young boys, and unmarried girls.”¹⁷ In order to live a peaceful existence on earth (which is the entire goal of all shamanic religion), Koreans must placate these spirits or otherwise deal with them through the mediation of shamans. While relatively harmless, these antagonistic spirits do have the ability to obstruct human desire in ways that Koreans have historically found to be both frustrating and, on occasion, dangerous.

The purpose of the shaman in this system is to mediate between the spirits (both good and bad) and humanity, thereby ensuring both sides receive what they desire. In this way, the shaman brings “spiritual power to bear on human pain.”¹⁸ With power that comes directly from the supernatural world, the shaman is able to speak with the spirits in order to communicate both the spirits’ injunctions and the people’s desires.¹⁹ This communication often involves what is called a *kut* ceremony, the purpose of which is to repel potential disasters and bring blessing upon the village, family, or individual for whom the shaman is mediating.²⁰ These shamans, most of whom are lower-class females, are capable of actually being possessed by whichever deity they are imploring.²¹ This “spirit-possession” has caused some scholars, like Eliade, to label shamanic practice as being defined by “techniques of ecstasy.”²² In other words, ecstatic experience is the hallmark of the shamanic devotional life; through this ecstasy, the shaman acts as a communicatory vessel rather than as a messenger. This provides the way for an experiential connection between the human and the divine in which the human may speak directly to the spirit, whose voice is coming through the mouth of the shaman.

¹⁷ Ibid., 264.

¹⁸ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1995), 226.

¹⁹ Ibid., 225.

²⁰ Oak, “Healing and Exorcism,” 97.

²¹ Ibid., 100.

²² M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. W. Trask, Bollinger Series 76 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 4.

In addition to the lower-class status of the shamans themselves, those devoted to the practice of shamanic ritual have also traditionally come from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, especially when other religions became the ruling ideologies of the higher classes. In fact, by the time that the Choson dynasty (1392-1910) had established its radically Neo-Confucian society, shamanism had so permeated the conscience of the Korean common classes for such a protracted amount of time that it was impossible to eradicate it. Even though “both domestic ancestral veneration and official governmental ceremonies were under the Confucian liturgical hegemony,” shamanism was the authoritative religious tradition within the home of the common Korean.²³ We can perhaps attribute this “staying power” to the fact that the shamanic project emphasizes the restoration of relationships between the divine and the human, which in turn ensures cosmic harmony and earthly blessing.²⁴ In essence, shamanism provided the common people with a spirit-based system by which they could supplicate the supernatural powers in accordance with their own cultural heritage, thus bridging the divine-human gap in a way that could positively benefit their daily lives.

Based on a profound desire to make life better on earth, the Korean shamanistic endeavor was about “real desire, escaping misfortune, longevity, health, giving birth to a boy, wealth and reputation,” rather than serving as an answer to ultra-ethereal or metaphysical questions. It was a way of life that ensured the existence of bridges (i.e. human → shaman → spirit → *Hanamim*) between humanity and the spirits that would provide a conflict-free human existence. Because it so readily spoke to the needs of the Korean common classes, shamanism retained its own prized place as the preferred faith of the non-elite even when other religious traditions began to make their mark.

²³ Oak, “Healing and Exorcism,” 97.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Holy Spirit Movement

This shamanic system of belief and practice has provided fertile ground for the pneumatological emphasis that in many ways defines Korean Christianity. By pneumatological emphasis, I mean that the Holy Spirit is the member of the Christian Trinity that plays the most influential role in Korean theological reflection and practice, both inside and outside of traditionally Pentecostal churches. The Holy Spirit bridges the divine and the human in the same way the shamanic spirits and the shamans did, and we will now outline the historical information necessary to understand the particular claim that this pneumatological emphasis is the foundational layer of Korean Christianity. Furthermore, we will see that the primary transformation in the establishment of this pneumatological emphasis was that the ecstatic experience once relegated solely to shamans is now open for all people to experience; in the Holy Spirit Movement the bridges to the divine can now be accessed by all who claim Christian faith.

The influence of the Holy Spirit is perhaps most evidently seen in what Korean Pentecostal theologian and senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, Young-hoon Lee, calls the “Holy Spirit Movement,” which emphasizes the strong personal and experiential connection between the Christian believer and the Holy Spirit. Arriving on the heels of a downturn in traditional religious influence at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, this movement provided for many Koreans what other religious traditions had failed to do in the face of both modernization and Japanese occupation. Confucianism, which had been the dominant religio-ethical system since 1392, had become more of a political tool than a religious or ethical ideology; it suffered from “overformalization and failed to fulfill the common people’s

desire for a religious commitment.”²⁵ Protestantism thus came on the scene at what many would consider a providential time. Its charismatic form found a highly cooperative shamanic system that had, in many ways, prepared the people for its arrival.

From the very beginning of this Holy Spirit movement, the Korean Church was dominated by a revivalist ethos. In January of 1907, 1500 people gathered in Pyongyang, now the capital city of North Korea, for a revival meeting in which “some threw themselves full length upon the floor, hundreds stood with arms outstretched toward heaven. Every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God.”²⁶ Beginning what many have called the “Korean Pentecost,” this movement rapidly spread outward, bringing revivalist zeal, emotionally compelling Christianity, and the possibility of ecstatic religious experience along with it.²⁷ Drawing on historical and statistical reports from this era, Lee estimates that in the year following the Great Revival Presbyterian churches grew by 34% and Korean Methodist denominations grew an astounding 118%.²⁸ Burdened by the staid and political Confucian ideology that had so permeated Korean life since the advent of the Choson dynasty in 1392, this revival filled a spiritual void in such a way as to transform the religious landscape of the nation.

In its second period, from 1920-1940, the Holy Spirit Movement received support from Western nations, which led to the establishment of the first Pentecostal church in 1933.²⁹ On

²⁵ Chaisik Chung, “Christianity as a heterodoxy: an aspect of general cultural orientation in traditional Korea’ in *Korea’s Response to the West*,” ed. Yunghwan Jo (Kalamazoo: Korea Research and Publications, 1971), 66, quoted in Andrew Eungi Kim, “Political Insecurity, social chaos, religious void, and the rise of Protestantism in late nineteenth-century Korea,” *Social History* 26, no. 3 (October 2001), 273.

²⁶ William Blair and Bruce Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Suffering Which Followed* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth, 1977), 73.

²⁷ Chong Hee Jeong, “The Korean Charismatic Movement as Indigenous Pentecostalism,” *Asian and Pentecostal*, ed. Allan H. Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 456.

²⁸ Rhodes, “History of the Korea Mission Presbyterian Church USA 1884-1934,” 547 and *Annual Report of MEC (1907)*, 425, quoted in Gil-sup Song, *History of the Theological Thought in Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1987), 157, quoted in Lee *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its historical and theological development* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2009), 31.

²⁹ Mark R. Mullins, “The Empire Strikes Back: Korean Pentecostal Mission to Japan,” in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 88-89.

their arrival, however, American Pentecostals found that a charismatic movement was already burgeoning within the Korean Church, led by Ik-doo Kim and Yong-do Lee. Kim's ministry focused on the miraculous signs of the apostolic era, and lower-class Koreans eager to see supernatural occurrences flocked to attend the revivals in which he healed many from their ailments.³⁰ Lee, on the other hand, emphasized a mystical union with Christ through the work of the Spirit. He criticized the larger Korean Christian movement for being "formalistic and lethargic" in a way similar to the Confucianism it had come to replace.³¹ Instead of this emotionless faith, Lee advocated for one that was exercised by "emotions in the pure state."³² This second period, led as it was by these two men, was simply a continuation and solidification of the emotional emphasis that had so defined the Korean Holy Spirit movement at its inception.

Church growth accelerated dramatically in the third period of the Holy Spirit Movement, which lasted from 1960 to the 1980s. In the 1960s, the revival meeting popularized after 1907 became an established tradition of Korean Protestantism; most churches, regardless of denomination, continue to hold at least one per year in our own time.³³ In addition to this, Lee cites a survey conducted towards the end of this period (1978) that proves the massive growth the Korean church experienced in the sixties and seventies has not been exaggerated—six new churches were opening in South Korea every day during this period.³⁴

This rapid and enormous growth caused Koreans to self-title the advent and development of Christianity in their own context as the "third age of the Spirit."³⁵ By virtue of participating in

³⁰ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea*, 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³² Min, *History of Christian Faith Movement under Japanese Occupation* [In Korean] (Seoul: Korean Christian Literature, 1991), 259, quoted in *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁴ Joon-gon Kim, "Six New Churches Everyday Korean Church Growth" (A report for the Asian Leaders Conference on Evangelism [Alcoe], Singapore, November 1978), 5, quoted in Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 84.

³⁵ Kirsteen Kim, "The Holy Spirit in the World: a global conversation," *Spirits* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 179; This follows the first age of the law and the second age of the Church.

this third age, Koreans play a unique role in the manifestation of God's power. In addition to this, many Koreans view this movement as an appearance of the Great Spirit of shamanism through the presence of the Holy Spirit, allowing all humans to interact with the power of a personalized deity.³⁶ According to Lee, people may now "have fellowship with God, receive revelations from God, and live in the kingdom of freedom, love, and joy."³⁷

The special and pneumatological character of this movement is, for many Korean theologians, a consequence of the Korean people's status as chosen by God. Harold Hong Hyong-sol, a Methodist theologian, perceives the Koreans to be under a special dispensation from God:

"It would be unfair to say that the Korean people were more receptive and responsive to the gospel than any other nation in Asia. But we strongly believe that we are now the chosen people of God and that we are under the special providence of God. This strong faith has actually made the Korean church the most rapidly growing church in the world."³⁸

Hyong-sol's reflection indicates an ethos prevalent throughout the Korean church, namely the feeling among church members that they have been providentially chosen to be a key player in this third age of the Spirit.

This third age, manifested in the outpouring of the Spirit through spiritual gifts and ecstatic worship, is a defining characteristic of Korean Protestantism as a whole. Allan Anderson, a prominent scholar of global Pentecostalism, writes of how he was struck by the fact

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 79.

³⁸ Harold S. Hong [Hong Hyon-sol], "Social, Political and Psychological Aspects of Church Growth," in *Korean Church Growth Exploration*, ed. Ro Bong Rin and Marlin L. Nelson (Seoul: Word of Life Press, 1983), 181, quoted in Donald Clark, "History and Religion in Modern Korea: The Case for Protestant Christianity," in *Religion and Society in Contemporary Korea*, ed. Lewis Lancaster, Richard Payne, and Karen Andrews (Berkeley: Institute for East Asian Studies, 1997), 184.

that the charismatic characteristics were not solely restricted to traditionally Pentecostal institutions:

During my visit to Korea, besides attending overtly Pentecostal Churches, I also visited Presbyterian and Methodist Churches—the dominant forms of Protestantism in Korea—which in the West would be regarded as charismatic churches. Although most Protestant Churches would be more typically Methodist or Presbyterian of the more conservative variety, in many Churches Pentecostal phenomena appear. Prayer for the sick, loud and simultaneous praying in early morning and all night sessions, speaking in tongues, congregational responses of “amen” and “hallelujah” to preaching, and rapid hand clapping throughout the signing of hymns, were some of the things both encouraged and practiced.³⁹

Some of the largest Protestant churches in Korea, according to Anderson, are known for their Pentecostal practices, a unique characteristic considering their denominational affiliations. Holiness and Methodist churches, like Soong Eui Methodist in Inchon and Central Evangelical Church in Seoul, are two that Anderson singles out as being charismatic in their worship. Though both are members of theological movements that spawned Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century, neither the Holiness churches nor the Methodist denominations would affirm as robust a Pentecostal character as either of these individual churches evidence.⁴⁰ It is no doubt due to the profoundly pneumatological character of Korean Christianity that denominations which would be considered by many in the West as liturgically staid or conservative in their worship are exhibiting characteristics common to more charismatically inclined institutions.

The Holy Spirit movement is one that has spread from beyond its Pentecostal roots to become a defining feature of Korean Christianity. The fact that this emphasis exists across the spectrum of Christian denominations provides insight into why Koreans themselves feel that God has uniquely dealt with them through the work of the Holy Spirit; for the Koreans, the Spirit’s

³⁹ Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity?” 330.

⁴⁰ Lee Jae Bum, “Pentecostal Type Distinctives and Korean Protestant Church Growth,” (PhD Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986), 272, 293, quoted in *Ibid.*, 330.

work is not coincidental or narrow in application, but is an expansive and miraculous manifestation of both spiritual power and providential election.

Shamanism's Impacts on the Holy Spirit Movement

The question that arises after being introduced to both shamanism and the Holy Spirit movement is *why* Korean Christianity has taken this trajectory towards such a profoundly robust pneumatology. If we turn our attention to examining the interactions between shamanism and Christianity, we will see that this is in large part due to the sometimes subtle and often implicit influence of shamanic religion.

First, there is a strong correlation between the power of the shamanic spirits and the power manifested through the Holy Spirit. This is predicated on the Korean belief in the tangible presence of spiritual beings. As early as 1907, Christian missionaries to the Korean peninsula were coming to terms with the fact that “believing as [the Korean people] do in the universal presence of Spirits, it is not difficult for [Koreans] to accept the doctrines of the spiritual nature of God.”⁴¹ As we have seen above, the shamanic system included a strong belief in the permeation of spirits throughout all things, even to particulars such as the toilet. There was no area of life that was not seemingly affected by the supernatural realm. The same is true of the Korean adaptation of Christian theology. No realm of life is without the influence of the Holy Spirit, and thus inherent within the Korean Protestant movement exists a strong belief in both the supernatural and the change it can effect.

In his own work on the theological contributions made by David Yonggi Cho, Allan Anderson references Lee Jae Bum’s unpublished PhD dissertation on this topic of the

⁴¹George Herbert Jones, *Korea: The Land, People, and Customs* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1907), 64, quoted in Kim Illsoo, “Organization Patterns of Korean-American Methodist Churches: denominationalism and personal community,” in Russell Richey and Kenneth Rowe, eds. *Rethinking Methodist History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 229.

supernatural. For Bum, the “‘spiritual preparedness of the Korean people due to their animistic beliefs’” was based on “an awareness of supernatural power, sins and evil spirits, and the need for blessing and healing.”⁴² Similarly, Myung Sunghoon, whom Anderson also references, argues that shamanic practitioners and devotees who are aware “‘of supernatural power...use magic and worship in order to reach out to their gods...are aware of their sins, and they have a fear of spirits.’”⁴³ The whole shamanic system in which humans supplicate divine beings for providential treatment is founded upon a strong sense that there is something beyond the material world that can and does heavily affect human existence. In terms of the shamanic enterprise, this can be most evidently seen in the *kut* ceremonies of which we spoke above. The primary purpose of shamanism, and these ceremonies in particular, is to heal disease, drive out evil spirits, prophesy future occurrences, and comfort the needy.⁴⁴ These ceremonies thus provide Koreans with “‘help and salvation from worldly suffering and pain of han’ (a unique Korean expression roughly translated as bitter grief and despair)” by bringing the power of the spirits down to earth.⁴⁵

Thus, when Christianity arrived on the scene, a strong emphasis on supernatural healing and spirit possession was already ingrained within the Korean psyche and could adequately serve as a meeting place between Christian theology and the spirit possession of shamanic heritage. Two particular areas of common Christian practice serve as prime examples of this relationship between Christianity and Shamanism, namely exorcism and healing. Andrew Kim notes that two

⁴² Lee Jae Bum, “Pentecostal Type Distinctive and Korean Protestant Church Growth” (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 1986), 180-186, quoted in Allan H. Anderson, “The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho to a Contextual Theology in Korea,” *JPT* 12.1 (2003), 94.

⁴³ Sunghoon Myung, “Spiritual Dimension of Church Growth as Applied in Yoido Full Gospel Church” (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 156, quoted in *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁴ Jung Han Kim, “Christianity and Korean Culture,” 134.

⁴⁵ Jeong Chong Hee, “The Formation and Development of Korean Pentecostalism from the Viewpoint of a Dynamic Contextual Theology” (ThD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2001), 201, quoted in Anderson, “The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho,” 96.

of the four primary functions of ancient shamans were “disease-curing and exorcising of evil spirits.”⁴⁶ For those who grew up in a culture in which shamanic practices like this were familiar, the “supernatural elements of the Scripture, i.e., faith-healing and casting out demonic spirits,” were an easy meeting point between traditional religiosity and Christianity.⁴⁷ Just as the shamanic devotees believed that “diseases and disasters were caused by a breakdown in the cosmological harmony between spirits, human beings, and nature,” which necessitated the intervention of shamanic mediators, the fallen character of the world as seen through the lens of the Christian worldview is a strong factor in the emphasis on divine healing and exorcism within the Church. For the Korean Christians, the harmony of the world, broken by the fall and evidenced in both disease and demonic possession, is put right through the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit. What is key here is the concept of harmony; the divine healings and exorcisms are so significant precisely because they evidence the harmonious nature of existence possible through the Holy Spirit.

This emphasis on supernatural power through healing and demonic exorcism is not simply a peripheral issue in Korean Christianity. Instead, both practices serve as foundational pieces of the Christian faith. In support of this claim, Andrew Kim cites an almost decade long survey conducted between 1978 and 1985 in which researchers found that out of 1300 sermons at ten leading churches in South Korea, the miracles of Christ and faith-healing were the most popular topics.⁴⁸ In addition, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Korean female shamans (*mudangs*) were converting to Christianity and finding themselves comfortably fitting

⁴⁶ Andrew Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity,” *Sociology of Religion* 2000, 61, no. 2, 125.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁸ Christian Academy, “The Content of sermons and its relation to church growth,” in *Gahyuk shillhagwa sulgyo yungu* (*A study of the reform theology and sermons*), ed. Christian Academy (Seoul: Gukje Shinhak Yunguso, 1986), 25-44, quoted in *Ibid.*, 126.

within the role of Christian exorcist. One such “crossover *mudang*” was Mrs. Sim in Pyongyang, who was appointed a Bible woman after Bible study, theological training, and limited ministerial experience.⁴⁹ Aside from the doctrinal training, her job description as a Christian exorcist differed only slightly from her previous shamanic profession. In more recent times, Sung Rak Baptist’s founder, Kim Ki Dong, performed nine hundred exorcisms in a period of time spanning from 1961 to 1986.⁵⁰ In addition to this rather astounding number of exorcisms, Kim’s influence and emphasis on exorcism has reached beyond his church, as he trained many senior pastors of Korea’s largest churches.⁵¹

Healing is similarly an essential part of both shamanic and Christian practice. In researching the testimonies of Yoido Full Gospel Church members, Myung Soo Park found that healing is one of the most “important aspects of the ministry of David Yonggi Cho and has contributed to the phenomenal growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church.”⁵² Since the physical body belongs to the spiritual dimension, members “believe healing of sickness is possible with help from the supernatural world.”⁵³ Yoido’s congregational magazine is full of stories such as that of Myung-hwan Kim, who was healed of blindness, and Jae-yeol Kim’s unbelieving husband, who was cured because of his wife’s Christian devotion.⁵⁴ Park goes on to argue that divine healing is directly related to pneumatological theology and practice; healing occurs when “a person

⁴⁹ Oak, “Healing and Exorcism,” 116; Mrs. Sim’s exorcisms consisted of (1) confrontation with the possessed person, (2) praying for the possessed Korea, (3) hymn singing until the possessed person turns from screaming to crying, (4) an inability to order the spirit out, (5) more prayer and hymn singing, (6) ordering the spirits out, (7) the spirits flee. Oak takes this account of Mrs. Sim’s exorcisms from Annie Baird, *Daybreak in Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909), 95-106.

⁵⁰ Mark R. Mullins, “The Empire Strikes Back: Korean Pentecostal Mission to Japan,” 91; Many have accused Kim of carrying out exorcisms that are too closely associated with the shamanic ceremonies of spirit possession (Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia,” 335).

⁵¹ For instance, Kim’s students started Yonsei Central Baptist Church, which had 20,000 members in 1998 (Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia, 335).

⁵² Myung Soo Park, “Korean Pentecostal Spirituality as Manifested in the Testimonies of Believers of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” *AJPS* 7, no. 1 (2004), 48.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

experiences the fiery Holy Spirit, atones for his/her sins, and has a firm conviction of becoming a child of God.”⁵⁵ In order to bring about this healing, pastors will use hypnotism, chant in tongues, and speak to evil directly; in this way, they turn ceremonies of Christian exorcism and faith healing into what are distinct reenactments of “shamanic rituals that typically featured disease-curing exorcism.”⁵⁶ For Hee, this is why Korean Pentecostalism has a “similar ritual function within the same culture of han”; through rituals such as healing, exorcism, charismatic preaching, dancing, and speaking in tongues the deeply rooted pain of Korean existence, along with what is in many ways an oppressive history, is itself healed.⁵⁷ Hee is referring here to something above and beyond disease, however; he also wishes to include in the category of ‘han’ the oppressive military dictatorships of Park Jung Hui, Jun Du Hwan, and No Tae Woo during which “industrialization and urbanization created urban congestion, particularly among the poor who left the rural areas for jobs in the cities.”⁵⁸ This created large urban slums, where oppressed inhabitants became the factory workers who spurred Korea’s economic growth.⁵⁹ Couple this economic oppression with the three-decade long occupation of the Korean peninsula by the Japanese and the subsequent division of Korea into north and south, and it becomes easy to acknowledge the fact that “han” or the bitterness of Korean life has a firm foundation in recent history. This is a significant reason for why Pentecostal or charismatic characteristics have come to be seen as replacements of shamanic rituals. Though clothed in different language, charismatic Christianity in many ways provides the same outlet that not only serves to heal psychological

⁵⁵ Ibid. 50.

⁵⁶ Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity,” 127.

⁵⁷ Hee, “The Formation and Development of Korean Pentecostalism,” 17, 26-27, 30, quoted in Anderson, “The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho,” 96.

⁵⁸ Hyung Chull Jang, “The Rapid Growth of Protestant Christianity in Korea and the Emergence of Cultural Hybridity within it” *Modern Believing: The Journal of Theological Liberalism* 47, no. 1 (2006), 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

and physical disease, but also provides a way out of the bitterness in which many Koreans feel themselves to be so strongly rooted.

What undergirds all of this is strong belief that the human being may personally communicate with the spiritual world; it is only through divine communication that any supernatural power can be released. As we have seen already, the shamanic system does this through the personal communication of shamans with the spirits. David Yonggi Cho, founder of the world's largest church, has provided a way of understanding the Holy Spirit that is both linguistically and theoretically similar to Shamanism and serves as a prime example of how this emphasis has been effectively Christianized. For him, the Holy Spirit is *sunrungrim*, a term that connotes "personal characteristics" and is developed from the shamanic term *shinryungnim* ("divine spirit as revered person").⁶⁰ In Cho's theology, the relationship with the Holy Spirit as a personal being is "almost absolute. Without communion with the Holy Spirit, communion with neither Father nor the Son is possible."⁶¹ Cho's emphasis on the Holy Spirit is uniquely Korean; while much of Western Christianity, aside from its Pentecostal streams, have lacked a robust practical theology concerning the Holy Spirit (preferring instead a Christocentric approach to communion with God), the Korean context was fully prepared for a pneumatological emphasis because it had inherent within it a profoundly strong sense of the spiritual world as personally affecting the lives of human beings. In the same way, Cho's theology exhibits a vibrant pneumatology that takes seriously the Holy Spirit as being the lynchpin between the divine and the human.

In the shamanic enterprise, this direct and personal communication was fostered by shamanic trances and "spirit-talk," or *kongsu*. This spiritual "filling" is known within

⁶⁰ Jong Chun Park, *Crawl with God, Dance in the Spirit!: A Creative Formulation of Korean Theology of the Spirit* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 92.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Christianity as the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” a traditionally Pentecostal concept. For Korean Christians, however, the baptism of the Holy Spirit takes on a shamanic hue due to the extremely ecstatic experiences that follow it. Korean Christians meet the Holy Spirit through *tongseonggido* (all night prayer, early morning prayer, wailing prayer, and emotional conversation with agony), along with ecstatic services in which they plead with it for spiritual blessing.⁶² This is strongly reminiscent of the shamanic trance, which, as we have seen, Eliade believes to be the defining characteristic of shamanism.⁶³ Of special importance is the fact that this is *not restrained to charismatic denominations*. While charismatic experiences are largely relegated to subsections of the Western church, the personal experience of the Holy Spirit through Spirit-baptism and ecstatic worship, based as both are upon the supernatural power evidenced in healing and exorcism, is common in most Korean churches. Members of the majority of Korean denominations will gather at least two or three times during the year in order to be “filled with the Holy Spirit, to gain assurance of forgiveness of sins as well as strength for the healing of wounded hearts.”⁶⁴ In Korean, this reception of the Holy Spirit is called *songnyong chehom*, which is similar to shamanic ecstasy or *shindullim*.⁶⁵ Through ecstatic experience, believers begin to communicate with the divine, developing what will become a profoundly personal relationship with the Triune God through the power and mediation of the Holy Spirit.

Shamanism’s influence, however, is not simply seen in how or why Korean Christians worship and experience the Spirit; the location of their spiritual experience is also directly connected to their shamanic heritage. According to Anderson, Korea’s mountains were

⁶² Chong Hee Jeong, “The Korean Charismatic Movement as Indigenous Pentecostalism,” 458.

⁶³ M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁶⁵ Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity,” 127.

traditionally “believed to be places where good spirits lived, and both shamans and ordinary pilgrims would receive power from the particular spirit on each mountain.”⁶⁶ In fact, *Tan’gun*, the mythological founder of the Korean nation, is said to have become an influential god of the mountains.⁶⁷ In a Christian twist on this reverential appreciation for mountains, Koreans meet with the Holy Spirit on mountaintop pilgrimage sites specifically devoted to the use of believers for prayer and fasting. Yoido’s own prayer mountain, the Choi Jashil International Fasting Prayer Mountain, not only provides a spiritual meeting place for Koreans, but also serves as a pilgrimage site for Christians from around the world.⁶⁸ While it is not my intention to argue that shamanic practices are occurring on these mountains, it is nevertheless worthwhile to note that not only do Korean Christians experience (through supernatural occurrences and ecstatic worship) the Holy Spirit in ways that are, at the very least, strongly reminiscent of shamanic practice, but the places where these meetings between the human and the divine take place are what, in Anderson’s words, “may be said to be a culturally relevant form that reflects the ancient spirituality of Korean people.”⁶⁹

Aside from a desire for a connection with the divine, what is the reason behind the popularity of this movement? Why do Koreans feel the need to so strongly connect with non-material reality in both shamanism and Christianity? Part of the answer to this question may be found in the “this-worldly” ethos inherent within both Korean Christianity and Shamanism, however paradoxical this idea may seem considering the spiritualistic nature of both faiths. In the shamanic system, Koreans would “solicit the service of the shaman in hopes of realizing their material wishes, such as longevity, health, male births, and wealth,” causing it to be a heavily

⁶⁶ Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia,” 333.

⁶⁷ Grayson, *Korea* 281.

⁶⁸ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 102-103.

⁶⁹ Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia,” 333.

“this-worldly, materialistic, fatalistic, magical and even utilitarian” religious system.⁷⁰ Its purpose was to make life on earth better for the Korean people by emphasizing materiality rather than ethereal salvation. Andrew Kim believes that this magical religion has simply been replaced by a Holy Spirit-centered Protestantism that nevertheless functions with the same set of values and goals as did its predecessor.⁷¹

Within evangelical Christianity, David Yonggi Cho’s emphasis on the power and influence of the Holy Spirit is a prime example of the Korean belief in the Spirit’s ability to provide material fulfillment. Based upon the suffering he witnessed during rapid industrialization and military dictatorships, Cho formulated two theological systems that speak directly to the material needs of the people, and the blessings that these doctrines expound are mediated through the Holy Spirit, whom Cho calls his Senior Partner.⁷² In the three-fold blessing, Cho expounds on 3 John 2, which “describes the blessing that Christians receive by the work of the cross of Jesus Christ. It consists of: spiritual blessing; physical blessing; and the blessing of circumstances.”⁷³ These blessings are grounded upon the experience of the fivefold gospel, which includes “the gospel of salvation; the gospel of the *fullness of the Holy Spirit*; the gospel of divine healing; the gospel of blessing; and the gospel of the second coming of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ As we have seen, all of these blessings of the gospel must be mediated through the Holy Spirit; without communion with Him, the Christian cannot access the depths of spiritual life available.⁷⁵ Though Cho’s theology and practice are both highly “spiritualized,” their practical purpose is to

⁷⁰ Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity,” 119.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Anderson, “The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho,” 95; see Cho, *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner: Understanding the Holy Spirit and His Gifts* (Charisma House, 1996).

⁷³ David Yonggi Cho, *The Fivefold Gospel and Threefold Blessings [In Korean]* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1983) and ITI, *Yoido Full Gospel Church*, 13-141, quoted in Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 101; 3 John 2: “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul” (NRSV).

⁷⁴ Ibid; emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea*, 79.

transform the lives of ordinary Koreans in the *here and now* through the power of the Holy Spirit, just as shamanism did through the mediation of divine spirit-beings.

Cho's theology of material blessing is, however, not unique within Korean evangelicalism or Pentecostalism. In a 1983 analysis of thirty prominent South Korean pastors, Daegon Kim found that the theme of material blessing was the "predominant focus of their sermons, and that the instances of miracles in the Bible were given particular attention."⁷⁶ Both Cho and his successors agree that the "acceptance of the Holy Spirit can mean that one is, besides being blessed with salvation in the next life, graced with health and materialistic successes in this world."⁷⁷ Similarly, a 1984 Korea Gallup Survey found that health and wealth ranked as being more significant to Korean believers than truth, love and trust.⁷⁸ Just three years before this, in 1981, 37.6 percent of survey respondents said that they "recognized material blessings as primary reasons for turning to the imported faith, while 41.2 percent of those surveyed reported "that their attendance at church resulted in a better living standard."⁷⁹ What these statistics indicate is that the Holy Spirit movement has tapped into something that shamanism likewise used to its benefit, namely the human desire for material blessing as being a positive consequence of spirituality. The Holy Spirit movement has in many ways replaced the shamanic enterprise as the spirit-based, *supernatural* foundation for material health and wealth in Korean society.

We would be remiss to ignore, however, the influence of Holy Spirit theology upon the *mingjung* movement, though we cannot do justice to this progressive theological system in a

⁷⁶ Daegon Kim, *Hangukgyohoe Sulgyoe Natanan Guyaksungsue Gwanhan Yungu (A study of the sermons of the Korean Church: Their interpretation of the Old Testament)* (Unpublished MA Thesis, Hanshin Theological College), quoted in Kim, "Korean Religious culture and its Affinity to Christianity," 120.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁸ Korea Gallup Polls, *Hangukinui Jonggyowa jonggyouishik (Religion and religious consciousness of Koreans)* (Seoul: Hanguk Gallup Josayunguso, 1984), 40, quoted in *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁹ Daegon Kim, *Cho Yonggi Gueneun Gwayun Idaninga (Is Yonggi Cho heresy?)*, (Seoul: Hanguk Gwanggo Gaebalwon, 1981), 94, quoted in *Ibid.*, 121.

paper of this length. In order to illustrate the widespread character of this pneumatological emphasis, however, we may briefly direct our attention to it. Taking form during the rapid industrialization of 1960-1980, this movement views the *mingjung* (masses) as the subjects of history that help the Church to transform its theology into one of political and economic liberation.⁸⁰ Through the power of the Holy Spirit, *mingjung* theologians believe they participate in a specific era of the Spirit the purpose of which is to free *mingjung* from *han* or the “repressed anger mixed with depression over a situation that cannot be changed.”⁸¹ This message of socio-political liberation emphasizes the Spirit’s power to affect change in the lives of oppressed Koreans in the *here and now*. Korean Methodist theologian Jong Chun Park goes so far as to say that the groans of the Spirit (to which we see reference in the Epistle to the Romans) are synonymous with the cries or the *han* of the people.⁸² The *minjung* movement provides insight into the widespread character of the Korean church’s pneumatological emphasis, which is not, then, relegated only to questions of prosperity, but also provides a theological foundation that undergirds the political quest for socio-economic justice. It is to the credit of this pneumatological emphasis that the Holy Spirit has ramifications across the wide swath of Korean Protestantism, both conservative and progressive.

What the Holy Spirit Movement provides as a whole, then, is a people-focused, Spirit-led way of *crafting meaning* for ordinary Korean Christians, just as the shamanic enterprise imbued ordinary Korean life with connections to deeper realities. This is why Tong-Shik can argue that Korean pneumatology, influenced as it is by shamanism, provides salvation itself for the Korean people, as opposed to an emphasis on more Christological categories such as atonement.

⁸⁰ Chi Myong-Kwang, “Theological Development in Korea,” *International Review of Mission* 74, no. 293, 73; Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea*, 79.

⁸¹ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 79.

⁸² Park, *Crawl with God, Dance in the Spirit!*, 58.

Healing, material prosperity, and direct communication with the Holy Spirit, all of which the emphasis on (though not the existence of) can be traced back to shamanic influence, are “very attractive to people who are oppressed and powerless,” and this movement is thus “itself salvation,” leading to “recovery of confidence and self-awareness.”⁸³ This pneumatological emphasis is, then, the primary way that Korean Christians both understand the human-divine relationship and realize God’s presence on earth.

Conclusion

We have now come to recognize that which connects the Korean Christian to the divine, namely the Holy Spirit, and we have provided evidence the purpose of which was to prove that this uniquely pneumatological emphasis, both inside and outside of the charismatic movement, can be found to be influenced by the shamanic culture that undergirds all Korean religion. This special emphasis has led to Korean theologians believing they live in a unique time relative to the rest of church history. In this age, continued pneumatological reflection occurs, including the work of feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung, who emphasizes the shamanic spirits as being the mediators of the Holy Spirit to the Korean people; that of Methodist theologian Jong Chun Park, who has crafted a “creative formation of Korean theology of the Spirit”; and the work of the late Jung Young Lee, who emphasized an even stronger pneumatological orientation in light of Korea’s religiously pluralistic culture.⁸⁴ All of these, though, are simply examples of theology proper, and they go beyond the scope of this paper; what we have tried to provide is insight into the fact that for the individual Korean Christian, the Holy Spirit is the mediator between the

⁸³ Kirsteen Kim, “Holy Spirit Movements in Korea—Paternal or Maternal? Reflections on the Analysis of Ryu Tong-shik (Yu Tong-Shik),” *Exchange* 35, no. 2 (2006), 161.

⁸⁴ For more on Kyung, see Tissa Balasuriya, “Liberation of the Holy Spirit,” *The Ecumenical Review* 42, no. 2 (1991), 203; for more on Park, see his own work titled *Crawl with God, Dance in the Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998); and, lastly, for more on Lee’s pneumatology see his chapter on the Holy Spirit in *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1996).

divine and the human precisely because Korean individuals have been, subconsciously or not, influenced by their culture's shamanic foundation. In the same way that shamanism provides the foundation of Korean religious culture, the relationship between the pneumatological emphasis and shamanism as evidenced in the Holy Spirit as mediator between the divine and humanity is the foundational underpinning of Korean Christianity. While Korea's Christian faith is, as we will see, built upon by both Buddhist and Confucian influence, it nevertheless serves as the most influential religious factor in the development of Korean Christianity.

Chapter Two: Mahayana Buddhism and the Pure Land of Christian Salvation

Though we can see that the divine-human link for Korean Christians is a pneumatological concept deeply influenced by Korea's shamanic heritage, the way that Korean Christians may reach the point of being able to experience the Holy Spirit is still unclear. In other words, *how does a finite human being cross this ontological bridge provided by the Holy Spirit?* This is essentially a question of soteriology, and in this chapter I will posit that Buddhism's effect on Korean Christianity has been one focused on the *ethereal* salvific message that not only actualizes the relationship with the Holy Spirit, but also provides a basis for the eschatological goal of Christian faith and practice.

Introduction to Korean Buddhism

In 372 CE a monk sent by the Chinese Ch'in dynasty to the court of King Sosurim of Koguryo brought Mahayana Buddhism to the northernmost of the three states that made up the Korean peninsula.⁸⁵ This particular type of Buddhist thought drew a distinction between the goal of the *Arhat* (one able to achieve Nirvana or cease personal suffering) and the *Bodhisattva* (an

⁸⁵ Korea was not a united state at this time; Charles Prebish, *Introducing Buddhism*, 2nd edition. World Religions Series (London: Routledge, 2010), 172. It is worthwhile to note that this date is hotly debated; James Grayson argues in *Korea: A religious history* that Buddhism(s) may have existed on the peninsula prior to this time. For our purposes, though, this official date of 372 will suffice.

“enlightenment being”) who is dedicated to attaining Bodhi—full awakening or Buddhahood—and sharing that enlightenment with others.⁸⁶ In rather simplistic language, the goal of Mahayana Buddhism is to attain “omniscient Buddhahood”; human beings have within themselves a Buddha nature that, when tapped into, may be able to be activated in such a way as to be fully realized in the attainment of Buddhahood.⁸⁷

In addition to this primary goal, significant concepts differentiate Buddhism’s earliest philosophies from those of the Mahayana movement. Early “Buddhism accepted a line of past earthly Buddhas, spread over the eons, though it had emphasized that a world-system can only have one Buddha, and the tradition he starts, at a time.”⁸⁸ Mahayana, however, teaches that there are a variety of world systems inhabited by Buddhas, “which could be contacted and bring benefit to this world (BSi.212-214).”⁸⁹ This leads to humans orienting their popular devotion toward a number of Buddhas and *Bhodisattvas*, which the Mahayana sutras speak of as “heavenly Buddhas and high-level heavenly Bodhisattvas, existing in many regions of the universe. A number of these savior beings, Buddhas and in time Bodhisattvas, became objects of devotion and prayer, and greatly added to the appeal and missionary success of the Mahayana.”⁹⁰ Lastly, Mahayana emphasizes contemplation or meditation of the ‘emptiness of phenomena,’ which eventually leads to enlightenment.⁹¹ As Buddhist pantheons increased, doctrines developed, and theistic overtones became more easily recognizable, various schools of Mahayana devotion began to appear, including both the Pure Land and Seon schools we will examine below. What arrived on the Korean peninsula in 372, then, was a Buddhism defined by

⁸⁶ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices*. Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151; Personal communication with Diana Keuss, PhD.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 110, 172.

⁸⁸ Harvey bases his analysis on the following Buddhist scriptures: Majjhima Nikaya 111.65; Milindapanha 236-9; and Commentary on *Vibh-a* 434-6, cited in *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; BSi refers to E. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* [anthology] (London and New York: Penguin, 2004).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 81, 108.

a profoundly religious character and doctrinally developed in such a fashion as to feed the spiritual needs of Koreans through both devotional practices and a salvific message of enlightenment.

By 384 the religion had made its way to Paekche, another peninsular state, and by 572 it had reached Silla, thereby solidifying itself as a religion held in common by all three of the primary Korean kingdoms.⁹² Monks were sent to China for educational purposes, and on their return they continued to spread Mahayana teachings across Korea.⁹³ By the time of Korean unification in 688 CE, Buddhism had become one of the peninsula's dominant religions.⁹⁴

In the Sillan period leading up to unification, the most significant Buddhist thinker was a monk by the name of Wonhyo. In his refusal to join any of the sects, Wonhyo attempted to “spread Buddhism amongst the masses” by unifying the school in a movement called *Illsung Pulgyo*, or the Buddhism of the Single Vehicle.⁹⁵ He emphasized devotion to the Buddha Amitabha of the Pure Land sect, and this form of Buddhism's success in Korea was in many ways due to his evangelistic efforts.⁹⁶ Pure Land, perhaps the most dominant school of Buddhism in the world today, refers to a “land, region (*chieh*), or country (*kuo*) many millions of Buddha lands to the west, so far, indeed, that it is actually beyond all realms, beyond samsara, unsullied by the passions which drive our world of suffering, and therefore called ‘pure.’”⁹⁷ This land is ruled by Buddha Amita (or Amitabha), who has “resolved that all those who, while living as humans, chant his name, will be, after their deaths, reborn in his Land.”⁹⁸ Though God-like in his power, the Buddha Amita is not supreme, for he does not rule other lands and does not create

⁹² Grayson, *Korea*, 32; Presbish, *Introducing Buddhism*, 172.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁴ Grayson, *Korea*, 39.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹⁷ Roger J. Corless, “Pure Land Piety,” in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, and Early Chinese*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 242.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

like the God of the Abrahamic faiths. In usual Buddhist fashion, he was actually once an imperfect human being who has attained his glorified state through enlightenment.⁹⁹

In addition to Pure Land thought, another equally significant sect began to make its mark on Korea during the Sillan period. Seon Buddhism, similar to Chan in China or Zen in Japan, began to influence Buddhist thought and continues to do so even today.¹⁰⁰ This particular school advocates a “‘sudden’ approach to realization rather than a gradualist one.”¹⁰¹ In other words, rather than one participating on a toilsome path to enlightenment that could possibly last multiple lifetimes, Seon Buddhism advocates an enlightenment that can occur at one intense moment. Because of its instantaneous character, Seon practitioners often eschew doctrine and the study of the sutras in favor of meditative practices that can more easily lead to enlightenment, a term functionally similar to, yet distinct from, the Christian concept of “salvation.”

As Buddhism’s influence progressed following the establishment of the Koryo Dynasty (935-1392), many prominent thinkers began efforts to blend various schools into a more synchronistic system by fusing the meditative aspects of Seon, the devotional practices of Pure Land, and the sutras of the Mahayana canon.¹⁰² Uich’on (1055-1101) began to advocate a process of synchronization by which there would be “reconciliation between what he saw as one-sided approaches emphasizing study or meditation, instead of a balance of the two.”¹⁰³ Though he eventually failed in this endeavor, he nevertheless began a trajectory that would have a profound impact on Korean Buddhism; his work to balance Buddhist thought and practice in

⁹⁹ Ibid., 247.

¹⁰⁰ Sunim Mu Seong, *Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen: Tradition and Teachers* (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1987), 82-108; Grayson, *Korea*, 87.

¹⁰¹ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 225.

¹⁰² Grayson, *Korea*, 106.

¹⁰³ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 225.

Korea has aided in Korean Buddhism's status as a uniquely indigenous and synchronistic belief system.¹⁰⁴

Following Uich'on was Chinul, who, during the last half of the twelfth century, began an effort to harmonize the great wisdom found in the Kyo sutras with the wisdom of Seon meditation.¹⁰⁵ In Seon fashion, he "accepted the central importance of sudden insight into one's Buddha nature," but at the same time believed that it was of equal importance to proceed in maturation after initial meditative enlightenment.¹⁰⁶ By developing a synthesis of Seon with the philosophy and practices of Hwaom, he began the process of creating the synchronistic *Linji gong-an* method, which would become the uniquely Korean Seon Buddhist school.¹⁰⁷

During the Choson period (1392-1910), in which Buddhism played a less dominant role, the work of Hyujong (1520-1604) was by the far the most influential. In his own attempts to continue the Korean tradition of bridging the Kyo (doctrinal) and Seon (meditative) schools, Hyujong argued for the significance of both meditation and doctrine. Any devotee of Seon, according to Hyujong, should "acquire familiarity with the doctrinal aspects of Buddhism before embarking on *kongan* meditation."¹⁰⁸ Because of his belief that doctrinal Buddhism was a "temporary means or preparatory stage that can help one advance in one's practice," Hyujong showed himself to be following in Chinul's synchronic footsteps.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Grayson, *Korea*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Presbich, *Introducing Buddhism*, 173; the Kyo branch of Buddhism is, according to Henrik H. Sorenson, simply the doctrinal branch of Buddhist thought and practice. It is oftentimes contrasted to the meditative (Zen/Seon/Ch'an) sects, but in Korea the two have been bridged (Henrik H. Sorenson, "Buddhist Spirituality in Premodern and Modern Korea," in *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World*, ed. Yoshinori Takeuchi (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 111.

¹⁰⁶ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 225.

¹⁰⁷ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 225; Hwaom is, according to Diana Keuss, a school of Buddhist thought in which the "understanding of the cosmic Buddha-nature" is expanded to a "teaching of perfect interpenetration in which all phenomena are mutually interdependent with every other phenomena, and past-present-future are collapsed" (Personal Communication, Diana Keuss, PhD).

¹⁰⁸ Sorenson, "Buddhist Spirituality in Premodern and Modern Korea," 113.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Beyond simply appreciating doctrinal emphases in Buddhist practice, however, Hyujong also taught Pure Land devotion, thereby helping to bridge the meditative and the eschatological.¹¹⁰ For Hyujong, Pure Land Buddhism was “indispensable to spiritual cultivation *alongside* the practice of Seon.”¹¹¹ Following Hyujong’s work, Pure Land Buddhism became increasingly popular, with some thinkers such as Songch’ong arguing that while in theory Seon was “the highest approach to liberation,” it did not have much practical value.¹¹² Instead, faith in the Pure Land “held the greatest promise of spiritual salvation.”¹¹³ Regardless of extremes such as those advocated by Songch’ong, the relationship between Pure Land (along with other doctrinal forms of Buddhism) and the Seon schools fostered a connection between the salvific and the eschatological that would endure as a defining feature of Korean Buddhism

Though we have only provided a brief overview, it is not difficult to see that Korean Buddhism is most emphatically not a monolithic entity. It is, in fact, a fairly difficult religious tradition to pin down in any systematic fashion, for its blending of emphases (meditative, Pure Land oriented, and sutra-focused) is a distinctly Korean attribute. Regardless of its complexity, however, both Korean Buddhism’s meditative aspects (seen in Seon practice) and its teleological/eschatological character (seen both in the goal of “enlightenment” and the Pure Land doctrine) figure prominently in any understanding of the soteriological and eschatological characteristics of Korean Christianity.

¹¹⁰ He writes: “Someone has said: ‘Your own mind is the Pure Land, hence there is no point in seeking to be reborn in the Pure Land! Your own nature is Amitabha, so there is no reason for wanting to see him!’ These words seem true, but are not so! That Buddha [Amitabha] has no desire and no hatred; we [ordinary beings], however, have both. The Buddha transforms the hells into a lotus flower simply by turning his hand, but we, because of the force of karma, always worry that we may fall into the hells, far from being able to turn them into a lotus flower... Therefore, although everybody’s nature is [in reality] the Buddha, in practice, we are just sentient beings. Hence, theory and its practical application are as far apart as the distance between heaven and earth” (*Hanguk pulgyo chonso* [Seoul: Tongguk Taekakyo ch’ulp’an sa, 1986-1993], 7.640c-641a, quoted in Sorenson, “Buddhist Spirituality in Premodern and Modern Korea,” 113-114).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 114; emphasis mine.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 114-115.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

Buddhism's Impact on Korean Christianity

Buddhism posits a certain spiritual problem that afflicts the entire human race, namely that of universal human suffering. All humans suffer from *dukkha*, or the existence of pain. This term, according to Peter Harvey, applies to “all those things which are unpleasant, stressful, unsatisfactory, imperfect and which we would like to be otherwise.”¹¹⁴ The cause of this suffering is the human’s propensity to desire, a characteristic that is known in Sanskrit as *tanha*. In essence, the more humanity craves something, the more suffering it experiences. If no solution is provided for this problem, this cycle of suffering and rebirth will continue for eternity.¹¹⁵ Thought it may be too simplistic of a conclusion, we could perhaps boil the entire Buddhist project down to being an attempt to provide an answer to this particular problem.

The Christian faith posits a similar problem to that of Buddhism, though cast in different language. This is the existence of both sin and the fallen world that sin has created. It is important to note here, however, that the Christian concept of sin is not the same as that of *dukkha*, though they serve similar functions. While craving and desire are the cause of human suffering in Buddhist thought, sin (universally considered to be morally evil) is the cause of human brokenness. For our purposes, though, it is important that we merely notice that each religious tradition posits a concept of life at the foundation of which is the fact that human potential is not being fully realized in some rather significant way. In the realization that the world is not as it should be, both religious traditions find a starting place from which to construct their messages of salvation.

Buddhism’s response to this problem is found in its practitioners’ belief in the human potential to attain enlightenment or *Nirvana*, which Harvey suggests ends any desire for the

¹¹⁴ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 52.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 63. There are, according to the Buddha’s first sermon, three types of craving: “craving for sensual pleasures (*kama-tanha*), craving for being (*bhava-tanha*), and craving for non-existence (*vibhava-tanha*)” (Ibid., 63).

“‘next thing,’ so as to give full attention to what is here, now; abandoning attachments to past, present, or future; freedom that comes from contentment; not relying on craving so that the mind does not fixate on anything....”¹¹⁶ The way to achieve this state, and therefore cease *dukkha* is, in traditional thought, to journey upon the Eight-Factored path, composed of the following: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (mental unification).¹¹⁷ This multi-faceted quest for enlightenment takes on an even more significant role in Mahayana. As we have already seen above, Mahayana emphasizes more than simply the cessation of *dukkha*; it also proposes the idea that one is capable of becoming a *Bodhisattva* or one who may travel on the path to Buddhahood itself.¹¹⁸ The human being is thus capable of reaching heights far beyond enlightenment. What is key here, though, is that the teleological goal of enlightenment is salvific; the human being is effectively *saved* from suffering and for something greater.

David Chung notes that this salvific emphasis is, for the Korean context at least, unique to Buddhism in terms of East Asian traditional religions. Because Confucianism lacked a theory of salvation and shamanism concerned itself with a salvation from earthly trouble, Buddhism was able to “fill this gap superbly.”¹¹⁹ In support of Chung’s conclusion, Don Baker argues that in its synchronistic emphasis, Korean Buddhism begins with a study of the sutras that leads to understanding how “human beings are caught in a web of illusion that misleads them into attributing permanence to phenomena that are only transitory.”¹²⁰ Following this realization comes the salvific act, which is seeking to transcend a normal understanding of Reality “through

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁹ David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 126.

¹²⁰ Don Baker, “Introduction,” in *Religions of Korea in Practice*, ed. Robert Buswell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 19.

meditation, so that the discriminating mind recognizes its limitations and lets go, allowing the meditator to experience the Buddha-nature that is inherent in all things.”¹²¹ Through this salvation-enlightenment, the Buddhist not only frees him- or herself from suffering, but is also now capable of tapping into the true Reality of all things that suffering and illusion had obstructed beforehand.

While on the surface one may be hard-pressed to find parallels between the Buddhist solution to the problem of suffering and Christianity’s way of salvation, I think that perhaps at a deeper level the doctrine of justification so central to Protestant theological reflection can be thought of as similar to (though certainly distinct from) the concept of Buddhist enlightenment. In the Protestant understanding of justification, the person is saved at the moment of conversion; acceptance of Christ’s status as Savior and Lord effectively ushers you into God’s kingdom, in which you come to realize the Reality of the world through the lens of God’s salvific narrative. While a doctrine common to evangelicals the world over, this is a particularly strong theological concept within Korean Christianity. As Timothy Lee notes, at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the aftermath of social and religious “disrepair, the quest for salvation—the search for a new moral order—was a major concern for Koreans....”¹²² Many were able to find the solution to their concerns in the salvation-oriented message of evangelical Christianity and its emphasis on instantaneous conversion and eschatological hope, both of which were spiritual values already present within Korean society due to the profound influence that Buddhism had played in the peninsula’s religious history.

Beginning with the great revival of 1907, the doctrine of conversion began to take on a significance the presence of which continues to define Korean Christianity. During this revival,

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Timothy S. Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 31.

“persons became profoundly aware of their moral shortcomings and their inability to merit salvation, leading them to repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior.”¹²³

This conversion effectively ended the condemnation and brokenness caused by sin and assured the believers of their being “saved.” In this system, salvation is not a protracted process, but is instead a one-moment and instantaneous spiritual transformation, strongly reminiscent of Seon Buddhism’s emphasis on an immediate and intense moment of enlightenment in which suffering ceases and Reality becomes attainable.

This emphasis on justification continued throughout the twentieth century. In 1909, the movement known as the “Million Souls Movement” began in an effort to convert that many Koreans to Christian faith. While its proponents did not succeed in converting one million people, records indicate that by the end of 1910 there were 20,000 new converts in Korea.¹²⁴ While undoubtedly a substantial number, the significance of this particular movement is not to be found in any quantitative assessment, but instead in the fact that the movement’s *sole purpose* was conversion. Furthermore, it is worth noting that 20,000 Koreans people were presumably looking for a conversion experience that could provide a salvific message that made sense to them in light of their own religious background. Christianity thus offered the immediate salvation that Buddhist enlightenment offered as well (albeit through a process less strenuous than meditation).

Notwithstanding the fact that the Million Souls Movement was, according to its original goals, a numerical failure, the revivalist and conversion-oriented streak running through the first decade of Christian success in Korea continued on through the 1920s and 1930s. One particular revivalist, Yi Yongdo, exhibited tendencies concerning conversion that are stark pointers back to

¹²³ Ibid., 25.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 24.

the peninsula's Buddhist heritage. Lee notes that Yi's call for conversion was particularly strong and successful: "For five years, from 1928 to shortly before his death in 1933, no other revivalist in Korea equaled Yi in the ability to draw and move people."¹²⁵ But, like the Seon practitioners of Buddhism, Yi's conversion theology exhibited what Lee calls "spiritualistic tendencies."¹²⁶ He "increasingly preferred the authority of his own inner experiences over that of the creeds or ecclesiastical norms... Also going beyond the pale of convention was Yi's concept of spiritual indwelling, his belief that God might dwell in just about anything..."¹²⁷ Of special importance here is the concept of inner experience over against creedal affirmations or doctrinal formulations. Like the Seon Buddhists of the past who eschewed study of the sutras or, in more Korean fashion, simply relegated them to a level below meditation, salvation for Yi was acquired through an experiential moment of conversion, not through a mere intellectual processing of information about the Christian scheme of salvation. Moreover, God's ability to indwell anything, though possibly panentheistic, recalls both the significance of the Holy Spirit seen in the previous chapter and the concept of Buddha-nature. In addition to borrowing theoretical concepts, Yi even used language directly borrowed from Buddhist philosophy. Often declaring "I am Empty and Nothingness," his understanding of evangelical conversion was predicated on the fact that humanity must empty itself of human sinfulness and be filled with the Spirit. That is, the new birth was not simply a filling up, but was also an act of emptying the mind, a concept common in the Seon school of Buddhism.¹²⁸

Though eventually disciplined by more doctrinally concerned evangelicals, one could easily argue that Yi's emphasis on personal spiritual experience is not only similar to the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁷ Ibid..

¹²⁸ Yu Chai-shin, "Epilogue," in *Korea and Christianity*, ed. Yu Chai-shin (Seoul, Berkeley, Toronto: Korean Scholar Press, 1996), 186-187.

Buddhist message of individual enlightenment attained through realization of the Buddha-nature, but is also an exaggerated form of the spiritualistic conversion emphasis that is so widespread throughout Korean Christianity.¹²⁹ In other words, Yi provides a prime example of one who exhibits an understanding of personal, interior experience that is similar to Buddhist enlightenment, but that is also an extreme view of what is already inherent within Korean Protestantism, namely the concept of individual and instantaneous conversion whereby the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the revivalist and conversion-oriented streak was relegated only to the early days of Korean Protestantism. In the '88 Crusade, intentionally planned to coincide with the Korean hosting of the 1988 Olympic Games, the emphasis on conversion and rebirth was accentuated to an even greater degree. One holiness preacher who participated noted that the ultimate purpose of those who believe in Jesus *is to be saved*. But, the evangelist notes, if we do not undergo rebirth, “if we are not born again, that is impossible....You cannot go to heaven even if you build a church entirely by yourself...You can go to heaven only if you are born again—through the experience of rebirth.”¹³⁰ While not an unusual trope in evangelical sermons, the fervor, expansive pace, and longevity of the conversion emphasis that this quote serves as an example of and which continued just as strong seventy years after the beginning of the revivals in 1907, is startling. Indeed, Timothy Lee believes that the conversion experience may be the very heart of Korean Protestantism.¹³¹ In adding to Lee's claim, I would posit that the reason this conversion-narrative has been so impactful is precisely

¹²⁹ For more on Yi's estrangement from the Korean evangelical mainstream, see *ibid.*, 81-82.

¹³⁰ Yi Mansin. “Hananim ui sarang,” in *Segye pogu-mhwa undong chungang hyo-pu-ihoe* [World Evangelistic Movement Central Association]. Evangelistic Movement Central Association. '88 *segye pogu-mhwa taeso-nghoe kirok munjip: So-nghyo-ng u-i pu-ikir u-l onsegye ro* [Record of the '88 World Evangelization Crusade: Spread the Fire of the Holy Spirit throughout the World]. (Seoul: Seoul: Segye pogu-mhwa undong chungang hyo-pu-ihoe, 1988), 85, translated by Timothy Lee and quoted in *ibid.*, 112.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

because Buddhism had provided a way of understanding salvation that was amenable to Christian ends.

In light of this emphasis on immediate justification, I think that is a fair assertion that this traditionally Protestant doctrine has been more amenable to Korean culture than Catholic dogma, which eschews an idea of immediate justification by faith alone, because of Korea's Buddhist heritage and Seon's strong emphasis on immediate enlightenment during meditation. Perhaps we can attribute some of Protestantism's success and Catholicism's lack thereof to how Protestant soteriology found concepts in Buddhist thought that were not necessarily agreeable to Catholic theology.

In addition to this conversion emphasis, this uniquely Protestant thought does not divorce the concepts of conversion and eschatology, just as Korean Buddhism has a synchronic tendency to associate meditative enlightenment and future hope with each other. Fortunately for Christian missionaries and indigenous Christian revivalists, the Korean religious culture already had inherent within it due to Buddhist thought a strong belief in the significance of both the salvific moment and the eschatological hope that followed it. The fact that Korean Buddhism was, throughout its history, attempting to develop a synthesis between varying traditions created an understanding of the connection between enlightenment and the afterlife that is not as readily apparent in Zen Buddhism in Japan or Chan in China. In Korean thought, however, the purity attained through enlightenment is that which can lead to the promise of a future life.¹³²

Pure Land eschatology, for instance, is similar to the eschatological emphasis found in Korean Christianity. While Shamanism provided Christianity with the necessary influence for a "this-worldly" spiritual life, Buddhism had within it concepts that were focused on the spiritual

¹³² Joon-Sik Park, "Korean Protestant Christianity: A Missiological Reflection," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 2 (April 2012), 60.

promises and rewards that would come post-death or at the end of time. During the Neo-Confucian domination of the late Choson dynasty, the Pure Land cult was one of the most successful Buddhist schools among the common classes. This school was “linked to the desire to depart this life and live eternally in the glorious Western Paradise with its benevolent ruler.”¹³³ The politically difficult period that Koreans found themselves in was balanced with, for Buddhist devotees at least, a hopeful view towards the future life. In the same way, that which provides hope for Korean Christians is the reward in heaven that is spoken of as being the consequence of the conversion experience.

In addition to this hope of heavenly reward following death, for those fortunate to be alive at the end of time, the second coming of Christ will serve as the harbinger of the ultimate eschatological realization of God’s plan for humanity. For Yonggi Cho, this is so central to Christian faith that he has chosen to include it in his Five-fold gospel formulation spoken of in the previous chapter. Even for the pre-Christian Korean this would not be a difficult doctrine to accept; Buddhism already had within it a concept of messianic hope that would make understanding Christ’s second coming much easier for the Korean populace. The Maitreya Buddha or, the “future Buddha” is a savior-Bhōdisattva who it is believed will return when the Dhamma Buddhism is in decay.”¹³⁴ In Korea’s synchronic fashion, belief in the returning Maitreya is widespread throughout all mainstream Buddhist sects. This robust Buddhist eschatology, connected as it was with other Buddhist emphases, made Christianity an altogether more reasonable religious faith for Koreans to accept. Christian eschatological hope did not require a radical redefinition of worldview or mindset concerning the future life, but fit quite well into a framework already provided by Korea’s Buddhist thinkers.

¹³³ Grayson, *Korea*, 175.

¹³⁴ Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianism* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 87.

As we have seen, the gateway into experiencing this eschatological hope in Protestant thought is through faith in Christ. Interestingly, Chung notes that the way towards achieving inclusion into this Buddhist heaven, or benefiting from the arrival of the Matriya, is through “faith and faithfulness.”¹³⁵ In fact, he believes that living by faith was the “universal attitude of the pious Buddhists in Korean society as a whole.”¹³⁶ Through faithfulness, Korean Buddhists can assure themselves of going to the Pure Land or of attaining one of the 28 other heavens available to them (as opposed to the 18 hells).¹³⁷ In light of Chung’s claim, then, we may round out our discussion of soteriology and eschatology by returning to the concept of justification by faith, which is similar to the language of “faithfulness” that Chung speaks of. Inherent within justification by faith is the assurance of eternal reward in the afterlife, which is similarly reminiscent of Pure Land doctrine’s insistence that only faith in the Buddha Amita is necessary for salvation. Neither Confucianism, silent on the topic of eschatology and the afterlife, nor shamanism, which was almost entirely based on the “this-worldly” life, could provide Koreans with a hopeful message that salvation in this life would be followed by paradise in the next. Buddhism’s influence in this area was therefore supreme. Coupled with the “justification by faithfulness” message that Chung attributes to Pure Land thought and that combines with an intense-one moment salvific experience, it is no wonder that Korean Christianity is so focused on conversion and post-death existence. These emphases simply fit into the position previously occupied by Buddhism.

As a brief caveat, however, I wish to note that this is not simply a connection between the two faiths that I have *chosen* to see. In fact, almost immediately after the advent of Christianity

¹³⁵ David Chung, *Syncretism*, 138.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Hong Young-gi, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* (2000), 107.

on the peninsula, Confucian critics of Christianity made the same assertion. Chung cites the work of Thomas Ohm in support of the fact that “all of the anti-Christian Confucian writers in Korea agreed that the Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell were nothing but the same doctrines of Buddhism which they had already condemned.”¹³⁸ Interpreting the significance of this connection is, however, more difficult. Young-hoon Lee, for instance, sees this relationship as coincidental; it is, for him, a “coincidence that the futuristic asceticism of Buddhism was in line with the imminent eschatology of Christianity. Christian eschatology includes in itself the danger of denying the present life and over-emphasizing the other world.”¹³⁹ I think, though, that in light of our examination of Buddhism’s salvation-oriented message and Korean Christianity’s strong emphasis on conversion, coupled with both religions’ eschatological foci, Lee is incorrect to label the connection as simply being coincidental. Instead, Buddhism’s own emphases were preparation for the contextualization and indigenization of the soteriological aspects of Korean Christianity. They were, in essence, the reason that this particular soteriological path has been chosen by the Korean Church as their way of expressing salvation and the hope it engenders, and this helps to explain the success of Protestantism over against Catholicism. Instead of it being purely coincidental, then, it seems that the Confucians were almost prophetic in what they chose to criticize, for the Buddhist characteristics that they also saw in Christianity may very well have helped to situate Christianity in Korean culture.

Conclusion

For Christians, no questions could be of more significance than those concerning both the divine-human connection and salvation. Having already established how Shamanism affected the divine-human connection, which may be the first aspect of any Christian theological reflection

¹³⁸ Ohm, Thomas. “Die Himmelsverehrung der Koreaner,” *Anthropos*, XXXV-XXXVI (1940-41), 834 in Chung, *Syncretism*, 220.

¹³⁹ Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement*, 16.

(i.e. “how do we know God?”), I have in this portion attempted to show how Buddhism has been the key influencer of the Korean emphases concerning both salvation and the afterlife. Building upon the divine-human connection, Buddhism offered Koreans a pre-Christian understanding of what salvation means and a framework for understanding how this salvation makes a difference for the world beyond this one. In this way, it has affected the direction Korean Christianity has chosen to take in terms of the importance of both conversion and the afterlife. The reason that most of Korean Christianity exhibits such profoundly strong evangelical tendencies (even in what those of us in the United States would consider to be mainline denominations) is because the primary way they understood spiritual salvation before the advent of Christianity was through the lens of a Buddhist faith that espoused a strong eschatology and a robust understanding of what immediate spiritual enlightenment or salvation could potentially look like. It was only natural for Koreans to emphasize the same characteristics and doctrines when they became Christians.

Chapter Three: Neo-Confucian Ethics and Christianity’s Moral and Ideological Structure

Introduction

Neo-Confucianism began to make its mark on Korean religious thought following the decline of Buddhist influence and political power. This Confucian layer, the beginning of which we can date to the establishment of the Choson dynasty in 1392, directly precedes the advent and establishment of the Christian faith. This has caused many scholars to devote what I think may be an inordinate amount of research on examining the Neo-Confucian influence on Christianity. For instance, James H. Grayson, scholar of Korean religious history, has argued that “Protestant Christianity was built on the foundation laid by the moral concerns of Neo-Confucianism.”¹⁴⁰ It

¹⁴⁰ James H. Grayson, “Dynamic Complementarity: Korean Confucianism and Christianity,” in *Religion and the Transformations of Capitalism: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Richard H. Roberts (London: Routledge, 1995), 83.

is perhaps true that the ethical concerns of Neo-Confucianism were the foundation of Korean Christianity *morality*, but I think that the two previous chapters have helped us to see that Protestant Christianity owes its foundation to a broader swath of Korea's religious heritage. Regardless of this overstatement on Grayson's part, it is not unfair to say that that the ethical structure of Neo-Confucianism greatly contributed to the overall shape that Christianity in Korea would eventually take. In what many consider to be the most "Confucianized" nation in East Asia,¹⁴¹ Christianity has developed an ethical rigor and doctrinal conservatism that can be traced back to the equally ethically-oriented and conservative ideology of the Neo-Confucian thought that directly preceded it. I hope to prove that claim in this chapter by examining Korean Neo-Confucianism, its impact on the character of Christian doctrine, its influence on what has come to be seen as an ethically rigorous (even fundamentalist) Christian moral system, and how all of these have impacted the worldview through which Korean Christians view the integration of faith and life.

What is Neo-Confucianism?

This paper will assume that Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are what Jung Sun Oh calls ethico-religious traditions that shift "the moral focus from abstract principles to lived realities that challenge many of our familiar categories in the comparative study of ethics and religion."¹⁴² While there is debate concerning whether Confucianism is a "religion" per se, it will be taken for granted in this paper that Oh is correct in his estimation of Confucianism as being a system that can only be understood when both religion and ethics are taken into account.

¹⁴¹ Jung Sun Oh, "A Hermeneutics of Korean Theology of Filial Piety: A Global Theology," *Asia Journal of Theology*, 24, no. 2 (October 2010), 330.

¹⁴² Oh, "A Hermeneutics of Korean Theology of Filial Piety," 31.

At its most basic, this ethico-religious system is based on a right ordering of human relationships through which the creation or reformation of harmonious societies occur.¹⁴³ Five relationships in particular take center stage: (1) ruler and subject; (2) father and son; (3) elder and younger siblings; (4) husband and wife; and (5) friend and friend.¹⁴⁴ Because a harmonious society finds its foundation in the right ordering of these relationships, all citizens must conduct themselves in such a way as to enable the cultivation of benevolent behavior. All people thus have the ability to contribute to the effort to reform society through moral education, regardless of their place on the social scale.¹⁴⁵ A succinct definition of Confucianism would thus be that it is a belief that rightly structured relationships will, if carried out according to the concepts of loyalty (*ch'ung*) and benevolence (*jen*), create a harmonious (possibly even utopian) society.¹⁴⁶

Neo-Confucianism (also known as *Chuja-hak*, or the Philosophy of Chu-hsi¹⁴⁷) is a branch of Confucian philosophy the history of which can be traced back to the Sung Dynasty in China (960-1279) and the philosophy of one of its most prominent thinkers, Chu-Hsi.¹⁴⁸ This school borrowed from philosophical Taoism in order to craft a Confucian philosophy in which the social relationships outlined above have a *cosmic and universal significance that transcends their social importance*.¹⁴⁹ Chu-hsi 's work was based on the work of Chou Tun-i (1017-1073), “who used the *T'ai-chi* (*T'aeguk* in Korean, the Great Monad) to explain the origin of the universe, the concept of the *Yi-yang* (*Umyang* in Korean), the five directions, and man.”¹⁵⁰ In

¹⁴³ Grayson, “Dynamic Complementarity: Korean Confucianism and Christianity” 79.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ki-bok Cho'e, “Ancestor Worship: From the Perspective of Confucianism and Catholicism,” *Ancestor Worship and Christianity in Korea*, ed. Jung Young Lee (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 35.

¹⁴⁶ Grayson, “Dynamic Complementarity,” 79.

¹⁴⁷ Grayson, *Korea*, 129.

¹⁴⁸ Jai-Keun Choi, *The origin of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea: an examination of popular and governmental responses to Catholic missions in the late Choson Dynasty* (Cheltenham: The Hermit Kingdom Press, 2006), 9-10; “Sung Dynasty Literature Bibliography,” accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.lib.washington.edu/databases/Sung/>

¹⁴⁹ Grayson, “Dynamic Complementarity,” 79.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

rather Platonic fashion, Tun-i advocated the idea of an ideal form (*li* or *yi*) that was different from the “principal of matter” (*Ch'i* or *Ki*). *Ch'i* was the cause of all friction in the universe; individuals with radically different *chi* need to be reformed through education. Harmony could only be achieved through the moral betterment seen in the development of *yi*, or the ideal form. In other words, while *ch'i* is the more human force that causes friction, *yi* is the essential righteousness or integrity needed in order to live a moral life and create a moral society.¹⁵¹ Neither form is strictly perfect, however, since beyond both of them exists Ultimate Reality.¹⁵²

Chu-hsi's philosophy was profoundly different from any of the Confucian types that preceded it; this new philosophical school advocated a Confucianism that “was no longer just an ethical system but a religious system as well. Moral living now meant moral harmony with the Ultimate Reality.”¹⁵³ Since morality had cosmic consequences, the establishment of Confucian principles in any given society had to be all-pervasive; the entire populace had to be correctly reformed. Though this widespread character of social reformation did not include social equality, scholars have nevertheless seen connections between the more individualistic and internal reformation of Neo-Confucianism with that of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁵⁴ In this way, it was a movement of reform and purification bolstered by individual and religious ideals. In many ways, the reformation of society was based upon the individual's reforming himself and internalizing this newfound Confucian *religion*. To maintain balance and harmony in the universe was to simultaneously accept Neo-Confucian ways of thinking as being the only proper

¹⁵¹ This translation of *yi* is done by Chinese scholar Patricia Ebrey in Patricia Ebrey and Anne Walthall, *Pre-Modern East Asia to 1800: A Cultural, Social, and Political History*, 3rd edition (Boston: Wadsworth Cenage Learning, 2006).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Strayer goes so far as to say, “This kind of moral or religious individualism bore similarity to the thinking of Martin Luther, who argued that individuals could seek salvation by ‘faith alone’, without the assistance of a priestly hierarchy” (Robert Strayer, *Ways of the World: A brief global history with sources*, second edition [Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012], 738).

way of life and governance. Neo-Confucian philosophy thus acts as a sort of hyper-Confucianism, the effects of which reach tentacle-like into every facet of societal existence. An error or misstep on the part of a citizen or family member would be taken with the utmost seriousness because along with the addition of a metaphysical foundation in Confucian ideology also came the very real fear of disturbing the cosmic balance.

Korean Neo-Confucian thought produced an ideology so rigid that its followers were decidedly and exclusively working towards its implementation in all facets of society. Prior to the unification of the kingdoms of Silla, Paekche, and Koryo, Confucianism had already made an indelible mark on the peninsula. Until the late fourteenth century, however, it lived in peaceful co-existence with Buddhism, though it was relegated almost entirely to the political realm as a sort of ethical standard.¹⁵⁵ However, by 1392 and on the cusp of dramatic dynastic change, some Confucian scholars became disenchanted with what they saw as the corruption of the Buddhist establishment. Buddhists had spread their influence from the supernatural realm into the more secular realms, and a movement on the part of Confucian scholars was instigated in order to end the influence of Buddhism and what they believed to be religious corruption through the establishment of a Neo-Confucian social order.¹⁵⁶

With Neo-Confucian ideology established and legitimized by the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), the complementary relationship with Buddhism ended. The Confucians believed that what they perceived to be the self-centered goals of Buddhist enlightenment would be detrimental to human life because they did not contribute to of social harmony.¹⁵⁷ Instead, the Neo-Confucian establishment set out on a total reformation of Koran society with the end goal of creating a unilaterally Confucian state. Leading the charge for this particular movement was the *Sarim-p'a*

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵⁶ Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 116-117.

¹⁵⁷ Don Baker, "Introduction," 79.

a group of Confucian scholars known to be “uncompromising in their attempt to reform radically Korean society.”¹⁵⁸ Any non-Confucian philosophy, religious school, or political ideology was either outlawed or subjected to “rigid regulations...which severely limited the number of temples which were permitted to be open, and the number of monks who would be permitted to pursue monastic life.”¹⁵⁹ What began as dissatisfaction with what they perceived to be the corrupt mixture of religion and government in Buddhism became an attempt, however unsuccessful it was on the populist level, to completely transform Korean society and exclude all other religious traditions and political philosophies.

As time went on, Confucian scholars began to expand Neo-Confucian philosophy. Of particular influence was Yi Hwang, whose theory of *Sadan ch'ilchong-sol* (Theory of the Four Beginnings and the Seven Sentiments), demonstrated “the relationship of the minds of individual persons to the fundamental elements of the universe.”¹⁶⁰ The individual mind was personally connected to that which composed the cosmos, and thus, though the essence of man was good, it was imperative that humans “be brought into a better if not a perfect state through the performance of ritual propriety and social virtues.”¹⁶¹ Rituals such as ancestor worship and virtues such as filial piety and obedience towards both familial and government authority composed the exclusive way to human perfection.

In terms of its socio-economic effects on Korean society, Neo-Confucianism increased social stratification and economic disparity. Composed of *yangban* (aristocracy), *chunging* (middle class), *yangmin* (peasantry), and *ch'onmin* (slaves), the society was one in which religio-cultural ethical values contributed to human oppression. This social influence was not simply

¹⁵⁸ Grayson, “Dynamic Complementarity,” 79.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶⁰ Grayson, *Korea*, 149

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

class-based; the same type of hierarchy was imposed within the family as well, causing ancestor worship to become the preeminent socio-liturgical act of Korean society.¹⁶²

Neo-Confucianism's effect on Korean society cannot be underestimated. Notwithstanding its influence in the creation of a conservative culture, its rigid orthodoxy was eventually the cause of the ideology's downfall. As time progressed, the narrow-minded conservatism "suffocated Confucian learning and allowed it to degenerate into purely scholastic study irrelevant to daily life or into something which was pursued merely for the sake of Civil Service Examinations."¹⁶³ Yao believes that Neo-Confucianism's ultra-conservative nature eventually led to the downfall of the Choson dynasty in 1910 because its traditionalist stance "became a major obstacle for Korea which was a nation making an attempt at modernization at the end of the Yi [Choson] dynasty."¹⁶⁴ What Yao does not consider, however, is that Neo-Confucianism's ultra-conservative nature, while leading to the downfall of the Choson dynasty, had a direct impact upon the conservative Christianity that was just about to make its mark on Korean society.

The Neo-Confucian Impact on Korean Christianity

Doctrinal conservatism, the same characteristic that Yao believes led to the downfall of the Choson dynasty in 1910, is a primary hallmark of the Korean Christian enterprise. In fact, Dae Young Ryu, associate professor of history and religion at Handong University, believes that for Korean Protestants, the matter is actually one of "who is 'really' evangelical rather than a competition between evangelicals and non-evangelicals."¹⁶⁵ For the purposes of this paper, we will use the terms evangelical and conservative interchangeably; though it is easily argued that

¹⁶² Grayson, *Korea*, 138.

¹⁶³ Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁶⁵ Dae Young Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (June 2008), 371.

they can mean different things, the Korean church largely exhibits characteristics of both doctrinal conservatism and what is considered to be evangelicalism, with an especial emphasis on conversion and the authority of Scripture. Progressive churches no doubt exist, but they are “more often than not far smaller and less appealing to the average Christian.”¹⁶⁶ This evangelical conservatism can, of course, be traced in some ways back to the shamanic influence on spiritual experience and the Buddhist influence upon conversion, but I believe that the primary reason doctrinal and moral conservatism exists across the wide gamut of Korean Christianity is due to the influence of Neo-Confucianism on the culture writ large. As the direct predecessor of Christianity in terms of dominant religious influence, the Korean psyche was (and still is) one largely defined by a conservative outlook on life. Social and moral behavior, as in much of Asia, has consequences that reach far beyond one’s own individual existence.

There are various reasons for why this influence is so notable. First, Kyong-jae Kim argues that the battles between the ideal *li* (*yi*) and *ch’i*, which eventually ended with the assertion of *li* ideology and thus the concept of an ideal (or perfect) form, has created a more conservative tendency in Korean society as a whole and thus in Korean Christianity as well.¹⁶⁷ The doctrinal battles and discussion that defined Korean Confucianism could not help but shape and transform society, especially since Confucianism was so influential for such a long period of time. It is, then, not a surprise that the doctrinal conservatism that emerged victorious out of these battles would likewise prove to influence the establishment of the Church. This may be a subtle influence, especially since it is no doubt difficult to draw a direct correlation between the doctrinal conservatism of Christianity and that of Confucianism, but the conservatism of Korean evangelicalism is so profoundly pervasive that one must search for the answers to its permeating

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Kyong-Jae Kim, “History and Prospects of the Protestant Church in Korea,” trans. Ui-gu Kwon, *Korea and Christianity*, ed. Chai-Shin Yu (Seoul: Korean Scholar Press, 1996), 187.

character in Korean culture itself. In its crafting a society based on ultra-orthodox, profoundly conservative ideology, Neo-Confucianism was unknowingly preparing society as fertile ground for an equally conservative Christianity.

One also sees a particular resemblance between the exclusive natures of both religious traditions. While Confucianism, as we have seen, disdained both Shamanism and Buddhism as being backwards religious traditions, Christianity also “took an attitude of exclusivism toward traditional Korean culture including Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and national religions that have existed in Korea.”¹⁶⁸ A conservative and doctrinaire theology, in whatever religion one ascribes to, is almost universally seen to be an exclusivist enterprise. While both Korean Buddhism and Shamanism were undoubtedly open to synchronic activity, Christianity and Confucianism took extremely conservative and exclusivist stances. Don Baker even goes so far as to assert that due to this exclusivity, Korean Christianity is in actuality an “overwhelmingly fundamentalist” religious tradition.¹⁶⁹ This word, however, has decidedly different connotations than in the Western world, where even evangelicals disdain use of the term “fundamentalist” as going beyond the pale of their own theological convictions. In Baker’s analysis, however, the Korean Church in its majority is both evangelical and fundamentalist, with its exclusivist stance towards outsiders being the primary reason for these designations.

What Baker calls the Korean Church’s “fundamentalist” character has been most evident in the ethical rigor that defines the Korean understanding of sanctification, a rigor that we can tie to the ethical systems of Neo-Confucianism. The entire Neo-Confucian project was founded upon the idea of an ethical system of proper relationships contributing to the formation of a utopian society; moral betterment, therefore, was the primary way to make the world a better

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁹ Don Baker, “Introduction” 22-23.

place. Indeed, most Confucians continue to “proudly esteem themselves as the ‘light and salt’ of the world. If a stray sheep exists at all, it would be in our minds, which are susceptible to recurring seduction.”¹⁷⁰ In other words, Confucians view themselves as the answer to the world’s problems by providing a system of moral betterment that can produce the necessary reformation of society in order to create harmony.

Because of this, Western Protestant missionaries arrived in a Korea that was fully prepared for the ethical rigor that the missionaries would preach as the way of sanctification following conversion. In fact, early Protestant missionaries required that Koreans prove at least a year’s worth of good “fruit” and moral behavior before they were allowed to be formally included within the Church body through baptism.¹⁷¹ According to Andrew Kim, the “high moral code taught by the Protestants converged with what many Confucian-minded Koreans felt and thought. Simply put, Protestant ethical values concerning the basic teachings of a way life agreed with the Confucian-centered moral values of Koreans.”¹⁷² Missionaries were thus keen on showing Korean Christians how the Christian tradition, especially through the Ten Commandments, did not necessarily lead to the abandonment of all their Confucian values.¹⁷³ Kim believes that the Church’s moral stance against “dishonesty, political corruption, moral depravity, the abuse of power by the elite, and even gambling, licentiousness, and drunkenness were largely congruent with Confucian ideals.”¹⁷⁴ Just as Confucianism provided a way of life defined by morality, Korean Christianity emphasizes a “behavioral imperative” that holds that “born-again persons must be able to give proof of their change in their personal life, by

¹⁷⁰ Hongkyung Kim, “A Party for the Spirits: Ritual Practice in Confucianism” in *Religions of Korea in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 2007)168.

¹⁷¹ Ryu, “Origins and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 378.

¹⁷² Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity,” 127.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

incorporating into their lives certain behavior and practices by virtue of which they could be distinguished from nonbelievers.”¹⁷⁵ This ethical way of life, given pride of place because of the already culturally acceptable and strict morality of Neo-Confucianism, has had three primary effects upon the trajectory that Christianity has taken: (1) rampant clericalism, (2) an emphasis on the holiness of the family, and (3) a strong emphasis on bible-centered education.

Neo-Confucianism, as we have seen, strongly emphasized a hierarchical understanding of society. Politically, the *yangban* aristocracy was the effective ruling class of the entire state. Culturally, the highest honor one could attain was the Heaven-blessed position of Sage, or one who was devoted to the study of Confucian texts and the application of the principles found therein. In fact, out of the five cardinal relationships that define Confucianism, four of them are hierarchical in nature. The subject submits himself or herself to the ruler, as does the child to the parent, the wife to the husband, and the younger siblings to the eldest. Perhaps it would be fair to say that authority and hierarchy are the very bedrock upon which Confucianism is built; if a people are not prepared to submit themselves to proper authority in both the personal and public spheres, then any type of Confucian influence will ultimately be unsuccessful.

In terms of Korea, though, this type of hierarchical system was socially acceptable, and thus when Christian missionaries arrived on the scene, Koreans were highly amenable to their teachings first and foremost because they viewed the missionaries as being teacher-scholars, or the equivalent of their Confucian sages. According to James S. Gale, Koreans viewed the missionary as “the man with the book...a spiritual master of literature, a teacher, a guide, a model.”¹⁷⁶ In the Confucian system, a scholar such as this was never questioned. Their word was accepted almost without contest. For Koreans, “good scholarship practically depended on how

¹⁷⁵ Lee, *Born Again*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ James S. Gale, *Korea in Translation* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909), 140, quoted in Ryu, “Origins and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism,” 384.

much and how well one knew traditional authorities, and new thoughts and interpretations would be deemed perilous.”¹⁷⁷ Once one was convinced of the Christian faith, then, one rarely questioned the authority of the missionaries and their native successors, and thus there has been little deviation from traditional orthodox evangelicalism.

Questioning authority, seen as unethical in Neo-Confucianism, has become an equally absent characteristic of Korean Christianity, where clericalism is alive and well. In his analysis of the Korean megachurch movement, Hong Young-gi has noted that the hierarchical and patriarchal system of Neo-Confucianism made it “easier for early missionaries and pastors to teach the word of God to Korean people.”¹⁷⁸ Combined with the early twentieth century Korean notion that to become modern they would have to accept Christian doctrines and Western ways, this authoritarian climate made it possible for the gospel to take root in a rapid fashion and secured evangelicalism’s place as the “traditional” form of Christianity, thereby ensuring its longevity.¹⁷⁹

In the modern Korean Church, this can be seen in the Korean emphasis on pastoral authority.¹⁸⁰ Park, believing authoritarianism within the Korean pastorate to be a wholly negative aspect of Confucian influence, notes that a thoroughgoing clericalism has developed within the church, with “clergy exercising excessive power in both the faith and the polity of the church.”¹⁸¹ Hong puts this into perspective for us: “In the Christian context, the validation of charismatic pastoral authority comes from the congregational perceptions that their pastor has proximity to the sacred, speaks the divine words, and is a channel of God’s work.”¹⁸² In other words, they

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 385.

¹⁷⁸ Hong, “Charismatic Megachurches in Korea,” 107.

¹⁷⁹ Kyong-bae Min, “National Identity in the History of the Korean Church, trans. Sun-ja Yi, *Korea and Christianity*, 127-128.

¹⁸⁰ Hong, “Charismatic Megachurches in Korea,” 107.

¹⁸¹ Park, “Korean Protestant Christianity: A Korean Protestant reflection,” 59-60.

¹⁸² Hong, *Charismatic Mega-churches in Korea*, 115.

resemble those Confucian scholars who were closely linked with knowledge of the texts and whose knowledge was the foundation of the populace's reverence for them. While, according to Kyong-jae Kim, the Old Testament prophets provide a precedent for a strong spiritual leadership, there is little doubt within Korean theological circles that the cause of "the Korean minister's authority comes from the Confucian tradition and its virtual caste system."¹⁸³ This has created a church culture in which, like the Confucian system before it, an elite group controls the institutions and the laity plays little to no role in exercising spiritual power or authority.¹⁸⁴

Sociologist David Martin concurs with these interpretations, noting that Confucianism has created an ecclesiastical atmosphere in which "pastors and elders try to stay above the laity and insist on enjoying superior privileges. Thus the universal brotherhood of Christianity is rather too successfully toned down to limited and particular relationships."¹⁸⁵ Regardless of whether one is right to see this as negative, the establishment of a powerful pastorate throughout the Korean church is a direct connection to Neo-Confucian influence; the moral path that Christians trod includes submitting oneself to the authority of the church leaders, which, though common throughout Christendom, nevertheless takes on a unique significance in the Korean context.

This hierarchical structure is also evident in Confucianism's emphasis on the family. Because early Christian missionaries "compromised with the native social customs regarding family values...certain Christian principles were given prominence, unseen elsewhere."¹⁸⁶ Besides the oft-repeated biblical injunction to honor one's parents, the Korean Church has utilized the biblical story of Ruth as evidence for the veracity of the traditionally Korean devotion to mothers-in-law. The same coopting of Confucian values has seen an emphasis on

¹⁸³ Kyong-jae, Kim. "History and Prospects of the Protestant Church in Korea," trans. Ui Kwon, *Korea and Christianity*, 187.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸⁵ Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 143.

¹⁸⁶ Kim, "Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity", 128.

what conservative congregations read as the biblical injunction for wifely submission (Ephesians 5:22-23). For Andrew Kim, “these illustrations alone reveal how the Korean Church endeavored to stress the conservative features of Christianity in order to reconcile its ideals with those of the host culture.”¹⁸⁷ This reconciliation can perhaps be best seen in the Christian appropriation of the *chesa*, or traditional ancestor worship that defined Confucian devotion. This has come to be known in Protestantism as *Chudosik*, which Hung Chull Jang views as Christian worship that is decidedly “indigenous, transformational, spiritual, pragmatic and compounded.”¹⁸⁸ Studies have shown that this practice is widespread throughout the church. In 1987, for instance, Soonha Ryu conducted a survey that Andrew Kim references in his own work on this topic; Kim notes that Ryu’s study found that “more than two-thirds of those surveyed conducted syncretized rituals of ancestral worship.”¹⁸⁹ So deeply embedded are these filial practices within the Korean psyche, that a significant portion of Christian congregants, however evangelical they might be in their theological convictions, continue to practice what many in American evangelicalism would deem to be pagan or, at the very least, an honoring of humanity which fails to recognize its broken and sinful state. This is a prime example of how the ethical practices of Confucianism were adapted for Christian purposes in such a way as to contribute to Christianity’s rapid success.

This hierarchical nature of Neo-Confucianism also directly affects the educational system of the Korean church through which Christians are catechized and taught the truths of the Bible. Sociologist David Martin, borrowing from the doctoral dissertation of Lee Jae Bum, believes that one of the primary marks of Korean Christianity is to be found in its emphasis on “preparation

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Hung Chull Jang, “Religious Cultural Hybridity in Chudosik (Ancestor Memorial service/Ceremony) in Korean Protestantism,” *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 4 (December 2007), 403.

¹⁸⁹ Soonha Ryu, *Gidokgyo Yehaewa Yugyojesa (The Christian Service and the Confucian rite)* (Seoul: Yongsuhguk, 1987), 200, cited in Kim, “Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity,” p. 129.

through Sunday schools and conservative Biblicism.”¹⁹⁰ This has manifested itself within the Korean church through such doctrinal concepts as that of biblical inerrancy. Lee cites The CCSKC (Centennial Comprehensive Study of the Korean [Protestant] Church), published in 1982, which indicates that 84.9 percent of the clergy and “92.3 percent of the laity answered affirmatively the question of whether they believed every word of the Bible to be God-inspired—and, presumably, unerring.”¹⁹¹ The CCSKC study indicates that an astoundingly large majority of the church adheres to a highly literal and conservative reading of the Christian Scriptures.

This concept of biblical inerrancy and the importance of biblical education/literacy were hallmarks of Korean Protestantism from the very beginning. Because the church of the missionaries was “operating in a Confucian culture that prized and revered the written text,” study of the Bible took on significance in Korean Protestantism that rivaled that of the Western Protestant nations.¹⁹² The Korean educational system was founded upon Confucian methods; middle and upper class citizens were required to learn Confucian texts by heart, and “people were taught to accept Confucian texts as the authority for socio-political principles as well as the daily practices of ethics and moral conduct.”¹⁹³ Confucianism did not allow literary criticism of their texts, but instead it was instilled in the citizenry that the texts were automatically trustworthy because they were given to the people by the king.¹⁹⁴ In light of this background, Korean Christians “employed the Confucian method of learning” to their study of the biblical texts as well.¹⁹⁵ Tending to take the Bible as being literally true, applying its principles to their

¹⁹⁰ Lee Jae Bum, “Pentecostal type distinctives and Korean Protestant Church growth,” PhD diss (Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986), 251-252 in Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 146.

¹⁹¹ Lee, *Born Again*, 118.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹³ Sebastian C.H. Kim, “The Word and the Spirit,” *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 132.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

daily lives, and discouraging alternative interpretations of the text can be seen to be direct consequences of what may be called a “Confucian hermeneutic.”¹⁹⁶

This type of emphasis on biblical literacy is, of course, not restricted to Korean Protestantism; but the *reasons* for its success in this particular context are undoubtedly connected to the already culturally acceptable ways that classic texts had been disseminated and studied in a Neo-Confucian fashion. Coupled with an emphasis on family and spiritual authority, Korean biblicism undoubtedly points to the influence of Neo-Confucian methodology and ideology.

Conclusion

The Korean answer to the question of how Christianity will affect Christian beliefs and lived Christian life, or sanctification, is to be found in the Neo-Confucian ideology of the past. Neither Buddhism nor Shamanism could provide the Korean church with an understanding of human ethical behavior in such a way as to directly influence the burgeoning church. Deeply imbedded within the culture, however, was a Neo-Confucian understanding of morality which could, and did, provide the Korean church with a way of walking out its faith in a thoroughly Confucian manner, however implicit that influence may seem to the untrained eye. While shamanism helps the Korean church answer the question of how we can come to know and experience God and Buddhism provides an answer to understanding the soteriological message of Christianity in a Korean way, Neo-Confucianism provides the Korean church with their own particular outline of what it means to be an ethical human being who happens to be both Korean and Christian. In this way, it is the last building block of our project, rounding out our picture of the Korean church by answering how its members must live their lives in light of their experience of the Holy Spirit, the salvation provided through Christ, and the future hope of heavenly reward.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Four: What difference does this make?

For those of us in the West, this entire enterprise may very well seem as if it has had and will have no impact on our own Christianity. Why, we may ask, should Korean Christianity provide any help in the evolution of our own faith communities? While I have hoped to debunk the myth that Korean Christianity is an imported faith from the West in the preceding pages, I hope to now examine, though briefly, how we may see the ways in which the Korean Church can speak into the lives of the entire global church in its various cultural expressions. In specific, I want to focus primarily on how Korean Christianity's relationship with traditional religions may speak to those parts of the Church, such as the West, which are experiencing what can only be described as spiritual recessions in the midst of secularism and the growth of other religious traditions.

First, the foundation for the Korean church's unique emphases is, as we have seen, a form of indigenous non-Christian religion. This has been supremely impactful in shaping the experiential and transformation qualities of Korean Christianity, and it is evidenced in concepts such as the Korean baptism of the spirit, *mingjung* theology, and the like. What is of primary importance here is the fact that the very foundation of Korean Christianity is neither imported religious traditions (Buddhism or Confucianism) nor missionary Christianity, but is instead built upon the profoundly rich shamanic heritage. This shamanic influence has been helpful in creating a Christianity that is focused upon the Korean people specifically and has helped to shape Christianity in a way that speaks directly to them. By implicitly rooting the pneumatological emphasis of Korean Christianity in something so essential to the Korean psyche as shamanism, the Korean Church has found a way to present the gospel and the lived Christian life in a way that is *Korean*. The Korean Christian rests assured that the vibrant and experiential faith she

holds dear is one that will positively affect her life. Because Christianity remains relevant to Koreans' cultural and religious background, it retains its transformational and supernatural qualities even in the 21st century. In addition to this, Shamanism reveals the deepest, most culturally entrenched needs of the Korean people, and by starting our understanding of Christianity in this place, we have seen that Korean Christianity begins the process of theologizing at the *deepest point of human need*. From there it moves forward through the needs met by other religious traditions, appropriating them in order to craft a contextualized gospel. If the global Church can learn anything from that of Korea, it is that religious faith must search out this place of deepest human need and speak to it in a way meaningful to the average person, embedded as he or she is in a particular culture. This may be difficult for those of us who are used to beginning with dogmatic conclusions, but if the Korean church's numerical success is an indicator of the vibrancy of Christian faith on the peninsula, we would do well to begin our theologizing in the same location that the Korean Church has done.

Second, in this time of spiritual recession the Church in the West may look to Korea for a model of cultural engagement that many Koreans themselves do not realize has so indelibly shaped their own communities of faith. From its very inception the church of Jesus Christ has had to navigate the difficult path of cultural engagement and the Pauline injunction to be "in the world but not of it." The Korean church has been able to do this by carefully navigating Korea's religio-cultural underpinnings in a positive manner. In other words, they have crafted a Christian faith that is able to speak to people *who maintain both their cultural identity and their Christianity*. Rather than eschewing the way that Korean religious heritage has shaped the worldviews of the Korean people, the Church has, whether it wants to admit it or not, been shaped and fashioned by the Korean culture in a profound way. When we turn our eyes to the

East, those of us in the Western Church may see a model of contextualization and indigenization that does not discount the work of the Holy Spirit through means other than the institutional church, and yet still retains its orthodox belief and therefore its membership in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We would do well, then, to examine how serious cultural engagement, especially in the increasingly religiously pluralistic West, can perhaps better situate or contextualize the Gospel where we live and worship.

There are, of course, caveats to what I have said above. We have time to examine two of them in the remaining pages. First, the research conducted leads us to beware of overemphasizing the desires of human beings and carefully defining what constitutes “human need.” That is, the motives of the religious life must be robustly examined in order to make any judgment calls about the quality of faith. There is little doubt in the minds of most students of Korean Christianity that shamanic influence has created space for what has been called in the West a “prosperity gospel,” a movement focused on material health and wealth as primary benefits of Christian devotion. This has had profound ramifications for much of Korean Christianity, including, for example, the recent suspended prison sentence of David Yonggi Cho for embezzlement. It is my contention, however, that the shamanic enterprise has much emotional and experiential power over the church that could instead be shifted towards true human *needs* in the here and now. As for now, though, the prosperity focused character of much of the Korean church seems to necessitate a transformation of priorities with the goal of creating a theology that, influenced by the cultural underpinnings of a shamanism that desires a better life for all people, can truly transform society in a way that takes the injunctions of Christ seriously.

Second, I realize that many Korean Christians would call into question just how much emphasis I have placed on other religious traditions’ influence on their faith. My reservation

concerning this, however, is that the conservative and fundamentalist character of much of Korean Christianity is blinding many faithful believers from recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit outside of the walls of their own church. In other words, the conservative character of Korean Christianity (which, as we have seen, can *itself* be in part attributed to Neo-Confucian thought!) may halt the progress of both indigenization and contextualization because of an increasingly fundamentalist attitude towards other faiths. This has proven particularly true in recent times, with Christians attacking and even destroying Buddhist temples.¹⁹⁷ After completing this project, it seems to me that the Korean Church must make more explicit its dialogical interactions with other faiths in a way that benefits all people while simultaneously allowing the Church to retain its orthodox theological convictions. This is the only way that it may continue to speak to those outside of its membership while simultaneously staying rooted in its uniquely Korean culture.

There are, of course, countless other positive aspects that we can draw from and critiques that we can make of the Korean Church based upon this research project. There is no doubt, though, that in Korean Christianity the global Church has an exemplary model of an indigenization and contextualization, especially when it comes to the Church's interaction with other religious faiths. God's people have in the Korean church a reference point that provides a blueprint for the global church's way forward in a world where multiple religious traditions exist simultaneously with the call for Christians to proclaim the unique message of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to the Church's detriment not to learn from Korean Christianity how to more effectively follow Christ in the twenty-first century.

¹⁹⁷ See Frank Tedesco, "Questions for Buddhist and Christian Cooperation in Korea," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 17 (1997).

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Appendix on Faith and Learning

My time at Seattle Pacific University, both within and outside of the School of Theology, has been one of what I would call a “broadening theological education.” That is, I have been taught and nurtured in such a way as to both experience and examine God in entirely unexpected ways. Because of this, I can say with the utmost honesty that these four years have been as much a spiritual journey as they have been an intellectual endeavor. This integration of spiritual-theological growth and academic progress is probably encapsulated in the last year that I have been working on this particular project. In the following brief appendix, I hope to provide some insight into how this honors project has been both an academic (and required!) activity, but also one through which I have come face to face with the Triune God.

First, this project opened my eyes to the necessity of the Western church taking seriously its global brothers and sisters. The days of Western Christian hegemony are now behind us, and if we hope to continue to be a presence in the world, then we must pay close attention to the faithful in other parts of the globe. In more colloquial language, this project has “put me in my place.” Through this particular academic exercise, I have been introduced to people different than myself who nevertheless love and honor the same Creator and Savior. In my case, at least, I have been able, through an academic process, to come face to face with those with whom I am bonded in Christian love and unity. My academic future is now based upon a profound desire to understand and learn from those other than myself. But in the case of this project, this has had profound theological consequences too, as I have not only learned something about those different than myself, but have also found ways to apply this learning to my own spiritual life.

Second, I have learned through this project that God’s work is truly *universal* in its scope and influence. This has been a theme of my education at SPU. No longer do I see a disjunction

between theology and other academic disciplines, but instead I have come to see that God works through the entire created order in order to provide His creation with that which is necessary to be fully human. In this particular project, I saw this God-work through other religious faiths, a conclusion that would no doubt horrify many of those with whom I grew up. It is my firm conviction, however, that “all truth is God’s truth,” and that God may work through a variety of means in order to fulfill his purposes. This is not, after all, an anti-biblical proposition if we take into account his using Cyrus of Persia or Paul’s preaching concerning the unknown God of the Athenians. It is in an academic project like this one that we can come face to face with a God who is willing and able to use whatever means necessary to continue his redemption of the world, and this is perhaps one of the most essential correlations between faith and learning we can make. Learning and faith are not dichotomous; learning reveals the unique ways that God has worked and is working in the world.

The most important aspect of the integration of scholarship and faith, however, has been the idea that Christian academic scholarship, especially that in the field of theology, is always a ministerial enterprise. As Doug Strong, the Dean of the School of Theology, said in a recent lecture introduction, the theological enterprise would be irrelevant were it not done for and alongside the Church. My hope was to not only examine Korean Christianity from an anthropological or sociological point of view, but to also provide a model for contextualization, indigenization, and interreligious dialogue that could make both my readers and myself better disciples of Christ. Though I know that this is only an undergraduate project, I do hope that I may be able to continue to shape it so that it may contribute to the spiritual and theological life of the Church and therefore to God’s continuing work of reconciliation.

I can therefore say that this particular project, which is a microcosmic image of my entire time at Seattle Pacific, has been a way of coming to know God, the Other, and myself better. The academic process seems, at least to me, to lose its impact and significance if this tri-partite approach is not realized. I am certainly fortunate to have have experienced it with this project, and I can only hope that this work can, if only by a little, prepare me for Christian ministry and help to draw out the implications of what it means to be a follower of Christ in a globalized and rapidly changing world. May my learning always be faithful, and may my faith always be defined by increasing knowledge in the ways of God. Amen—let it be so.

