The Origins of the Twentieth Century Explosion of Christianity in Korea: Changing Heaven’s Landscape

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Preface

The topic of this thesis has originated in both my academic studies from the past four years at Wellesley College and in my personal interests in the spirituality of minorities and missionary work. As an International Relations-History major, I have concentrated my studies in the region of East Asia, examining the histories of Japan, China, and Korea and specifically focusing on some concrete reasons why in spite of China’s grandiose history, the small island nation of Japan emerged as the great power in Asia in the twentieth century. Early on, I became particularly interested in Japan’s Colonial relationship with Korea. Most of the history courses I took focused on the better known histories of Japan and China. However, Korea stood out to me because of the resilience of the Korean people in spite of the Japanese Empire, post-War occupation by the United States in the South and Russia in the North, and the Korean War. South Korea literally rose above the odds and became a champion the effective implementation of market economy system in developing countries in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries and a beacon of Christianity.

During my first year at Wellesley, I took a course called Christian Spirituality in the Religion Department. A section of the course focused on Asian women’s spirituality. Again, the resilience and fervent spirituality of Koreans and Korean women in particular impressed me. I was curious about the origin of the strong Christian faith of Korean women in spite of their strict Confucian society and even as they suffered abuse at the hands of Japanese soldiers during World War II. It seemed to me that their faith was almost a response to or maybe even because of their pain. In one of course the readings by Hyun Kyung Chung, “Your Comfort Versus My Death” about Korean women who were used as comfort women for Japanese soldiers during World War II, Chung argues that Korean women’s Christian spirituality swells out of them as a
response to their pain. Once again, I was intrigued to learn the ways Korean women had risen above their oppression. In spite of their struggle, over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, Korean women have become great Christian missionaries, scholars, and businesswomen.

Historically, African Americans have been similarly liberated by their spirituality. Like Korean women, African American women have dealt with the patriarchal nature of their own community and abuse at the hands of the dominant race because they are female. Yet African American women have liberated themselves and have overcome impossible circumstances. The experience of African American women over the past three centuries helped me develop a sense of camaraderie with the plight of Korean women. For my thesis research, I have decided to examine Korean Christianity in particular because of the unbelievable pace at which it is quite literally taking over the world. In 1900, few Koreans espoused Christian beliefs since most of East Asia still clung tightly to Confucian ideologies. However by 2000, Christianity was on the rise in South Korea and by 2010, South Korea deployed the second largest number of Christian missionaries, preceded only by the United States. The rate of growth in the Korean Church is now impossible for the Western world to ignore. Korean Church growth has implications for the American Church especially in the wake of an influx of Korean emigrants and students to the United States and Canada over the past sixty years.

The methods of the North American missionaries to Korea are compelling because of my personal interest pursuing in missionary work. Methodists and Presbyterians in Korea began their efforts in 1884 by employing the social gospel and street preaching whenever possible. Although they did manage to convert Koreans, it was not causing the explosion of Christian spirituality they had hoped to achieve. The early Presbyterian missionaries to Korea applied the
Nevius Method, named after Dr. John Nevius, a missionary to Chefoo, China. They advocated a mission method that produced self-sustaining and self-governed local churches which is the origin of the three-self church movement in China, self-support, self-propogation, and self-government. In 1890, North American missionaries to Korea asked Dr. Nevius to come to Korea to explain his methods to them. After much discussion, they prayerfully chose to employ his methods in Korea. Having this method of ministry from the beginning of the Korean mission proved fruitful for church growth in Korea. The method allowed Korean men and women to quickly become trained in the Bible and they were soon able to serve as local ministers which removed some of the burden from the North American missionaries.  

I have learned valuable lessons about missionary work through my research for this thesis. First, effective missionaries must have specific plans when pursuing missions, especially in a relatively new territory. Second, various methods must be employed to relay the message. Finally, allowing some level of self-sufficiency right away is ideal to ensure rapid Church growth. Today’s missionaries from Korea are as compelling as North American missionaries have been because of their fearlessness in terms of spreading their faith. However, the effectiveness of their efforts throughout the world remains to be seen over the course of the next several years.

Continued research in the field of missions using Korea as an example of a successful missions effort is something that I hope to continue over the course of the next three years as a student at Yale Divinity School. After completion of the Masters of Divinity Program, I am eager to pursue missionary work in Asia. I am also eager to continue to study themes of Christian Spirituality especially in disadvantaged countries and communities and among minority

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populations. Most importantly, I would like to apply those themes both to my efforts in foreign missionary work and the local church.

This thesis contains six chapters can be divided into three overarching sections. The first section, which includes Chapter One, discusses the nineteenth century North American Protestant missionary movements to Korea. The purpose of the section is to celebrate the North American missionaries both male and female that transformed Korean Spirituality in only a few short decades. Additionally, the section analyses their motives in Korea and the racism lying just below the surface of their Christian charity. The second section discusses how Christianity appealed and still appeals to Koreans within the context of their religious history. Some North American missionaries were happy to accept converts even if they would not abandon their Confucian or Shamanistic beliefs and compared Koreans to the Early Jews who held on the Folk Religions. These missionaries often believed that Korean Folk Religions could enhance Korean’s understanding of Christianity. Of course, other missionaries urged Koreans to let go of traditional Korean religions when they became Christians. Even today among many Korean Christians living in Korea, Korean traditional religions highly influence their understanding and practice of Christianity. Additionally, the second section discusses the resilience of Korean Christians through annexation, total war, and the Korean War and how the nationalism of Korean Christians kept the Church alive during those five decades of turmoil. Finally, this section discusses the impact of Christianity on Koreans who immigrated to the United States and how Christianity has impacted their lives.

The final section of this thesis discusses the future of the Korean Church. The section attempts to create space for alliance and reconciliation between the African and Korean American communities by discussing their similar histories. At least in the United States,
increasingly it is their shared Christian faith which makes these two communities obvious allies in a shared struggle against oppression and racism in the United States, however, their cultural differences are so stark that they are often blind to their many similarities. Finally, this section shares my predictions about the future of the Korean Church based on both the history of the Korean Church and current developments within the life of the Korean Church.

Regardless of what happens in the future of the Korean Church, it is clear that the shared efforts of North American Christian missionaries to Korea and of Koreans themselves have forever changed the landscape of the world of Christianity. By so doing, together they have also changed the landscape of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 18:18-19: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven . . . if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” (NRSV) My thesis cannot draw many conclusions about what the demographics of Heaven will be but it can show that the explosion of Christianity in South Korea will impact the field of foreign missions and hopefully will aid the American Church in terms of its own inclusiveness, an effort I hope to take part in. The reality is that through the manifestation of their spirituality both in Korea and North America, Korean Christians have “loosed” a more fervent and genuine form of Christian spirituality on earth.
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There are numerous individuals who have selflessly contributed their time and attention to the completion of this thesis and I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to each of them. First of all, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Jim Kodera, for his constant guidance and support throughout this project. Professor Kodera threw his support behind my efforts back when this thesis was still just an idea during the Spring Semester of my junior year. Second, I would like to thank Professor Sharon Elkins for her ideas and guidance while I was working on my research during the Fall Semester and for her feedback on my first chapter. I would also like to thank the Wellesley College Religion Department for funding my Winter Session research trip to Korea. What I learned over the course of my three weeks in South Korea was invaluable to the completion of my thesis. I also am thankful to the Wellesley alumnae, Minah Kim and Arcadia Kim, who both assisted me in planning my trip to Korea and met with me to offer their thoughts and guidance while I was in Seoul.

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in person and who helped me find resources about the North American female missionaries who
founded and led Ewha Woman’s University from the 1880s to the 1940s.

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Bringing North American Christianity to the Hermit Kingdom

Nineteenth century North American missionaries to Korea have left a conflicting legacy both at home and in modern Korea. The United States has lost its nineteenth and twentieth century fervor for missions and the missions efforts of both the past and present are often viewed as being intolerant to the native culture. In the early years of Wellesley College, Mount Holyoke College, and other female seminaries across the East Coast and Midwest, the primary reason for an American woman to get an education was for the purpose of travelling outside the United States to India or China to “save” their Asian non-Christian sisters. Young North American women seized upon the opportunity to have options other married life after having receiving an education. Other women married missionary men to share in the calling of their husbands by serving as diligent missionary wives. Needless to say, today’s average graduating senior from Wellesley College is not likely to share the same ambitions as these early graduates did; even a Wellesley graduate from the 1950s would have been unlikely to desire to serve as a Christian missionary. However, at the time, it was considered to be the only noble thing for a young, college educated woman to do. So, in the 1880s and 1890s, young women often hurried to get an education to be qualified to go overseas as a missionary. In 1884 when Korea officially opened its doors to medical missionaries and teachers, many men went to Korea but even more women were to follow. Horace Allen, Henry Appenzeller, Horace Underwood, Mary Scranton, Lulu Frey, and others are glorified in South Korea to this day for their efforts there.

However, the same North American missionaries who were praised throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came under fire in late twentieth century Korea where they were often viewed as racist and imperialist. Since Korea was a colony of Japan from 1910-1945, in the 1920s many of the Korean students who received higher education in Japan did so at
a time when Japan’s anti-American sentiments were nearly at their peak. These Korean students learned a leftist ideology and returned to Korea to condemn the very missionaries that many of them had grown up knowing. These young Koreans were compelled to lead anti-Christian movements and linked missionaries with colonists. When Japan’s domination of Korea increased during World War II, many North Americans heeded the pressure to leave Korea.

In November 1940, 219 Americans, most of whom were missionaries left Korea after being urged to do so by the United States State Department. By March 1941, there were 68 American Presbyterians in Korea and by October there were only 22 missionaries and 2 missionary children. After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese government placed all Americans in Korea on house arrest or confined enemy aliens in specific missions’ buildings. The fact that so many missionaries deserted Korea in her time of need implies that it is true that self-interest, racism, and an intense fear of the other pervaded this encounter between missionaries, the Japanese government, and Koreans. However, it is important to acknowledge the institution of the Church survived the ordeal with Japan and even managed to grow in spite of it and that the missionaries who stayed in Korea did so mostly out of a strong desire to express their Christian love. As the twenty-first century dawned, democratic South Korea gained a new appreciation and for North American missionaries and for the institutions they established in Korea. However, Korean missionaries have by and large rejected North American missionaries’ often exclusive methods of ministry.

South Korea is well known today as a small, peninsular nation that’s fervent Christianity is bursting at the seams. In terms of percentages, today’s South Korea rivals the United States in the number of Christian missionaries sent to various countries throughout the world to spread the

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3 Ibid. Page 276.
Gospel annually. Seoul, South Korea is home to the largest mega-church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church located on Yeiodo Island. The congregation of Yoido Full Gospel Church literally worships without ceasing as it offers church services every day throughout the day starting at daybreak and well into the night. Yoido also encourages its congregants to visit Prayer Mountain to spend time in prayer there. Other than Yoido, South Korea is also home to many other mega-churches and smaller churches all of which are filled with parishioners each Sunday without fail. In many Korean Churches across South Korea women are extremely active since they are generally home during the day. The passion for Christianity among its Korean practitioners is apparent. The missionary movement overtook Korea and captivated Koreans beginning in 1884 with Dr. Horace Allen. However, the pioneer Protestant missionaries certainly came with trepidation as they would have been well aware of Korea’s bloody relationship with Roman Catholicism which had only recently been quelled.

The Chosen Dynasty which began in Korea in 1392 was Confucian. However, with time legalistic Confucianism became inadequate to fulfill the religious needs of the people and Roman Catholicism was one of the options introduced to help fill the void. Roman Catholicism was first introduced to Korea through the scholarship of tracts that were written in Chinese. Catholic missionaries in Manchuria converted the first Koreans and the Protestant missionaries in Japan tried to open the borders of Korea for missions. Presumably having seen the often destructive and divisive impact of Roman Catholicism on its East Asian neighbors, China and Japan, the Korean Government was extremely wary of the spread of Catholicism in Korea and clearly saw the religion as some sort of political threat. The Catholic mission in Korea began in earnest in 1784 and can be characterized by a large amount of violence against Catholics in Korea. Even from the outset Catholicism was viewed with a great deal of suspicion although no foreign
Catholics came to Korea for the first four years of the Catholic mission. However, when foreign missionaries did come to Korea they were immediately captured by the government and beheaded. The greatest outbreak of Catholic martyrdom in Korea happened in 1886 when Protestant missionaries had already begun to come to Korea. So although there were 17,500 Catholics in Korea when the Protestant mission there began they were all dispersed and driven underground to avoid any further martyrdom at the hands of the Korean Government.

In 1887, the Protestant missionaries in Manchuria helped Korean Christians to publish the first Korean Bible. It was a Korean Christian man named Rujutei who tried to bring Protestantism to Korea for the first time. He personally translated the Gospel of Mark into Korean for the benefit of Koreans and sent letters to American Churches imploring them to send missionaries. In 1884, the requests of Rujutei and the Christian missionaries in Asia were finally answered as North America sent its first Protestant missionary to Korea. The Korean government would not allow missionaries to come to Korea unless they had skills the Korean people were interested in utilizing. The earliest missionaries were required to be trained educators or doctors. Thus there was an influx of women and men in the United States who were being trained in both of these fields before leaving to participate in missions. The decision to send missionaries to Korea and to train them in whatever fields were necessary in order to evangelize to Koreans was a change that was in line with a changing missionary theology in the United States. In the 1870s, premillennialist theology rose in contrast to the then dominant postmillennialist paradigm. The standard postmillennialist theology said that American society had reached a level of civilization that would usher in the eventual return of Jesus Christ while premillennialists believed that the return of Christ was a prerequisite to the era of peace. They saw Christ’s return as a prerequisite

to the millennium that is alluded to in Revelation 20. Of course, these theologians were eager for the millennium since Revelation 20 said that the Devil would be cast down into a pit for one thousand years and would never again deceive the nations. Additionally, the passage asserts in Revelation 20:6, “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him a thousand years.” (NRSV) Clearly, anyone who believed himself to be a righteous Christian would be eager to hasten the day on which this promise would come to fruition. The belief in the United States had long been that missionary work was part of an eventual process of teaching the Word of God to the world but that social reform should also be large component of missions. Premillennialists always placed evangelism before education and industrialization and other “civilizing” elements of missions. Ardent millennial theology caused the major surge in missions at the end of the nineteenth century but with the turn of the century, the end times imagery receded and the most mainstream mission organizations sought to find common ground between the need to evangelize the world and to put the “social gospel” into practice. Because of the nature of the beginnings of missionary efforts in Korea, most of the original missionaries to Korea fell into this mainstream category. Although the passion for missions did fade in the twentieth century as the “social gospel” became more popular. However, millennial theology played a large part in encouraging North Americans do attain whatever level of education was required to evangelize in the then relatively unknown nation of Korea.

The pioneer missionary to Korea was medical missionary Horace Allen and his wife, Fannie Allen. The Allen family had initially been appointed as missionaries of the Presbyterian

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Church to China but from there they were sent on to Korea. They were to be joined by the likes of educator Mary Scranton, Henry and Ella Appenzeller, and the long-suffering evangelical and educational missionaries Horace and Lillias Underwood. Koreans trusted these North American missionaries as long as they maintained their designated roles as doctors and educators. It was on these shaky political terms that Protestant mission in Korea finally commenced. Among the North American missionaries, Horace Allen did the best job of treading lightly in Korea in terms of his evangelistic approach. He was frustrated by Appenzeller and Underwood's insistence on public proselytization because he felt that his low profile was slowly opening doors for the infiltration of Christianity and that their evangelism thwarted his progress. In Horace Allen’s defense, he was indeed opening doors and he managed to force open the most important door; that is the Korean government. Allen gained the respect of Queen Min by saving the life of one of her wounded relatives. Allen was an ardent postmillennialist who argued that good works would ultimately create the opening for evangelism in Korea and the conversion of Korea would happen from the top down. Underwood and Appenzeller also employed the social gospel as a tool to convert Koreans but unlike Allen they never shied away from an opportunity for open evangelism.

Katherine Ahn argues that the pioneering years of Protestant missions in Korea unfolded in three major stages. She calls the first stage of the mission the years from 1884-1891. It was during these early years that the pioneer medical missionaries came to Korea. The Royal Family was open to the advances of Western medicine. However, medical work was also positive for as missionaries as they tried to grow the Church in Korea because doctors could gain particularly close access to Koreans and Korean culture. In 1885, Mary Scranton founded the first girl’s

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school in Korea called Ewha School. Opening the doors of a girls’ school was shocking to most Koreans. Today Ewha Woman’s University is the largest women’s college in Asia, having grown substantially since 1886 when Mary Scranton opened the school with only one student. When Scranton initially recommended the idea of founding a girls school, it was not only rejected but also mocked by Koreans because while education was valued in this highly Confucian society, Koreans saw no benefit in educating women. Traditionally, girls from wealthy families led sequestered lives during their youth and society mandated that they be married off at a young age. Poorer families did not want their daughters to attend schools because they profited from selling their daughters as dancers.

Eventually, Scranton did succeed in securing her first students from poorer families but their behavior was often unruly because of their failed upbringing which made them difficult first pupils in Korea. When these young women finally harnessed their behavior and began to become good students around the age of twelve or thirteen, they were taken out of school to be married. Because of the cultural stigma, Mary Scranton had to quickly develop strategies to make the idea female education non-threatening to Koreans. With that objective in mind, teachers at Ewha strove not to attempt to turn Korean girls into American ladies but rather to turn them into the ideal Korean homemaker. These Korean homemakers were useful to the missionaries because they brought Christian teaching into their households as a result of their education in the missionary schools. After they received their education, the newly educated Korean women were able to return to their domestic roles. The hope was that these young girls would share Christianity with their parents and plant the seeds of conversion in them. Missionary women were often rewarded for their efforts as Korean mothers slowly became interested in speaking with Western women in their homes. Through their daughters, Mary Scranton managed to find
her way into the hearts of Korean women who were often inspired by her Christian beliefs. Without much effort, female missionaries in Korea could easily appeal to Korean women who generally allowed them into their homes out of curiosity. Through their conversations, the process of conversion could begin to occur. The combination of education and Christian teachings which increased the rights of women in society slowly began the process of liberating Korean women.8

Ewha graduate Helen Kim is the earliest example of how a Ewha College education could create a high level of liberation for Korean women. In 1931, Kim became the first Korean woman to receive a doctorate degree. She pursued her degree at Columbia University’s School of Education at the urging of Ewha’s President at the time, Alice Appenzeller. However, the beauty of her story is that Helen Kim pursued this upper level degree not for her own benefit but rather to give back to Ewha. After receiving the degree from Columbia, Dr. Kim returned to Ewha as an educator, becoming a dean of Ewha in 1931 and President in 1939 as Japanese repression of Korean schools was increasing. Even during World War II amidst much pressure from the Japanese government to control school curriculum, Dr. Kim managed to keep Ewha College afloat. While maintaining her duties as President of Ewha during World War II, Dr. Kim also became South Korea’s government spokesperson and founded the Korean Times newspaper, an English language newspaper.9 Extraordinary women like Helen Kim surely surpassed Mary Scranton’s original expectations when she first conceptualized the idea of Ewha, but it is due to Scranton’s tireless efforts in the 1880s that the complete transformation of the Korean woman through education could even begin to take place. As Helen Kim herself expressed about the

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transformation of Korea, “Freedom is not just a word here, not just a concept taken for granted. Its meaning is in the air we breathe, in our thoughts, in our hearts.”\textsuperscript{10} Christianity was one factor that catalyzed the twentieth century transformation that was occurring in Korea.

Katherine Ahn calls the second period of the Korean missions the years from 1891-1897. During this time, missionaries gained the respect of the royal family. Queen Min frequently invited missionary women and their children out of curiosity about Western culture. The John Nevius method was also employed in Korea to encourage more rapid church growth. The method was applied especially heavily in the Northern cities of Korea where the Church was growing most rapidly. The missionaries to Korea learned from their failures in the mission fields of China and Japan what they ought not to do to convert East Asians. From their efforts in China, missionaries learned that the churches need to be financially independent and locally led. In China, the efforts to make Chinese churches independent were called the Three Self Movement: Self support, self propagation, and self government. The model was a sensible method to use in Korea especially in light of the violent persecution of Catholics in nineteenth century Korea. From their efforts in Japan, the missionaries learned not to substitute the notion of Western Civilization for Biblical Christianity. The Japanese seized upon Western technology and thought, guns, industrialism, and imperialism, while rejecting Christianity and alliances with the West almost entirely. So while it might be true that missionaries in Japan employed racist and imperialist methods to convert Japanese people, the same could not be said of their initial efforts in Korea.\textsuperscript{11}


Katherine Ahn calls the third period of the Protestant mission in Korea the years from 1897-1907. These years were a trying time for the Korean government as Korea watched Japan defeat both China and Russia in war. After the Sino Japanese War, in 1905, Japan set up a Protectorate in Korea. The establishment of the Protectorate would have been particularly devastating for Koreans because Korea has a rich cultural background all its own and was headed toward modernization without the help of the Western world or Japan. However, because Japan swooped in at this point in Korea’s history, Japan has taken credit for bringing Korea into the modern era. As a result of the injustice committed against them by the government of Japan, Koreans developed an overwhelming desire for theological education. The growth of the church during this time was most prevalent in Northern Korea. Missionaries trained and taught local preachers and bible women to feed the growing desire for Christian understanding.12

It is in the event of the Annexation of Korea that I believe the beginnings of a uniquely Korean Christian spirituality can be located. This emerging spirituality incorporated elements of the old religious traditions of Korea, Shamanism and Confucianism. Yet far more important was the new addition to the religious traditions of Korea, a Biblical text in which Koreans could anchor their emerging spirituality. The new spirituality was tested in 1919 as Korean Christians eagerly joined with Korean Nationalists to participate in the March First Movement. Christians and students felt particularly impacted by Japanese suppression. The Japanese government intentionally attempted to push Christians over the edge with laws such as requiring Korean government officials and students to worship at Shinto shrines. The Korean Church divided over the issue.13 However, the Korean Church is also significant for its ability to thrive during

struggle. The Korean Church is comparable to the Black Church in the United States or any other church made of a homogeneous group of a minority people. Their faith is firmly rooted in an event that so shook the people to the core that the only response is a deeper spirituality. Although that event is rarely if ever spoken about in church services or bible studies, every member of the congregation worships from the same place of pain. Their faith in the unfailing God of the Exodus story gives them hope in spite of their past pain. For Koreans, in addition to the Bible and their faith, in times of trouble, they also had some friends among the North American missionaries that helped them to maintain their strength. It is in memory of and gratitude to their missionary friends during the early twentieth century that today’s Koreans enter the mission field in droves with no sense of racism or superiority but only with hearts for service.

Horace G. Underwood and his wife Lillias entered Seoul in 1885 as Presbyterian missionaries and stayed on in Seoul through Korea’s protectorate status under colonial Japan and through the horrors of World War II, refusing to leave the Koreans whom they referred to as their friends. In many ways, their courageous careers in Korea ended in disgrace as anti-American pro-Communist rhetoric flooded Korea in the 1920s and 1930s. The rhetoric often condemned missionaries as being agents of American interests in Korea. However, by 1950, the tide changed as South Korea became a democracy and in 1999 at the request of the Korean Church, Underwood’s body, buried in New York, was re-interred in Seoul to honor him. South Korea’s change of heart regarding their sentiments toward North American missionaries could not be cross applied to staunchly communist North Korea. Like South Korea, the North Korean press also ran an article about Underwood’s body being re-interred in Seoul in which they stated:

Underwood was a vicious criminal who came to this land in the guise of a missionary as a guide for US aggression of the Korean peninsula, propagated the ideas of worshiping the United States . . . and ran amok with spying, plotting, and nurturing pro-US elements . . . disgraced our nation’s modern history with aggression and plunder . . . to implement
US policies of aggression in our country for as many as . . . four generations. We cannot but express national shock and resentment over the act of bringing to Seoul even the remains of Underwood. (Pyongyang KCNA: 8/22/99).

North Korea’s sentiments in 1999 reflect the popular sentiments against Western missionaries which both Korea and Japan shared in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. These sentiments pitted Koreans against the North American missionaries that had made such a strong contribution of the emergence Korean Christian spirituality.\(^\text{14}\)

Unfortunately for the North American missionaries of the nineteenth century, the accusation of imperialist agendas in Korea is not the only strike against them. The perception in both the modern United States and sometimes in modern North Korea is that North American missionaries forced Koreans to conform to their religious ideals and demeaned traditional Korean thought and practices. In their photographs, missionaries always appear to be stiff and stern and seem to look down upon any natives that might appear with them in the photograph; their racist thoughts toward them were apparent. For many North American missionaries, the act of converting Koreans was the first time it ever crossed their mind that everyone in Heaven might not be white Americans or Europeans. Evidence of their racism is clear because they did little to conceal it in their letters home to family members and friends. They also spoke in blatantly racist statements in they wrote for Foreign Missionary Journals. One article written under the pseudonym “John J. Johns” is particularly disturbing because Johns writes that he was tempted to leave Korea because “The very folks [he] came to help, yea, to save, are the ones who depress [him] and sadden [him], and kill [his] exuberance in spite of prayerful endeavors to the contrary.”\(^\text{15}\) Such sentiments are hardly the words of a patient missionary friend to Koreans.


Similarly, missionary educator Louise Timmons wrote about her inability to relate to Korean women writing, “I see very little in the majority of the women.”\(^{16}\) However, some female missionaries managed to find a powerful connection between themselves and Korean women; that is their shared experience of motherhood. Missionary Annie Baird felt the cultural barrier disappear as she comforted a Korean woman who had lost her two year old grandchild. “I, too, knew what it is to long unspeakably for the weight of a dear little body and the pressure of a warm little head on my breast, and to listen for the patter of baby feet where there was only silence . . . as we wept in each other’s arms we were conscious only of our common motherhood.” However, Ms. Baird cannot help but include in her sympathetic statement that she believed the woman was “dirty and ill smelling”. Even in the most intimate of encounters, many of the pioneer missionaries to Korea could not discard their racism.\(^{17}\)

Although missionary families like the Underwoods who considered Korean people to be their friends might provide a stark contrast to the typical racism that pervaded missionary interactions with the native people, most North American missionaries openly viewed Koreans as “the other”. Missionaries insisted on living in Western homes away from Koreans and often believed that living among Koreans and eating Korean food led to poor health. Generally, only single women were allowed to live among Koreans because North Americans families felt a need to “protect” their children. Women like Harriet Parker are ideal examples of women who had no qualms about health issues in Korea when serving there as unmarried women. However, Parker’s true racist perceptions of Koreans emerged when she became a mother. Like many other North Americans, Parker correlated poor hygiene and sanitation with being a “heathen” nation.

Familial attitudes toward Koreans certainly rubbed off in the interactions between American

\(^{16}\) Ibid. Page 228.

children and their Korean playmates in spite of American missionary’s attempts to raise their children to have “missionary spirits”. Even the use of the term missionary spirit here is laughable considering that many of the missionaries themselves had racist spirits.

Korean women often served as *amah* to North American missionary children. Amahs went beyond being babysitters; they were essentially loyal surrogate mothers for missionary children. Finding a good amah impacted the lives of more than just the children, often the happiness of their mothers while they lived in Korea would be impacted by whether or not they had a stable amah in their home. However, missionary children were also surrounded by other Korean workers and could be playmates to their young children if they were particularly isolated from other North American children. Because most of the Koreans they interacted with were in subservient positions, children easily developed feelings of superiority toward Koreans in their relationships with their Korean playmates.

The cultural differences between North Americans and Koreans were most pronounced in issues such as food and medicine. Medical workers were some of the most sought out North Americans by Koreans because they wanted to explore modern medicine. Because of the importance of medicine in Korea, being a doctor was seen as a great tool for evangelism. The greatest advocate for medical missionary work was Horace Allen. Allen’s legacy remains in Korea to this day because he established Severance Hospital which one of the leading hospitals in the city of Seoul today. However, not all doctors were as accommodating to the nature of Korean people as Horace Allen was. Many of the doctors from the United States were offended by Korean’s rudimentary medical techniques. When their treatments were rendered ineffective in treating sick Korean patients American doctors blamed Korean medications rather than their own often saying, “These doctors have medicines of their own . . . which they furnish their patients in
liberal quantities. Why should a man who has failed to receive benefit from three gallons of mixture so nauseating he could not retain it . . . place faith in a small bottle of medicine as clear as water.”

That being said, North American doctors certainly gave Korean women a type of comfort they had not had access to in the past. Dr. Mattie Ingold was particularly instrumental in the lives of Korean women and children who were bruised and battered by their patriarchal husbands. Doctors wrote with a mixture of frustration and anger that “Human life in this country is a most inexpensive commodity. The natives cry out with horror if a horse is over loaded, but would seldom deign to help a dying or starving man.”

The efforts of North American doctors helped to curb the cycle of domestic abuse in early twentieth century Korea as female doctors offered comfort to their battered Korean sisters.

Even early on in the missions encounter in Korea, select missionary families came to be seen as friends of Korea. Among pioneer North American missionaries, the Underwood family, Horace Allen, Henry Appenzeller, Rosetta Sherwood Hall, and Mary Scranton garnered a particularly good reputation and paved the way for missionaries who came to Korea during the twentieth century. The Underwood family is a good example of a missionary legacy which has been preserved in Korea to this day. As discussed earlier, this family name has quite a negative connotation in North Korea but in South Korea, the name Underwood is a reminder of two important aspects of modern South Korean society, Christianity and education. Horace Underwood gained much respect in Korean society as one of the founders of Yonsei University, called Chosun Bible College at the time. Since the Confucian Chosen Dynasty which governed Korea until Japanese annexation in 1910 emphasized the importance of learning in Korean society, Underwood was well respected for his desire to teach and his diligence in instructing his students.


19 Ibid. Page 200
male Korean students. The name Underwood garners the respect of Koreans to this day because of his commitment to teaching.

The Chosen Dynasty (1392-1910) was heavily Confucian and valued learning; therefore the King was not opposed to Western thought. A visitor to Seoul, South Korea today will notice within moments that South Korea is not a “Christian nation” in the same sense that the United States might be called a “Christian nation”. There are certainly more Americans who profess Christianity as their religion of choice than Koreans living in Korea. However, a trip to South Korea in early January reveals that the traditional Christmas spirit still abounds throughout the country. Even two or three weeks after the holiday, Christmas is still being celebrated in South Korea at churches and shopping malls and the joy of the season is maintained throughout the month at a time when most Christmas decorations in homes in the United States have been long since discarded. The crosses which stand high at Protestant Churches all around Seoul are a reminder that Christianity, and particularly the Presbyterian and Methodist denominations most of the pioneer missionaries to Korea introduced there, is on the rise in Korea. Learning is also a huge part of life in Korea; there are universities, primary schools, and secondary schools throughout the country. The Churches and Schools are evidence that North American missionaries have left a lasting legacy in Korea. Specifically, they left behind two of the most prominent universities in Korea, Yonsei University and Ewha Women’s University.

Education has been one of the primary ways that missionaries have left their fingerprint on South Korea. Yonsei University in Seoul takes pride in having been founded by North American missionaries. The founding spirit behind the University according to its website is to cultivate leaders who embody “truth and freedom”. In 1885, their founder chose their founding philosophy from a passage according to the Gospel of John 8:31-32. “Then Jesus said to the Jews
who had believed in Him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.’” (NRSV) For universities founded with the Christian sentiment in South Korea there is no contradiction between being academically sound and fostering a Christian ecumenical spirit in everything that faculty and students do. In fact, in South Korea there has been a prolonged debate about the level of education pastors should be expected to attain. Presbyterian churches flood South Korea and most pastors in these churches have strong spiritual backbones although their level of education is apparent. Some Koreans argue that pastors need to be well versed in the social and natural sciences. However, while the Presbyterian Church has embodied this concept, the idea is rejected firmly by the mere existence of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul which is in line with the Pentecostal tradition which values the spiritual far above the intellectual.

However, Yonsei University clearly values a high level of education for young Koreans both Christian and non-Christian. In line with their pride surrounding their missionary background, Yonsei founded the Underwood International College named for Horace Underwood. The college is predicated on continuing Yonsei’s legacy as a leading university in Korea. As a four year liberal arts college, Underwood International College is dedicated to serving and educating students of all nationalities to develop them into future global leaders. Considering the failure of Europe and North America to help lead Korea into modernity by allowing Japan to occupy Korea beginning in 1905, European and North American diplomats can take no credit for the modern cities that constitute today’s South Korea. Therefore, while missionaries themselves are highly respected in South Korea, it is clear that Korean Christians have no desire to align themselves with North American Christians. Although North Americans did not lead South Korea into modernity, the development of Korean Universities into
institutions that have the capacity to develop the world’s future leaders should be credited to North American missionaries who bravely educated Koreans in the liberal arts and medicine and stood by them even at the height of their suppression by the Japanese. Because of the missionaries’ dedication to them, Korean Christianity flourished and Korean Church growth in the decades following the Korean War would not be what it is today had the missionaries not set a firm foundation beginning in the early years of their ministry.

That is not to say that all North American missionaries possessed the same motivations for travelling to Korea in droves to spread the gospel. However, there are just a few main schools of thought which encouraged the rapid spread of the Protestant Missionary movement in Korea. Generally speaking, a large number of Presbyterians and Methodists from New England and the mid-West had been swept up in the evangelistic fervor of the nineteenth century. Without even going too in depth into the publications of the late 1800s and early 1900s, Woman’s Missionary Friend and Heathen Woman’s Friend published and released by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society headquartered on Tremont Street in Boston, Massachusetts, an overarching theme was the need for North Americans to travel to foreign lands to spread the Gospel. Although there very well might have been political or social reasons for North America’s sudden desire to evangelize, a good number of these missionaries had a passionate desire to go abroad spreading the Good News because they genuinely believed it would be of assistance to people living in developing countries. For the first time in the history of North American missions, the Great Commission was used as a tool to teach young missionaries that they must go overseas. Missionaries needed to justify a decision not to go abroad to serve. Many missionary men and women had grown up eager to serve in India, which was the primary mission field of the mid
1800s, but changed their mission field after the need for Protestant missionaries in Korea arose for the first time in the mid to late 1880s.

In spite of the conflicting legacy the pioneer North American missionaries left in Korea, the reality of the situation is that the Korean Church grew rapidly and is still on the rise today. Koreans were not kept from experiencing the joy of Christian spirituality even by racist missionaries or by strict Japanese restrictions. Their experience mirrors that of African Americans who grew up in churches which preached against their salvation and used the gospel as a tool to condemn them. Both churches have grown and continue to grow in spite of all the efforts that have been made by their white American and European “saviors”. Koreans in particular, have thrown themselves into the missionary movement, travelling all over the world to share their gospel. Missionary work has not been viewed in modern South Korea as it has been in the modern United States. In Korea, sharing Christianity is analogous to sharing any other necessary language. Koreans are in their own right, changing the deep-set foundations of the Church universally.
The “Koreanization” of Christianity: Confucianism, Shamanism, and Christianity

Efforts to Christianize Korea (both by Catholics and Protestants) both began during the highly Confucian Chosen Dynasty. The rapid conversion of Koreans to Christianity beginning in the nineteenth century cannot be separated from their Confucian values which taught them: respect for elders, respect for learning, and respect for family. Confucian aspects still exist in the structure of today’s Protestant Korean churches in which women are often the most active in the life of the church but cannot hold vital leadership roles. Patriarchy still causes major constraints on women within the Korean Church which is ironic considering so many Koreans find the Church to be a safe haven. For example, there are two denominations of the Presbyterian Church, the Yayjang and the Geejang. The Yayjang churches are far more prominent in Korea and are known for their conservatism. In the Yayjang Church women cannot hold leadership roles and in some of the most conservative Yayjang Churches women are not even allowed to approach the pulpit; practices that exclude women in this way are clearly linked to Korea’s highly Confucian society. The Geejang Churches on the other hand are far less prominent in Korea. They are known for being pro-democracy, they are politically active, and women can take on leadership roles in Geejang Churches. In some Geejang Churches women even serve as head pastors.20

The prevalence of Yayjang Churches in Korea is evidence enough that patriarchy is an essential component of the Korean Church. The hierarchy difference between men and women was certainly not demonstrated by the early North American missionaries to Korea, it was a component that they added in of their own volition and it is another clear indicator that in spite of being fervent Christians, Confucianism still has a powerful hold on Koreans. In many North American missionary couplings, wives roamed freely and served as equal ministry partners with their husbands especially before they had children. The lack of a firm example for this level of

hierarchy in the Church is a strong indication that Confucianism has what fueled this exclusive practice more than anything else.

To be a follower of the tenants of Confucianism can be called an expected element of what it means to be Korean in that there is no “conversion” to Confucianism like there is in other religious traditions. Also, no practitioner of Confucianism attempt to convert another person to Confucianism. In historically and traditionally Confucian Korea, a person simply follows the tenants of Confucianism because society requires them to do so. A person with Confucian values has no need for further enlightenment as most religions encourage its practitioners to aspire to achieve. Rather Confucians need to “convert” those who do not espouse Confucian values to their belief system in order for society to keep functioning properly. Based on the way Confucianism has manifested itself in Korea, it is clear that Korean people by and large do not intentionally follow the tenants of Confucianism, however, Confucianism does create basic societal rules and roles that Koreans naturally have followed decades and those are not easy to shake. While there are important areas of departure between Christianity and Confucianism, the highly ordered Protestant churches of Korea are sufficient evidence that Confucianism is never far from the Korean mind. Modern Seoul is highly urbanized and is a completely modern city. However, the city landscape is an enigma in and of itself. Beside tall financial buildings, coffee shops, and Western-style hotels stand Confucian palaces dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth century Korea. The temples attract tourists, both from Korea and abroad daily. In downtown Seoul, the old meets the new in an almost ironic manner as men and women in business suits hurry past centuries old temples down the streets to their modern office buildings. It was this awkward marriage between a rapidly modernizing world and Korean Confucian
The earliest missionaries to Korea learned from the previous successes and failures of the Christian missionaries in Japan and China. As discussed earlier, these missionaries understood that they could not completely do away with the traditional religions of Korea as the earliest missionaries to Japan had often endeavored to do in order to accommodate conversion. They learned from their experience in China that churches had to be self run and self sufficient and thus they had to teach Koreans basic theology so that they could be teachers and preachers for their own local community. Because of the adjustments that were made in terms of the way the mission would proceed in Korea and because of the highly educated missionaries that were sent to Korea to begin the mission there, the church in Korea grew much more quickly than the church had in other parts of East Asia.

In both China and Japan, North American Christians missionaries had entirely rejected the notion that the ideas of Confucianism could reconcile with the doctrine of Christianity which was also destructive to the growth of the Church especially in China. The Confucian ideals of intense patriarchy and especially the practice of ancestor veneration were not allowed to continue for those who converted to Christianity. The method of eliminating all of the traditional religious of China and Japan to press traditional Christian doctrine backfired on missionaries who had little success, especially in Japan although ironically the Japanese were soon to try the same method in an even more aggressive manner than the North American Christian missionaries had in Taiwan in Korea by forcing their new colonial subjects to worship at Shinto shrines.

Since the mission began slightly later in Korea, it took on a much different slant there because missionaries learned from the mistakes of the past. In Korea missionaries converted
within the context of the Confucian Dynasty Korea which governed Korea until 1910. Missionaries took a different stance with Koreans both because of what had been learned in China and Japan and because Korea’s leaders mandated that missionaries be educators and doctors. No missionary was allowed into Korea for the strict purpose of prostylezation. Korea had seen how the missions efforts had unfolded elsewhere in East Asia and its leadership accepted missionaries on extremely specific terms knowing that North Americans were going to force Korea open regardless of their protestations. Therefore, Korea’s leadership insisted on accepting the foreigners on their own terms. King Kojong took full advantage of the positive things missionaries had to bring to Korea; he was intrigued by Westerners since Korea was a nation on its way toward modernization by the turn of the century. However, King Kojong wanted to speed the process of modernization in Korea based on what he could learn from the Western world.

The Confucian nation emphasized education for all members of its society from its young people to its farmers. Before Japan established the Protectorate over Korea in 1905, there were a variety of educational institutions in Korea. There were two types of traditional Chinese schools. There were government sponsored schools run by a local administrator and there were sodang throughout the country which were private schools patronized by the yangban who were the Korean elite. By the 1890s, Korea had what could be considered to be a modern education system. There were Western-style elementary schools, middle schools, foreign language schools, vocational schools, a normal school, and a medical school. By 1905, there was a nationwide “education for the nation” movement and even Koreans in labor-intensive fields were becoming educated. The Korean schools created a strong sense of nationalism in educated Koreans. Some
Koreans began to seek out schools that taught Western-style school subjects and the Korean vernacular which was a sign of changing times.\(^\text{21}\)

Because of Korea’s obsession with learning, Christian schools for boys gained popularity quickly. The large number of missionaries in Korea also ensured that a large number of schools that could be established there right away. For education-minded Korea, it turned out well to have so many Christian schools educating both men and women by the time Japanese annexation began since Japanese colonizers struggled to justify closing Western schools and so early on in its Empire, Japan was fearful of provoking the anger of a Western power by mistreating North American missionaries. Thus, during occupation, Christian schools and churches became hotbeds of nationalism. Medicine was seen as a necessary area of study and King Kojong saw the benefit Western medicine into Korea. The women of Korea were also highly intrigued by Western society. Even in the late 1800s, Korean women still lived in almost complete seclusion but the example provided by Western women allowed women to slowly make their way into the public sphere. The wealthier a woman was, the more secluded she was. Since North American women were more liberated, they were eager to challenge the treatment of Korean women.

Queen Min often called missionary wives to her palace to observe the way they dressed and how they interacted with their children. Part of the reason why missionaries in Korea were able to convert so many people as quickly as they did in Korea was because of the high level of Korean curiosity about foreigners. More than one North American missionary woman wrote despairingly that Korean women would gather around and stare at “foreign women”. Korean women stared because they were amazed that North American women could survive with their pale skin and large, pale eyes. In fact, it was the North American male missionaries that often

had to seclude their wives when they travelled into the interior of Korea because the number of people that gathered around impeded their efforts. However, Korean over-interest in Westerners was also an advantage for the missions efforts in Korea. The groups of Koreans that would gather around the homes of the missionaries were the ideal target audience because they were open to change. So while the deeply Confucian nature of many Koreans made change difficult, some Koreans saw clear connections between the old and the new.\(^\text{22}\)

Since foreign missionaries were allowed into Korea to provide Western education and health care to they could touch Koreans on a personal level. King Kojong had unintentionally given the missionaries a direct line to influence the minds and bodies of his people. Missionaries were able to convert without blatant proselytization because they had a bond of trust with the Korean people as their teachers and healers. Dr. Rosetta Sherwood Hall found an easy audience with Koreans because of her valiant efforts as a doctor.\(^\text{23}\) Likewise, Horace Allen gained the trust of the Korean people by saving the life of Queen Min’s son. Mattie Tate worked tirelessly and found it easy to spread the gospel among Korean women because people were interested in her since she was a foreign woman. In her first year after founding Ewha School, Mary Scranton had many struggles because Confucian society was “patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal” meaning that everyone blindly heeded the father and all inheritance went to sons. However, within a decade, Korean women and their families realized their liberation and their education were inherently linked and began to send their daughters to school in larger numbers.\(^\text{24}\) In this way, missionaries quickly began to break down the barriers of Confucianism.

\(^\text{23}\) Hall, Rosetta Sherwood. The Life of Rev. William James Hall: medical missionary to the slums of New York, pioneer missionary to Pyong Yang, Korea.
However, breaking down a centuries old religious tradition was not simple; in 1392 Confucianism became the official political ideology of the Korean state. The Korean government propagandized the idea of having shrines in every home and ordered strict ancestor veneration. That being said, Confucianism served as a spiritual guide in Korea, not a religious institution. The Korea the missionaries would have encountered in 1884 was strictly ordered by the system of Confucianism but Koreans were still in dire need of a religious structure to guide their souls. By 1900, Korea was a nation at risk from Russia and increasingly from its East Asian neighbor, Japan. A Korea which was on the way to forming its own national identity faced the threat of takeover from both nations who both saw potential for financial gain on the Korean peninsula. Also, both Japan and Russia struggled beneath the pressure of keeping up with the worldwide imperial race of the nineteenth century. In the midst of political turmoil and the natural changes of being part of a rapidly modernizing world, the people of Korea needed something to hold on to and Christianity was one such option which obviously fit the bill for many Koreans.

However, considering the strongly Confucian element of Korean society, missionaries needed to put in a bit more effort than simply arriving on the scene with an alternative to strict Confucianism in order to convert Koreans in earnest. The early missionaries struggled to deal with the necessity of Koreans to practice geomancy. “Geomancy is an important practice of every major religion of Korea in regulating relationships with the environment.” Even Korean men who had never shown filial piety during their father’s lifetimes would strain themselves to find the ideal gravesite for him. Confucian teaching taught young men that they stood to prosper even if their filial piety did not begin until after their father’s death. Notably, this type of effort was not considered to be necessary for a deceased mother.

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Confucianism taught that a Korean wife needed to be completely devoted to her husband’s family. Even in name, Korean women were always referred to in terms of their relation to a man. Depending on their stage in life, they were always this man’s daughter, this man’s wife, and eventually a widowed woman would become this man’s mother. Christian missionaries tried to be wise in the way they handled the limited rights of Korean women. They worked within the context that Korean women would only use their education as homemakers because they were expected to be good wives and mothers. Korean women were not taught to be American women but rather, ideal Korean women. After they completed their educations, they returned to the home but hopefully as Christian women who would influence their families to the Christian path as well. Koreans believed that for women to have this level of devotions to their families was commendable.

However, geomancy was an issue that went beyond the familial level in Korea. Good Confucian scholars from the tenth century always were required to have a strong handle on geomancy to aid the Confucian state. Korean geomancy taught that only an ethical person could find an auspicious place. Confucian shrines and academies were required to be in geomantically ideal locations. As further evidence that missionaries to Korea could never rid Korea of the prevalence of geomancy, it is practice in Korea to this day even among Koreans who also practice Christianity fervently. During the colonial period in Korea (1910-1945) Japan tried to rid Korea of its geomantic practices. To standardize everything, Japan wanted all Koreans to be buried in public cemeteries. After colonial rule ended, the Korean government did not recognize geomancy as an official burial practice but Koreans continued anyway. During the Korean War, interest in geomancy waned because of extreme poverty which did not allow Koreans to put the money and effort into geomancy that it required. However, in the late twentieth century when
South Korea became a wealthy nation, geomancy regained its popularity especially among the wealthiest South Koreans. Today even the most well-known Korean politicians practice geomancy.26

Especially for the older generation of Koreans, there is no conflict between maintaining traditional Korean practices and beliefs and simultaneously being a good Christian. In many denominations of the early Korean church, the missionaries allowed these to remain as gray areas because they preferred mass conversion over trying to rid Koreans of these traditional tendencies. However, merging traditional Korean beliefs and Christianity became another issue; the early Korean Church divided over. However, because they were not done away with entirely, Confucian practices like geomancy are an essential part of the practice of every major religion in Korea including Christianity.

Another Confucian idea which could never quite be purged from the psyche of the Korean Christian is intense family values. The Confucian Korean is immensely connected to their blood relatives and thus would relate to and appreciate the Christian mandate to honor their father and mother. However, in Confucian society, the idea of family did not extend beyond bloodlines. Ironically, during Biblical times the idea of family was quite similar. Men were expected to feel a sense of familial obligation to their blood relatives but not toward their neighbors. However, Jesus single-handedly subverted the notion of family boldly asserting before the religious leaders, His blood relatives, and the crowd “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:35, NRSV) Although the idea of what it means to do the “will of God” is debatable, the statement makes it obvious that Jesus had a new idea of what a family was intended to be and that idea had nothing to do with blood relations. Jesus intended

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to pick His own inner circle by hand and those He wanted would come to Him when He called them by name. The point is demonstrated in Mark 3:13 when “He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.” (NRSV) The people who were obedient to Jesus’ call became His new family and those who did not follow Jesus were not considered to be part of His family. This negates the concept of the Confucian family within the context of Christianity because a true Christian would have to turn away from the Confucian idea of family in order to truly follow Jesus; making this transition has been a major challenge for Korean Christians.

Much like it was for the religious leaders during Jesus’ time, it would have been a real challenge for Koreans to relate to the idea of being family in Christ Jesus and it would have been introduced into Korean society for the first time through the preaching of the missionaries. Unlike the Korean family, Jesus taught that the Christian family is not based on kinship, unless of course one’s blood relatives choose with them to follow the “will of God”. This new family crossed all ethnic, cultural, and social boundaries in a way the homogeneous Korean family never would. Since the Gospel of Mark was the first to be translated into Korean, Koreans would have read Jesus’ notion of family but perhaps could not really understand because the idea was too foreign to them. As Jesus’ familial gesture was odd in His own time and the people around Him could not fully comprehend, so it is difficult in Korean society to turn away from one’s earthly family to do the will of God. If Jesus had come to Korea in the late nineteenth century, they would have probably been just as baffled and perhaps even angered by His irreverent behavior toward His blood relatives as it is written that people in biblical times were. The necessity to break societal ties with the biological family on the basis of faith could quite possibly be the one factor to prevent a fervent Korean Christian from becoming whole-heartedly
devoted to the Church. Staying connected to the biological family was a deep seeded societal value in nineteenth century Korea and despite the popularity of Christianity in Korea, it has clearly remained so to this day.

These passionate family values were potentially even more damaging to Christian beliefs because they often extended to ancestor veneration. Koreans believed that people’s ancestors lived on through their descendants. So prosperity for the ancestors also meant prosperity for the descendants. The early Christian Church in Korea divided over the issue of ancestor veneration. The more conservative churches would not accept any Koreans who practiced ancestor veneration. Other more liberal churches would accept them with every intention of slowly purging them of the practice.

A much less deep seeded but equally important component of Korean spiritual life is shamanism. Shamanism is far less intellectual than Confucianism and is far from being the root of Korean social life, but it was popular during the time that the early North American Christian missionaries came to Korea. It has also experienced a major revival in recent years and there is at least one university, Chung-Ang University, in Seoul at which one of the main areas of study is Shamanism. First of all, it is important to note that just as Christianity in Korea has its qualms with the impassioned charismatic nature of Korean Shamanism, so too does Korean Confucianism. Confucianism dislikes the lack of order which is constantly evidenced in the practice of Shamanism. When compared to Confucianism and Christianity, Shamanism is a senseless practice which focuses on the soul and personal feelings above any sort of doctrine or even logic. Shamans realized that Shamanism was not appealing to people who belonged to these traditions and some shamans even practiced other more highly respected religions like Buddhism or Confucianism to add to their own authority as shamans among Koreans. It is also important to
note about shamanism from the outset that the most prominent Korean shamans were female which also contributed to their lack of credibility since there are only a couple reported female Confucian scholars since most women did not have time for serious scholarship between the demands of caring for a family. Kang Chongiltang (1772) and Im Yunjidang were both considered to be notable female Confucian scholars but neither woman had children which would have been frowned upon by Koreans whether they practiced Confucianism or did not.\(^{27}\) Shamanesses were considered to have a strong ability to connect with the spirits; Korean women were also respected healers in Korean society. Shamanism has always had trouble surviving in Korea. It was demonized by Christian missionaries, driven underground during the colonial period, and banished by the military government after the Korean War.\(^{28}\) Shamanism, moreso than Confucianism was reactive to what was actually happening in the world. Shamans have no set of scriptures that they follow and no set of deities they worship. Some venerate Jesus, during the pro-American period of the 1970s some took on General MacArthur as their deity. Shamans acted out of passion and their real life experiences and helped themselves to make sense of what was happening in the lives of the Korean people. This need to use spirituality to make sense of the world would have helped shamanesses to relate to Christianity. Christian missionaries put in extra effort to help Koreans deal with the reality of being Korean in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That reality involved low health standards, a growing sense of self, and the brutality of colonial rule at the hand of Japan. Korea’s experience with a constant feeling of powerlessness and the brutality of war during these centuries made Christianity and Shamanism feasibility beliefs for Koreans to cling to in the midst of the confusion and desperation. Even today, it is difficult to be a strictly eschatological


\(^{28}\) The Creation of the World and Human Suffering
Christian pastor in Korea, most pastors at least hint at the promise of prosperity since Korean shamanism speaks to the this-worldliness of Koreans.

Among older women, Shamanism is experiencing a revival according to a 2007 New York Times Article on the revival of Shamanism in “tech-savvy South Korea”. While for decades Shamanistic rituals had to be performed privately, shamanesses can now perform in public and apparently are highly sought after in busy Seoul. Tradition-minded Koreans, even Koreans who are Christians flock to the shamanesses to aid them in everything from personal relationships to business to political careers. With the internet boom, shamanesses have actually profited greatly by creating websites to attract people to use their services. The Korean Worshippers Association which represents shamans says that in South Korea there are an estimated 300,000 shamans per every 160 South Koreans. Because Shamanism agrees to take on figures from other faiths and even figures in popular culture as deities, in spite of having been driven underground several times, Shamanism has never faded away.\(^{29}\)

Generationally, Koreans are experiencing the relationship between Korean traditional religions and Christianity in very different ways. The generation that remembers the colonial period and the Korean War has found unique ways to combine their “Koreanness” and their newfound Christian beliefs. Wellesley College alumna Arcadia Kim, a Korean American living in Seoul, explained to me that her mother-in-law, a fervent Christian, also clings to superstition. She enjoys telling people their fortunes for the coming year, warning them of the bad and good things to come. However, she also wakes up early every morning with her husband to read the Bible together. Arcadia questions her mother-in-law as to how she can simultaneously hold to superstitious beliefs and be a devout Christian. However, she explains her superstitious nature by

explaining that she is Korean. For the older generation living in Korea it seems that Korean tradition and Western Christianity meet but do not even feel a need to reconcile themselves to one another. They are simply expected to coexist with one another. However, the younger generation of Korean Christians, those born in South Korea in the decades following the end of the Korean War, act more in line with what the missionaries hoped would emerge in Korea. They see Korean traditional religions as being just that, traditional. Obviously, the Confucian past emerges in their diligence in school and respect for elders but Confucian code does not dictate their lives. Except in the charismatic Pentecostal churches, shamanism plays next to no role in Korean Christian Churches.
Korean Christianity in War and Peace

By the turn of the twentieth century, Korea was a nation on its way to modernization. In the two years before the turn of the century, streetcars, electric lights, foreign buildings, a modern hospital, and a bridge over the Han River were introduced in Seoul which were all clear signs that this was a nation in preparation for some sort of economic boom in the twentieth century. Korea had been a stabilized nation politically and socially in the nineteenth century. While Korea was far from being a nation of economic equality as there were a very wealthy landed aristocracy and then the poorer masses, before the colonial era pointed out the major socio-economic differences between Koreans, they were a group of extremely united people. It was this high level of centralization and stabilization that was allowing Korea to modernize at the same rate of Japan. Korea was rapidly accepting Western education, medicine, style, and unlike Japan, Korea was even finding ways to accept Western religion wholeheartedly.

Japanese Colonial Rule in Korea from 1910-1945 worked substantially to modernize Korea for the needs of the Empire. However, even without the influence of Japan, Korea still would have been one of only a few developing countries to modernize in a seemingly “miraculous” way during the 1970s and 1980s. In spite of Korea’s proven ability to modernize independently, Japanese Colonial Rule certainly sped the process of modernization there even more than it did in its other colonies because Korea became heavily engaged in the industrial side of Japan’s Total War with the Western World. Korea played such a large role because the infrastructure Korea already had in place enabled Koreans to come out of the rice fields and to work in the factories and companies which began to emerge at the time. Although Koreans, especially those in elite positions, did seize on the opportunities that were available during the colonial era by becoming entrepreneurs, working in companies, and becoming educated Koreans
managed to remain fairly independent during the process. Even though there were Koreans who were able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by Japanese colonialism, Koreans one the whole were rightfully angered by Japanese claims to have modernized Korea. While total war might have modernized Korea had an exceptionally quick rate, the infrastructure to do so was established by Koreans. The railroads extending from South Manchuria, the highways, and streets, and imposing modern buildings to house Japanese officials were, in the minds of Koreans, for the benefit of the colonizers, not Koreans. In no way, they argued, were these changes an indicator of improvement and progress for Koreans facilitated by the Japanese.\(^\text{30}\)

The Japanese tried to educate select Koreans, especially those from the most influential Korean families. However, the education of Koreans came at a price to the Japanese Empire. After achieving the top levels of education at Japanese and Korean schools and yet still being treated as second class citizens, young Koreans’ minds often became planted with the seeds of revolution. Ironically, it was education afforded to Koreans by the Japanese that led to the most intense strands of Korean nationalism because in spite of being educated, these Koreans still had trouble finding the best employment and increasing their societal status. Generally speaking, Koreans were more resistant to colonial rule than the Taiwanese. Korean resistance can be linked to their education in Japanese schools but in reality, the origin of the resistance was probably Korea’s bitter resentment about losing its independence. Korea had been completely independent before colonization whereas Taiwan had never tasted independence before it was unexpectedly acquired by Japan in 1895. At the time of its annexation, Korea was just as modernized as Japan was at the time so Japan had to work to modernize itself more quickly after annexation to continue to assert its superiority. However, the main reason Korea was susceptible to Japan was

\(^\text{30}\) The Claim of the Korean people and nation for liberation from Japan and for the reconstitution of Korea as an independent state: memorandum Page 6.
because it was not militarily strong enough to defend itself from foreign encroachment. Japan had already begun to encroach on Korea’s sovereignty after the Sino-Japanese War. In 1895, Japanese agents murdered Queen Min in Seoul. As early as 1905 after winning the Russo-Japanese War, Japan established its protectorate over Korea under the terms of the Treaty of Portsmouth. Under the Taft-Kastura Agreement the United States recognized that Japan had a legitimate claim to Korea and President Theodore Roosevelt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for facilitating the negotiations in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Korea felt betrayed both by their Japanese neighbors that colonized them and by the United States for allowing Japan to colonize Korea.\(^{31}\) Traditional Korean religions, especially shamanism which was primarily practiced by women in Korea, were driven underground. Christianity, which was seen as a threat to Japanese authority was also driven underground although many missionary schools could not be closed because Japan feared the wrath of the West. Koreans were encouraged to worship at Shinto shrines. Although Shinto was not the primary religion of Japan, it did serve to glorify the Japanese state and Meiji Japan had promoted its practice. For a nation like Korea where a unique spirituality was beginning to emerge, the mandate to worship at Shinto shrines was an extremely demeaning one. Ordering Koreans to turn away from their Korean spirituality in favor of a more Japanese spirituality was yet another factor that worked to emasculate the Korean state.\(^{32}\)

Korea struggled under its colonial oppressor from August 22, 1910 when the Korean Emperor granted the Japanese government the right to rule Korea until the Peace Conference in Paris, France in 1919 following World War I in relative silence. However, the end of World War I and the subsequent Fourteen Points issued by United States President Woodrow Wilson which

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argued that all people had an inherent right to Self-Determination signified to Koreans and other colonized people all over the world what should have been the end of their torment under colonial rule. It seemed that the Western world had finally seen the evils of empire; unfortunately, that was not the case. In a hopeful effort, at the Paris 1919 conference, Koreans issued a memorandum in their own defense arguing that Korea ought to be an independent state once again. To Korea and others, it seemed that the tide of the world was finally shifting to a fairly anti-imperialist stance and that colonized countries had allies in the Western world. However, as the negotiations in Paris unfolded, they only served to further entrench or create more divisions than already had existed. Although the League of Nations had been President Wilson’s idea, the United States demonstrated a blatant disinterest in joining that type of organization and it quickly became obvious that the anti-imperialist stance could be called weak at best.

In spite of United States government disinterest, in its memorandum Korea boldly argued for its rights. Notably, it seems that North American missionary friends of Korea in 1919 were helping them to bear down under their struggle and did not discourage their frantic nationalist movements but they did not do much to advocate for Koreans to the United States government or any other Western power for that matter. Although Korea critiqued Japan’s use of war for imperial gain, the critique was ironic because Korea later took advantage of Japanese warlike behavior for its own financial gain. As early as 1919, there were already a small number of elites in Korea that were taking advantage of the new opportunities afforded to them by Japanese colonial rule and after the nationalist movement was suppressed in March, even more Korean elites decided to do likewise. After the massive Korean revolt in 1919, the Japanese government consciously worked tirelessly to divide the Korean people based on social status even more than
it had before to dissuade them from ever being able to group together as Korean people again against Japanese aggression. However, this was not an easy task since in 1919 the general Korean sentiment toward Japan was extremely negative. In the memorandum, Korea likened Japan to Prussia (The German Empire) since these were the two nations which by 1919 were building empires because they had “profited greatly from the business of war”.

Because Japan accepted the President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Korea argued that having complete sovereignty over the people of Korea violated the Fourteen Points and that the conference must make the 1910 treaty void. In the memorandum, Koreans argue that Korea had been completely independent for 4200 years before Japanese encroachment in 1910 and that many ideas from China and Korea had actually nourished the Japanese mind and now enabled the greatness Japan was achieving.

Additionally in the memorandum, Koreans expressed their rage over the Japanization of Korea during the colonial period. Koreans were likewise indignant over the loss of everything Korean in the younger generation. The Japanese colonial government in its attempts to make Korea more Japanese abolished the teaching of Korean language in schools and replaced it completely with Japanese language. Likewise, although the Koreans had a rich and long history, the teaching of Korean history was prohibited. These were prohibited under the penalty of imprisonment, torture, banishment, or worse. During Japanese colonialism, the memorandum also claims that wealthy Koreans lost control over their own financial affairs. Nearly every wealthy Korean had a Japanese overseer in his home to control property and finances on his behalf. Additionally, Koreans who had money held in Japanese banks could not withdraw large sums at one time unless they told the Bank the purpose for which the money was to be used. In

33 The Claim of the Korean people and nation for liberation from Japan and for the reconstitution of Korea as an independent state: memorandum Page 2.
its attempts to oppose Japanese authority in Korea, it also supported Western authority which Japan firmly rejected. Korea was so eager to rid itself of Japanese oppression that even the colonization of India by the British appeared to be far superior in the eyes of Koreans. One portion of the memorandum even rejects Japanese control of Korea because it was clear that Japan’s strategy was to claim dominion over China and the memorandum opposed this, not because of the imperialist threat Japan was posing in Asia but because the behavior threatened French authority in Asia. Although Korea claimed to make this argument in support of Europe as a whole, it barely conceals the desperation Koreans were feeling nine years into harsh colonial rule, an experience of dependence which was completely new to Korea.

Korea felt the Japanese colonizers spreading Japanese identities over the Korean people like its new religion through the imposition of state Shinto, intense assimilation efforts, and the violent rejection of Christianity and Korean traditional religions. The 1919 memorandum came to the strong conclusion that Japanese imperialism was not just a threat to Asia, it was “opposed to the interest of the world and to the moral progress of the human race”, a conclusion the Western world did not come to terms with until seeing the brutality of the Japanese Empire in China and the Pacific almost twenty years later in 1937.\(^\text{34}\) To justify their assertion that Japan was immoral, in the memorandum, the Korean government argues that the rampant spread of prostitution in Japan demonstrates their high level of deviance. In the West, the memorandum argues, prostitution pervades the cities, but in Japan, it pervades both the cities and the villages. According to the memorandum, not only were the nouveau riche clients of the geisha, so too were the village school teachers. To the Koreans this was despicable behavior because it was counter to any concept of family values. Not surprisingly, it was Korean aversion to immorality

\(^{34}\) The Claim of the Korean people and nation for liberation from Japan and for the reconstitution of Korea as an independent state: memorandum Page 10.
and in particular to deviant sexual activity against women which the Japanese used against Koreans during World War II through the systematic use of Korean women from all walks of life as comfort women for the Japanese soldiers. Using Korean women who were the daughters, wives, and sisters of Korean men as sex workers in spite of their protestations was yet another way Japan emasculated Korean men. For Korean men and women, this usurpation of the Korean family, which of course was a staple of Korean society, as discussed in the previous chapter, was the greatest pain colonialism caused and an enduring spirituality and a move toward a less biological family and toward the Family of God instead began to emerge in Korean consciousness to manage the unique pain Koreans now encountered.

Japanese policies thoroughly infuriated Korean Christians in 1934 because the colonial policy required Koreans to use the Japanese language, to participate in Shinto rituals, and to honor the Emperor of Japan and ancient warrior heroes. This was another attempt to force Koreans to assimilate to the idea of being Japanese although they could always be excluded from Japanese society in spite of how well assimilated they were because they were not ethnically Japanese. The assimilation policies seemed to be a blatant attempt by the Japanese colonial government to further drive the Christian Church in Korea underground and exemplify celebration of the state instead because they made the Japanese culture and state a new god that had to be revered above all else.\(^{35}\) In the midst of the darkness that settled over Korea when the new Governor General of Korea, filled the streets with Japanese soldiers when the protectorate was established in 1905, Christianity was slowly making its mark on Korea, mostly through the presence of the missionary schools. Missionary families like the Underwood family and the Appenzeller family were constant presences in Korea throughout all the events that occurred in

Korea over the course of the next thirty five years and many became good friends of Koreans and even tried to stay on in Korea through the Korean War.

Although the decades of the colonial era and especially the wartime empire were often dark and tragic for missionary families as they frequently fell from grace with Koreans because of the Japanese propaganda against Christianity, through schools like Ewha and Yonsei, Western missionaries always maintained some sort of hold on Koreans minds and hearts even in the midst of three tragic wars. On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1885 a yet to be married Horace Underwood and the Appenzeller family arrived in Incheon, a city outside of Seoul, to begin their ministry in Korea. After Underwood married, his family stayed on in Korea for decades and Henry Appenzeller’s family also planted roots in Korea as well. The Underwood family still remains active in Korea to this day especially at Yonsei University. Horace Underwood’s grandsons were useful translators to the United States military since they had been raised in Korea speaking in both English and Korean. During the wars they used their translation skills to aid negotiations and were great allies of the Korean people.

However, the first generation of missionaries to Korea lived with a certain level of confidence as the United States was quickly becoming one of the most powerful countries the world during the nineteenth century. Although their livelihood was certainly better than their Korean counterparts, it should be noted that even the missionaries were not exempt from tragedy as they were often arrested for aiding Korean Christians and Lilias Underwood even met her death housing a nationalist.36 However, the story in Korea was different for their most of their children and grandchildren who struggled during the Japanese Colonial Era alongside the Koreans if they chose to stay in Korea because it was not until about the 1930s that Japanese

imperialism really began to reach its height. Although they did see liberation briefly, by 1950 Korea once again fell into war, once again, having been divided because of the encroachment of outside forces. Missionaries who those who stayed on in Korea were forced to face the destruction and division of the Korean War.\textsuperscript{37}

In spite of the obvious problems posed by Japanese colonial rule in Korea and subsequent Korean resistance, Japanese colonial rule especially during World War II served to transform Korea into a modern nation even by the Western standards at the time in that Korea became filled with industry. Because of the emergence of a new economy, Korea ceased to be a nation where land ownership alone determined the wealthy class. Heavy industry was quickly emerging as the new commerce of Korea and having a steady job in a factory, being an engineer, or being an entrepreneur became more likely sources of Korean wealth than land ownership alone. Because total war engulfed the Empire, Korea went from being a land of agriculturalists and suddenly became a nation of soldiers and individuals who served as architects of a larger empire.

Koreans suffered under even more brutal assimilation policies during wartime Japan than they had in the initial years of Japanese imperialism because Japan scrambled to consolidate its power to achieve victory in the worldwide war. The colonies were the easiest starting place for Japan’s efforts to unify the empire. Since their authority as a colonizer was weakening in an increasingly anti-imperialist world, the Japanese government drastically changed its policy and sought to create both citizens and colonial subjects who were willing to die for the Japanese emperor. On top of the educational reforms that had already occurred, Koreans were also expected to join the Japanese military and even to adopt Japanese surnames. Christianity posed a major threat to the Japanese government mostly because the Judeo-Christian God was giving

Korean Christians a new source of identity in the image of God while the Japanese government felt a need especially during the war to teach Japanese on the main islands and the colonized people that they were in the image of the Japanese emperor.

As World War II raged in Europe and the Pacific, the Japanese colonial government continued its intense policies of assimilation and did not let up on the requirements to worship at Shinto shrines. In 1937, Japan invaded China and imposed tighter controls on Koreans. In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated for a third term and prepared the United States for war while ordering the Japanese to halt their level of aggression. However, in 1941, Japan did the exact opposite by bombing the United States military base at Pearl Harbor as an assertive declaration of war against the United States. After that act of blatant aggression against the United States, total war began in Korea and remaining Westerners, especially those from the United States, were evicted from Korea by the Japanese authorities and many missionary families, especially those with children, left Korea. In 1943, the Allied Powers met in Cairo and decided that once Japan was defeated, Korea would be granted its independence “in due course”. It became obvious after the war was over that protecting Korea was not a top priority for the Allied Powers and that instead Korea would be used as a fighting ground for the Soviet Union and the United States at the beginning of the Cold War. In spite of Western interests in Korea, it did achieve about two years of relative independence.\(^\text{38}\)

When the Japanese colonial era ended suddenly in 1945, it left behind a nation that was war-torn, politically divided, and unsure of how to continue the process of modernization independently of the assistance of any foreign power. Because of the Japanese presence in Korea had been politicized as early as 1920 in the form of intellectual debates in Korean newspapers

and magazines and it grew in the 1930s as Koreans were either agents or victims of the policies of the Government-General. However, the colonial era also left behind Korean people who were grounded in what they felt it meant to be Korean. However, clearly not all Koreans agreed on the meaning of being Korean. Most Koreans had no way of knowing how long the Japanese colonial era would last; they simply knew that they needed to find a way to survive and in fact, it was Christianity that taught them to be patient under the authority of their oppressors. However, some of the elite Koreans had allied themselves with Japanese authority since Japan was never expected to lose the war against the West and Koreans needed to find a way to survive under a rapidly changing status quo. To protect themselves from any further Japanese aggression, many Koreans collaborated with the Japanese and many Korean elites had seen the benefit in joining the Japanese ideologically. Therefore, many Koreans saw their new potential leaders after the end of Japanese colonialism as being “tainted”.

In certain parts of Korea, intense communism and re-appropriation of land was idealized which frustrated the wealthiest members of society who often had the most land. An emerging leader, Kim Il-Sung, who had become a war hero in Manchuria and held Soviet leanings, exemplified this ideal. However, there was also a more democratic school of thought in Korea, especially among the wealthiest people in the south who had significant plots of land they sought to protect. That being said, now that Korea was free again most Koreans agreed with creating distance from Japan and movements that had been driven underground during the colonial era quickly reemerged, more powerful than they had ever been before. The Christian Church in Korea was growing and was stronger than ever. In spite of its instability, Korea was a new nation and was ready to stop constantly becoming subject to the encroachment of outside forces. They
were fearful especially of any powers that might attempt to gain a colonial relationship with the Korean peninsula.\(^{39}\)

Although Korea was now free from Japanese encroachment, it was now to enter an era of recolonization at the hands of Western powers that ironically were the same nations that had only a few years earlier led the condemnation of Japanese imperialism. However, by the late 1940s, the Soviet Union and the United States found themselves in the same conundrum Russia and Japan had been in when Japan gained control over the peninsula in 1905. The Soviet Union believed that especially the northern part of Korea was strategically important land for it to possess and at first the United States saw no issue with allowing the Soviet Union complete control over Korea but after everything played out in East Asia and the United States played a larger role than the Soviet Union had in defeating Japan, it wanted a larger piece of the pie in East Asia and saw Soviet control of the Korean peninsula as a threat to that control.

In 1945, Allied leaders planned a trusteeship for Korea and the United States and the Soviet Union were allowed to divide Korea temporarily along the 38th Parallel into North and South zones temporarily. Of course, the only recently liberated Koreans completely rejected the idea of trusteeship. In spite of agreements that Korea should be free after the tragedy of World War II, President Theodore Roosevelt wanted to establish a forty to fifty year trusteeship there and the government of Russia was not opposed to the idea. Finally, the decision was made in Moscow to have a four power trusteeship of Korea for up to five years shared by the United States and the Soviet Union and the two powerful new world leaders were supposed to work together to establish a unified Korean government.\(^{40}\) Clearly, they both protected their own opposing political interests and failed abysmally to unify their new trusteeship. By 1946, there


was all-out conflict in Korea between the north and the south. In the North, Russia was supporting a communist regime and it quickly emerged under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, a thirty three year old military hero who was known for his bravery in Manchuria. In the South, the United States supported right-wing elements and campaigned to suppress the leftists as their Korean leader, they chose seventy year old Syngman Rhee who had been educated at Harvard and Princeton and denounced the Soviet Union, Korean communists, and any group that sided with Korean communists. In 1948 after the newly minted United Nations held sanctioned elections, the Republic of Korea was established in South Korea under authoritarian president Syngman Rhee. The United States and its allies recognized the Republic of Korea as the only legitimate government of Korea. In retaliation against this government, the North declared itself the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and a Communist dictatorship began to govern under their first premier, Kim Il-sung. By 1950, North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung was calling upon Stalin in Russia and Mao in China for military support in an attempt to reunite Korea by force.

In spite of the turmoil Koreans faced during the brutal civil war in the 1950s, it was also a time of self-discovery for many Koreans who developed new political identities for themselves. Those in the North who were staunchly anti-Communist fled to South Korea to protect their personal freedoms. South Korea was quickly becoming a champion for developing nations that switched to a market economy during the 1950s and a beacon of fledgling democracy. Some of the runaways became the charismatic leaders of the church movements that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century in South Korea. Examples of such men are David Yonggi Choi, co-founder and senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church on Yeiodo Island in Seoul, South Korea and Sun Myung Moon, founder of the now international Unification Church also

based in Seoul, South Korea. Resistance to the Christian Church and attempts to secularize Korea by the government spurred growth and expansion in the church instead and the Korean Church became staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-Communist.

Coming out of the Korean War, South Koreans knew clearly what type of nation they intended to be. This new sense of self was not at all influenced by the United States since the United States withdrew its troops from the region in 1948 and 1949 and allowed Koreans to fend completely for themselves in spite of seeing the ensuing conflict which the United States had a large hand in starting.\(^43\) In the early years following the War, the separation of families on both sides of the 38th Parallel was clearly a problem for South Koreans but both North and South Korea were both independent for the first time in forty three years and were free to develop their own unique identities and they did exactly that.

South Korea clung to a staunchly anti-Communist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Japanese ideology in light of all the challenges the peninsula had faced since 1900. This political ideology bleeds over into their practice and understanding of Christianity as well. South Korean Christians are still extremely nationalist and paternalistic to this day. They cling to traditional Korean practices; it seems that almost anything the Japanese rejected during the colonial as found a place within Korean Christian practice. South Korea has independently made the adjustments to form their own unique brand of Korean Christianity during Korea’s period of independent modernization. At the same time, it is clear that Korea is clinging to the techniques of entrepreneurship learned during Japanese colonialism. Economically, South Korea has followed the same path Japan did to achieve economic stability during the 1920s to achieve its own economic miracle in the 1970s and 1980s and economic prosperity booms in the more urban

areas of South Korea today. At the same time that South Korea was striving to become a more
Christian nation, it quickly also developed a competitive capitalist and market oriented economy.

Since 1980, South Korea has begun to look like an entirely new nation. South Korea had
emerged from eighty years of chaos, riots, revolutions, and war as a modern nation with a unified
and confident sense of self. A mere one hundred years after the Protestant missionaries first
began their evangelizing in Korea and a mere seventy years after Japanese colonialists descended
upon Korea and mocked its backwardness, South Korea was placed on a pedestal among
developing countries. In recent Korean history, Korean men had been emasculated and
demeaned by the behavior of Japanese colonialists in World War II and the subsequent United
States and Soviet rule during the Korean War. Yet now, Korean men emerge as paternalistic and
competitive actors in the global market. Korean women, especially Christian Korean women,
had begun to develop more confident self-identities even in the midst of the war as they have
been allowed to attend secondary schools and universities and many, like former Ewha Woman’s
College student and College President, Helen Kim, have even obtained the highest possible
levels of education. Although in modern Korea, Korean women often continue to stay at home to
raise families instead of working outside the home, Korean women are more liberated than they
have ever been. Today’s Korean women attend the top schools and universities both in Korea
and in Europe and North America. Both academically and socially Korea is now increasingly not
only encouraging but also mandating that Korean women to aspire for greatness in their
educations and professional careers.
Korean Spirituality on a Different Shore

In spite of the history of brutality on their own shores during the forty year Japanese colonial era, Koreans faced a completely new form of discrimination when they attempted to create better lives for themselves and their families by moving to the mainland United States, Hawaii, and Canada. Initially, many Koreans were cautious to immigrate to North America because it meant cutting off blood ties and tradition in Korea. However, many missionaries from North America told Koreans that immigrating to the United States was like going to the “land of milk and honey” as described in the Book of Exodus. Typically, in the United States, missionaries served as intermediaries for Koreans who were willing to migrate to the Plantations in Hawaii. North American missionaries promised the hope of new life to Korean emigrants and thus emigration and Christianity quickly became linked for Koreans although the image and their actual experience varied greatly.44

Koreans began to migrate in three main waves beginning in 1903. The first wave of migrants was young migrant male workers between the ages of seventeen and twenty five. The time was ripe for Korean migrant workers to begin to come to the United States since Chinese and Japanese men working in Hawaii were beginning to protest against their condition and a new source of labor was needed. However, many of these Korean migrant men were unwed and sought out Korean wives not only to do their domestic tasks but also to perform the domestic tasks of the young unwed men around them. Unwed women in Korea became a phenomenon which many scholars call “picture brides”. These young women were sent deceptive photographs of youthful migrant workers looking for wives but these eager young women arrived in Hawaii only to encounter men who had aged ten to twenty years since the photographs they sent had

been taken. In spite of the deception, many of the women married and stayed on in Hawaii suffering under the same Korean male taskmasters they had been so eager to immigrate to North America to escape. Koreans began to emigrate in much larger numbers in the 1950s and 1960s first to raise themselves out of poverty because they believed they could help their children receive better educations and better job prospects for the future and second to escape the tragedy the Korean War had left behind.

However, it is imperative to note the reasons for Asian migration which were completely selfless and subservient. At least initially, there was nothing Korean migrants sought to gain from the United States; they went to Hawaii and other parts of the United States because Americans wanted them to come. As Gary Okihiro points out, “Asians did not come to America, Americans went to Asia”. Americans went to Asia to conquer, colonize, and benefit from the wealth to be had there. It was when the United States decided to expand to San Francisco for its own financial gain beginning in 1848 that Chinese workers were imported to clear the land and build the railroad. It was under this pattern of migration that Asians began to join Africans, Indians, and Latino’s in their labor in the United States. Asian migrant workers initially faced the same labor-intensive struggle the other minorities of the United States were already dealing with. The second wave of migrants came in these post-Korean War years. Most of these migrants were the wives of American service men, war orphans, and students all in search of a better life. The third wave of migrants continue coming to this day in search of employment and education.

After immigrating to North America filled with great expectations about their new lives there, Koreans received a rude awakening. Koreans who had enjoyed positions of prominence in Asia now were relegated to living in the slums in the cities, being called racist names by ignorant North Americans, and constantly being jeered at by North Americans who implore them to “go back home” as though they could instantly return to Asia and rebuild their broken familial ties and home lives there. After emigrating, on trips back to Korea to visit friends and family, emigrants also received a rude awakening. They quickly learned that while they might not fit in with North Americans, they were no longer Korean either. So they were faced with a baffling conundrum, in North America, they were too Korean. From the perspective of their new neighbors, they ate strange foods, looked different, and spoke an odd and unfamiliar language. Yet in their homeland of Korea, they were too Western because they now spoke in English, wore Western style clothes, and were becoming accustomed to Western culture. The lack of acceptance from both sides forced this new generation of Korean North Americans to recognize the fact that they were “in between” two very different cultures. This transition was particularly difficult for the youngest emigrants who had spent the beginning of their lives in Korea and now had to endure the rest of their childhoods in public schools in the United States with intolerant young classmates and because of the reaction of the people back in Korea, they never had the option to simply go back home.47

Korean North American scholar, Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Japanese American professor Gary Y. Okihiro both argue that for Koreans especially, the Korean Church and a unique form of Korean spirituality is what liberated Koreans from han. Han is the prevailing feeling Koreans

have of unresolved resentment and an overwhelming urge to take revenge.\textsuperscript{48} The purpose of this chapter is to serve as one small piece of their liberation theology. It is a challenge to write a satisfactory liberation theology for Koreans in particular because of the form liberation theology has taken on among other nationalities of oppressed people. The birthplace of liberation theology is Central and South America where the majority of the population still struggles with completing primary school and where Communism became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The Liberation Theology applied to Central and South America accounts for the inability of the masses to read Scripture for themselves and additionally, their liberation theology has taken on a strongly socialist slant. Because of the lack of education in Latin America and the tendency toward socialism in theology, their form of Liberation Theology cannot be directly cross applied to provide comfort for the Korean North American experience.

The same Liberation Theology that works for one region of the world or one particular group of people cannot be directly cross applied to serve any other group. The Latin American and Korean experiences exhibit a few problematic differences. The first major difference is entirely political. In the 1970s, Central and South America was becoming an increasingly violent and socialist region of the world. Their increasingly socialist form of liberation theology turned the Jesus found in the Gospel of Luke into a passionate socialist who came to Earth to drive out economic corruption and to bring justice to the poor. As Jesus is reported as having said in the synagogue in Luke 4:18: “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’” (NRSV) Because of the Korean War experience which had divided Koreans between democracy in the South and communism in the North, it is not a source of liberation to South Korean

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
Christian emigrants to envision their Jesus as a socialist looking to usurp the social order. In light of their recent experience in Korea, they needed a Jesus who was much more loving and graceful and infinitely less political and they read Scripture in such a way that this was the Jesus they encountered. The second major difference can be attributed to high illiteracy rates in Central and South America. In Central and South America, the Bible was not the most important element of Liberation Theology for two main reasons. First because within the Latin American Catholic tradition, parishioners did not read the Bible in Church, a Europe-trained priest read each of the lessons aloud in their hearing and then preached an appropriate Catholic interpretation of the Scripture. Therefore, priests were the key to Scripture for many people and they could only base their faith on what they heard in church each Sunday. Second because many South and Central American Christians did not know Scripture simply because of high rates of illiteracy in that region in the 1970s.

Because of the inability to read the Scripture, many of the early liberationists in Latin America argued for the importance of the personal experience in Christian faith and encouraged people to relate Bible stories they knew to their personal lives. Although a significant number of the poor people of the region were illiterate they shared a struggle for equality both within their hierarchical Catholic Churches and their society which united them. Korean Christianity also would not have related to the idea of not using Scripture as a basis for everything. The Bible had long been translated into Korean and, quite in line with their Confucian propensity for learning; both Korean men and women knew the Scripture inside and out. Coming from a highly Confucian society where learning for the nation had been emphasized since the fifteenth century, by the 1970s when Koreans began to emigrate, illiteracy was uncommon so the Scripture has to be central in any Korean North American Liberation Theology.
The manifestation of Liberation Theology for Black Americans also is not entirely in line with the theology Korean American Christians are seeking but it comes much closer than Latin American Liberation Theology to resolving the issue of han. In his 1970 book, *A Black Theology of Liberation* James Cone pits “blackness” which he believes to be good in the eyes of God against “whiteness” which he sees as the evil oppressor of “blackness”. Of course, this theology both then and now comes off as being rather militant and divisive and in spite of what Grace Ji-Sun Kim describes as a “need to take revenge” among Korean Christians struggling with han Korean Christianity does not quite have that level of aggression. Similarly to James Cone’s theology, the Black Power Movement in the 1960s and 1970s likewise felt the need to separate people into categories of good and bad based on the color of their skin. For Black theologians in the 1970s, it was important to emphasize that they were God’s Chosen People just like the Israelites were in the Hebrew Bible. Korean North Americans felt less of a need to justify and theologize their very existence by calling themselves the Chosen People and as they had done during Japanese Colonialism, Korean migrants to the United States for the most part simply bore their new struggle with grace.

The 1970s militant approach of African American theologians was a direct backlash against the peaceable efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s. In his attempts to liberate Black Americans, King took a more inclusive approach, incorporating the United States’ poor whites into his mission. Dr. King was much more like the Jesus of the Gospel of Mark who openly preached in Mark 8:31 “that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed.” (NRSV) Dr. King’s final sermon had a similar deadly and prophetic tenor as though he had somehow become aware of his own imminent death. Dr. King was more willing than many of the other African American
theologians of his time to peacefully and quietly go the way of the cross. Korean North Americans took an approach to their liberation that was midway between the radical militarism of the Black Power Movement and the radical nonviolence of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Korean emigrants to North America could take great comfort in the message of the Book of Amos which Dr. King also used extensively as a scriptural reference during his own efforts in the Civil Rights Movement. The Old Testament Prophet, who was probably one of the early Prophets in Israel, prophesized the destruction of Israel which would have come as an unexpected message to God’s so-called Chosen People. However, God’s wrath burned against God’s own people because they mistreated foreigners and the poor. In immigrating to a country like the United States where the powers that be claimed to be Christians who had the utmost respect for the institution of the Church and the Bible, the Book of Amos would have come as a source of comfort to the new Korean population who themselves were becoming Christians in North America as they became more distant from the traditional Korean religions they were accustomed to being reliant upon.

Although the overall themes of the Book of Amos alone are enough to provide liberation for Korean emigrants to North America, there are particular verses that stand out as being particularly powerful sources of comfort. These verses in particular seem to say that God would take revenge even on the people God had led from oppression and into the Promised Land because of their mistreated the lowliest members of their society. God is a God of justice and expected all the people who claimed to follow Him to be just in the same way. For an emigrant, Amos 2:6-7 would make it pretty clear that if God was willing to destroy God’s son Israel, how much more would God be willing to exact powerful vengeance on North Americans for their indiscretions against emigrants. “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke
punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals-they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned.” (NRSV) The verses ironically speak specifically to the experience of the emigrants. They were underpaid migrant workers in Hawaii and lived in the poorest areas of major cities like Los Angeles to be mistreated by even the other minorities in the area. The Korean women either came as sex workers, wives of American servicemen, or picture brides so their bodies were abused just as the women described in verse seven. The prophet Hosea’s story also provides liberation for Korean sex workers. In the Book of Hosea, God metaphorically instructs Hosea to take a prostitute as his wife and with this woman he bears a son and daughter who both come to be shunned by God as punishment for the past indiscretions of Israel. This relationship is an accurate representation of the degraded lives and bodies of Korean women at the time and the treatment of their children. The liberation comes in Hosea 1:10 where these same formerly shameful children are once again accepted by God “Yet the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them ‘Children of the Living God’”. (NRSV) Throughout the Book of Hosea, his wife is unfaithful and must be punished for her lewd behavior. In spite of his love, she is an adulterous. However, Hosea, like God always woos her back. The entire theme of the Book is a reminder of God’s deep love even for Korean women whose bodies have been abused and misused by lovers, rapists, and husbands and for their young children who are so often born into lives of disgrace.

Amos 5:11 is yet another passage of liberation for emigrants living in low-quality homes, “Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built
houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.” (NRSV) Especially in areas like Los Angeles where the disparity between the very wealthy and the very poor (mostly African Americans and Korean Americans) was greatest, verses like these are a great source of liberation. The Prophet’s words in Amos 5:24 have been a source of liberation for African Americans and Korean North Americans alike. The Prophet reports that God says to Israel to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (NRSV) The power of the verse for a Korean emigrant lies in the fact that in this one verse, it becomes quite clear that above all, God wants justice for all people and that is enough to justify converting to Christianity on the new shores of North America.

Although Asian migrant workers to the United States could relate to the struggle of African Americans, the way these two radically different cultures were suddenly smashed together in the 1980s and 1990s in the impoverished urban areas of New York City and Los Angeles created extreme tension which boiled over on April 29, 1992, or Sa-i-gu as many Koreans remember it. The Korean Church is Seoul did the most work to help these two groups reconcile after the conflict occurred but it is clear that Koreans not only had to deal with the culture shock of no longer being the dominant race of a nation when they immigrated but they also had to deal with the new experience of living in a racial melting pot where there were other minorities they had to find ways to interact with peacefully. That being said African American Christians did not make the transition easy for their newly Christian neighbors. In Los Angeles, just as one conflict between the African American community and Korean shop owners ended in 1991, another would begin. By, 1992, young African American Rodney King was dead because of police brutality the likes of which shocked the world and eighteen year old Edward Song Lee died in a hail of bullets. The incidents made it clear that if Koreans were going to live peacefully
in the United States, they needed to find a way to identify themselves with the other oppressed people in the community. Okihiro reconciles the issue by stating “Yellow is emphatically neither white nor black, but insofar as Asians and Africans share a subordinate position to the master class, yellow is a shade of black, and black, a shade of yellow. We are a kindred people, African and Asian Americans.” When Koreans and African Americans learn to accept each other as kindred spirits, they will better be able to join one another in the struggle for liberation through the Word of God.

Korean North Americans use Korean Churches as a safe haven from North American society and to have a feeling of keeping their Korean heritage alive. The same conclusion cannot be drawn about the importance of the Catholic Church in Central and South America or the importance of the Black Church to African Americans. The Catholic Church in Central and South America is first of all, only attended by people from these regions and second of all, never loses its Western influence since its behaviors are strictly mandated by Rome. African culture is too broad to be fully encompassed within the Black Church not to mention the fact that most African Americans have never been to Africa and would not have many ideas of what encompasses African culture. However, a certain level of Korean syncretism remains within Korean North American Christianity. Korea itself is a multi-religious nation as many world religions have been able to coexist there side-by-side. In Korea, Confucianism, Shamanism, and Buddhism meet and each hold their own character. While Korean North American Churches are strictly Christological they also are heavily influenced by the religious traditions of Korea although they are often disproportionately influenced by the legacy of Confucian legacy which

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Korean men could not let go of by migrating to a new country. Because Confucianism came with Koreans to the United States, Koreans have not been able to release the same burden of han they struggled with in Korea.\textsuperscript{51} To be fully Christian in the United States, Korean North Americans have to retrieve the deep religious stories that the missionaries called unchristian. Kim argues that the History of Christianity itself shows the importance of inculturation. The Gospel was first preached by Jesus to the Jewish community so many members of the earliest Christian Churches were in fact Jewish Christians and they incorporated Judaism into Christianity. However, the Apostle Paul preached Christianity to the Gentiles so another form of Christianity emerged which was not in line with the Jewish laws. Finally, the Catholic Church emerged and while it is quite similar to Paul’s Churches for Gentiles, it really has become a world church which means that it is incorporating history and culture from throughout the world.\textsuperscript{52}

In spite of the powerful hold Confucianism has over Korean North American Christianity, among Koreans, growth in the Korean Christian Church in North America boomed after their immigration. By 1967, there were thirty Korean Churches in the United States but by 1989, a mere twenty two years later, there were 3000 Korean Churches in the United States. Even more compelling is that 79 to 80 percent of all Korean emigrants in 1989 said they were affiliated with a Korean North American Church and 40 percent of those Christians said that they had become Christians in the United States. However, in 1989 in Korea, church membership hovered at about fifteen to eighteen percent.\textsuperscript{53} In spite of the false advertisement by North American missionaries that the United States was a land of milk and honey, Korean spirituality

flourished and increased significantly after arriving to the United States. The growth of the
Korean Church after immigration has much to do with the new struggles faced in the United
States. Koreans in North America could not simply go have an encounter with a shaman in their
new city for guidance, but they needed to have some sort of access to the spiritual realm. Korean
emigrants often struggled to find employment in North America because their credentials in Asia
were called insufficient. In North America, even getting a factory job was no small feat for
Korean emigrants.\(^5^4\)

However, the Church gave hope in addition to being the only institution that helped them get in touch with being Korean again.

Two Christian images in particular were essential to Korean North American Christian
spirituality. First of all, Lady Wisdom was an essential symbol especially for Korean women.
Here it is important to note that while Korean North American women certainly benefitted from
the feminist movement already occurring throughout the United States, the white feminists could
not relate to unique the struggle of being a Korean North American woman. To be a Korean
feminist came with its own unique history and struggles. Their struggles included more than
being female in a male dominated society. In this way, as Chung Hyun Kyung points out in
*Struggle to the be the Sun Again* Korean women identify much more closely with the womanist
movement occurring in the African American community in the 1980s than they do with the
traditional feminist movement. In Korea most of these women had been the victims of sexism
alone since ethnic differences were a non-issue. While sexism is not a small burden in and of
itself, when these women immigrated to the United States the burden was only compounded.
They still were victimized by the sexism of Korean men who clung to Confucian values but they
additionally had to deal with racism and classism at the hands of North Americans. The wise

\(^5^4\) Kim, Grace Ji-Sun. *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology*. Cleveland, OH:
woman who appears in Proverbs 1-9 would have been a source of motivation for them as she appears throughout the nine chapters in a wide range of characters and roles. She initially emerges as the Old Testament prophet encouraging the people around her to seek deeper understanding. She does not wait for anyone to come to her, she take the initiative. In spite of what the author of Proverbs tell us this woman has to offer, people do not enthusiastically embrace her. In Proverbs Chapter 8, she is looked upon as the perfect teacher. However, her true value is because of her intimate connection with life. She constantly is trying to lure human beings to life; that is to walk in the way of wisdom. She is the prophet, the creator, the perfect teacher, the hostess. This woman would have been relatable to Korean Christians who see the image of Sophia as being similar to some Korean female religious images. She is useful in discerning and connecting with the works of Jesus.  

Second of all, Jesus himself is an important figure and completely essential part of Korean North American Christian spirituality. While Korean American Christians, unlike Black American Christians did not use Jesus as a tool of liberation to call themselves the new “Chosen people”, like Black Christians, they consider Jesus to be a friend of marginalized people. Although Jesus was marginalized, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus came to liberate marginalized people from their oppression. Korean emigrants are marginalized people; therefore, Jesus’ mission of liberation must extend to them as well. Chung Hyun Kyung has suggested the idea of a Shaman Christ who can release han. However, the image loses much of its power in North America where exposure to shamans is rare if not non-existent so that is a part of religious-historic tradition which most Korean emigrants can never tap into.

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These two symbols, Lady Wisdom and Jesus, along with the presence of the Bible provide Korean North Americans with their own liberating Christology. This Christology is so powerful because it is completely unlike the liberation theology that is espoused by the Central and South American or African American traditions. Korean’s pain emerges from a different source and they have their own tools with which they attempt to ease their pain. However, in all three liberation stories, three aspects are essential to achieve complete liberation. First, Jesus Christ must be present above all. Without sharing and applying the good news Jesus Christ brought to the world, there can be no Christian theology. Second, history and culture can never be forgotten. Korean emigrants struggled when they came to North America for fear of losing blood ties. Once broken, those connections can be difficult to retrieve but remembering that uniquely Korean history and culture is truly essential to being able to fully use Christianity as an agent of liberation in a new land. Third, Christian Scripture must play a central role. Obviously, illiteracy can limit the role that Scripture can play for each individual but the examples posed by all three of these movements for liberation effectively demonstrate that when the Bible is read and interpreted in small groups, it is an effective tool of liberation and that is certainly the case in the Korean tradition in which Scripture plays an extremely prominent role in Spirituality.

Living now in North America, Korean emigrants from all generations and both male and female have converted to Christianity in droves as a way to combat their intense feelings of han although as Kim points out, many Korean Christians brought their han with them by not letting go of the Confucian tendencies that systematically oppress women even within the safe haven of the Church. What is unique about Koreans who seek their liberation through their faith is their unwavering reliance on both the Bible and Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of their liberation. Christians of other ethnicities who have sought liberation have allowed personal history, culture,
and experience to become primary but Koreans, in spite of their tendency toward syncretism, keep Christ as the center in all things and love the Bible. Korean theologians like Chung Hyun Kyung and Grace Ji-Sun Kim have managed to set themselves free entirely through their reliance on Jesus Christ. As time goes by it will be important for other Koreans, both male and female, to follow the lead of these progressive theologians and use the Bible as their tool for liberation in North America. Koreans, especially those of the younger generation, must systematically fight the urge to conform to the will of the majority. When young Koreans remember their history, especially their religious and cultural history, the Word of God itself truly becomes a safe haven in which they can rest. The Bible creates a space both inside and outside the Church for Koreans to live as Korean North Americans, emphasis on the Korean, even within the constraints of North American society.\footnote{Kim, Grace Ji-Sun. The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2002.}
African American and Korean Experience and Christian Faith

Since I was raised in a 209 year old traditionally African American Church in Alexandria, Virginia, I see numerous parallels between the African American Church and the Korean Church in terms of the deep spirituality found in both churches and the importance of the unspoken historical shared experience that underlies every aspect of the worship. The African American Church is more than a century older than the Church in Korea so recent developments in the African American Church are a good indication of where the Korean Church might be headed in the next several decades. These churches both grew both in terms of membership and strength out of a struggle which threatened the root of their identities as ethnic groups. So it was the political problems happening around them that made these churches so prominent in their respective communities. These churches also share histories of being taught how they should worship and what their doctrine ought to be by white North Americans yet both managed formed churches known for their uniqueness in terms of the way they worship. This chapter strives to show the connections between “minority churches” and furthermore to project a likely future for the Korean Church based on the history of the African American Church.

African American Christians are all highly influenced by the patriarchal nature of the Christianity impressed upon them by white North American Christians. As was done in Korea during the missionaries’ efforts there, Christianity was seen as an ideal way to civilize African Americans and to encourage them to be satisfied with their lesser position in society. Much like Koreans did, however, African Americans took a liberationist approach to their Christianity fairly early on in their experience. In Southern states like Virginia, being a Christian prior to 1776 entailed being very Anglicized since the Episcopal Church dominated the landscape of Early American Christianity. However, by the 1760s, the Church of England was falling from
grace in the colonies. Around 1800, the Episcopal Church collapsed entirely and the religious landscape was now open to allow Methodists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, and Baptists to take places of prominence in areas where the Episcopal Church had previously flourished.58

Africans were first brought to the colonies as slaves to the British town of Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. However, the first African American Church was not established until 1773 in Silver Bluff, South Carolina. In the years following the collapse of the dominance of the Episcopal Church, efforts were made to control the way African Americans worshipped by having them attend churches led by white pastors while still ensuring that they were not allowed to enter the personal circles of whites. Within the Baptist Church, two distinct groups emerged. The General Baptists were mostly from England and did not accept non-Whites as church members. The Regular Baptists were mostly from Philadelphia and although they were also mostly white, they did slowly allow some Blacks to join their churches. However, they maintained a high level of segregation within their churches by allowing slaves and free Blacks to worship at the same hour as they did as long as they sat in a separate section of the sanctuary. Even when African American Churches began to be established in larger numbers, they were led by white pastors. In the early years of the missionary movement in Korea one century later, a similar model was applied which allowed Koreans to be active in the Church but not to pastor churches. However, it is apparent that North American missionaries learned from their failed efforts within the African American Church, in China, and in Japan and quickly allowed Koreans to have a greater sense of autonomy.59 However, in the 1770s, African Americans were limited in the amount of autonomy they could exercise in their own churches by White American Christians. Thus, layered on top of the already patriarchal nature of the African American

59Ibid.
familial structure which placed men above women was the patriarchy of the European Church which encouraged African Americans to be satisfied and to praise God in spot of their meager lot in life as White Americans also ought to be satisfied and praise God because of their superior lot in life.

Soon African Americans were allowed to join official church networks yet many preferred to be part of the bush harbor churches which met in the woods because they had the freedom to worship more freely. The bush harbor churches were led by and for African Americans. However, even the bush harbor churches faced troubles since the laws in the United States at the time prevented African Americans, especially slaves, from pursuing education even at the primary school level. The efforts to make sure African Americans remained uneducated also meant that they were provided with absolutely no religious education. For example, at President George Washington’s Mt. Vernon Plantation in Virginia, the most religious education slaves ever received was being given Sundays off to attend the local church service where, of course, they were again carefully segregated by White American Christians in terms of their seating and the way they were treated by their fellow parishioners during the service. Much like what happened in Korea during Japanese Occupation and especially during World War II, during the American Civil War, many churches were driven underground in order to survive both the physical and social destruction that was occurring throughout the country. During the Civil War, many parishioners frequently met in personal homes and businesses to maintain their regular Christian practice in spite of the chaos around them. By going underground and worshipping in homes and businesses, American churches managed to survive the Civil War.\(^6\)

The end of the Civil War was another time of great struggle for African Americans. Immediately after the April 8, 1865 victory of the Union, African Americans celebrated. Many praised President Abraham Lincoln as a source of their newfound salvation. However, the time for celebration was tragically cut short when President Lincoln was assassinated five days afterwards. Although the tragedy did place a damper on the victory, the late nineteenth century saw the rise of new opportunities for African American Churches and they finally could begin their ascent to independence and consequently to more rapid growth.

The late 1800s and early 1900s led to rapid changes and developments in the African American Church as the United States began to cope with the Reconstruction Era. African Americans suddenly had opportunities for education and that opportunity was often met by men and women from African American Churches. At the time teaching was a stable job at the time and these African American men and women offered the first opportunities for education to African American children since public schools were still highly segregated. However, it took a couple of decades for African American public schools to graduate their first high school classes. The struggle with the initial classes of African American students parallel the struggles of Mary Scranton at Ewha Girl’s School in its inaugural years as coaxing girls to attend school for the first time and to stay enrolled in school was a challenge. However, like Scranton did in Korea, African American teachers also prevailed and African American children finally began to become educated and of course, that education was one of the primary tools of their liberation.\(^6\)

The Roaring Twenties were a time of economic prosperity for many individuals in the United States. Women reveled in their newfound social freedoms. However, growing anti-foreign sentiment, which was rooted primarily in fear of the other, led to a revival in racist, anti-

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Semitic, and anti-Catholic sentiments around the United States. With the revival of such sentiments, the Ku Klux Klan grew rapidly especially in rural areas. By the 1920s, their membership stood at approximately 500,000 members and they were gaining control over some city and state governments. However, with the Great Depression, the economy started downhill and the period of American prosperity came to an abrupt halt. Once again the African American community felt the financial pinch even more than other groups of Americans. Even before the Great Depression, African Americans were feeling financially strained and unlike many other Americans, were not surprised by the rapid employment downturn. During the Depression, African American men quickly lost their factory jobs and many were unemployed. One result of the Depression was the rapid planting of “storefront” churches especially in cities like Detroit which played “gospel music” which was the Northern version of the Negro spirituals that were emerging throughout the South. During the Great Depression, many African American congregations became divided along the lines of the haves versus the have not’s. African Americans who were government workers or teachers retained their jobs during the Depression but those who had jobs in the private sphere struggled to make ends meet. A group of people who had previously been so united in their struggle began to drift apart. The reaction to Japanese rule in Korea caused a similar phenomenon there as the Japanese policies were used to intentionally create a wedge between the Korean elite and the masses of poor Koreans who worked the land.62

During the 1950s, the American Civil Rights Movement began to take off in a much more prominent way than it previously had, especially in the South. Race issues became an important issue in American politics because the high levels of segregation in the United States

were changing the perception the rest of the world had of it as a haven of freedom and equal rights. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s prominent leadership role in the Civil Rights Movement as a Baptist minister and his subsequent March on Washington were an area of concern for other African American ministers who were wary to be associated with the fiery movement. There was similar trepidation among Korean Christians and North American missionaries during the March First Movement in Korea. However, both Churches chose to fight for social justice just as Jesus fought for social justice during His earthly ministry. Increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, African American women finally began to gain a voice in society. While many white women enjoyed the social freedoms of the 1920s, the same rights came more slowly in African American churches where Civil Rights for African American men had taken on a dominant role in the 1950s and 1960s. It was not until about the 1970s that African American pastors began to appoint women as preachers and deacons at their churches. They faced extreme ostracization at the hands of other Baptist ministers by making such decisions.

Within the African American Church, black men were restricted by the patriarchy placed on them by the white church under which many of them had learned their theology. Black women were restricted by the white church in addition to the patriarchy that already existed within the African American family which made women subservient while still expecting them to be the consummate mother and wife while still managing work outside the home to make ends meet. As Hee An Choi points out in her article “Transforming Power in the Lives of Women as Surrogates: The Dialogue between African American and Korean Christian Women”, Korean Christian women and African American women found themselves facing similar odds within their churches and families in the 1970s and 1980s because of the influence of the patriarchy of their husbands and their societies.
Although He was male, Jesus has become a great liberator for Asian women because of the way He supported and defended women throughout all four of the Gospels and because of His very maternal characteristics. Jesus is compassionate and can feel the suffering of humanity because when He was crucified, God placed the sins of humanity upon them. Jesus knows what it is to be innocent and yet be falsely accused and suffer for a crime that was committed by someone else. Like an earthly mother, Jesus always moves to the defense of His children. When Jesus is moved by the pain of humanity, He weeps along with them. Notably, Jesus was not a silent martyr; numerous theologians explain that Jesus could not have been silent during His crucifixion because He bore not only His own suffering, but that of every member of humanity. He could not but cry out under the pressure of that weight. Asian women take extreme solace in the idea that their Lord is the suffering servant as they feel that they also are.⁶³

Both African American and Korean women have struggled under the burden of serving as surrogates for their colonizers and the traditional substitution theory of atonement has encouraged them to quietly endure the oppression. Jesus’ surrogate role taking on the sins of humanity has been used to justify their oppression and has only compounded their suffering. However, Choi argues that Jesus’ surrogate role itself should not be granted any redemptive power or atonement action but that instead, as long as they live, women ought to follow and emulate the life of Jesus. The important thing to notice in the story of Jesus’ surrogacy, she argues, is not the surrogacy itself but rather how He arrived in that position. This was a position that society forced Jesus into for the purpose of fulfilling its own self-serving needs. In the same way, African American women and Korean women have been forced to be surrogates although they never chose to be surrogates for the sake of their nation. However, like Jesus, both groups

took on the role they never should have had to with grace and humbly lived and died as surrogates. This take on the situation in no way justifies the surrogacy itself; in the case of Jesus and in the case of African American women and Korean women, the surrogacy is unjustifiable. However, thinking of Jesus as the ultimate surrogate ought to be a source of hope to women who have been forced to endure the condition.\textsuperscript{64}

As Chung Hyun Kyung describes it, Asian women’s theology is born out of their desire for liberation and wholeness. Throughout their history she argues they have cried both openly and secretly about the injustices in their lives but that they seldom received comfort from their male dominated religions. The theology of Asian women thus becomes their pent up anger boiling over; they are challenging the Christian God who loves everyone because of “His” absence in their lives. Chung argues that Asian women are “renaming their own God who gives birth to their dignity and nourishes and empowers their life struggle.” Like African American women, Asian women have a history marked by poverty, oppression, militarism, and dictatorship. Both groups of women feel they have to survive the burdens placed upon their race even after their emasculated male counterparts have lost the will to live entirely.\textsuperscript{65} Korea’s patriarchal form of Christianity and the other patriarchal religions practiced in Korea do not provide salvation for Korean women. Buddhism which has become a popular religion in Korea today but it is also patriarchal in that it abhors the woman’s body more than it does the man’s. Confucianism which is an underlying element of Korean society systematically downgrades the status of women. Judeo-Christian traditions call the woman’s body unclean. Only in Shamanism can a Korean women be an unequivocal leader, but unsurprisingly, this religion is considered to


be lesser than all the others. The prominent religions of Korea merge and turn Korea into a multi-religious nation, however, it is Korea’s multi-religiosity which produces misogynistic ideologies and which continues to suppresses Korean women’s bodies and spirits even to this day.\textsuperscript{66}

Chung further points out the double message that Asian women receive from Asian men. Asian men want women to be their comrades in the nationalist movement, yet at home, they impose their own form of colonialism upon women and demand that they ought to be subservient to their domestic desires. Chung writes that if Asian men expect their wives to be warriors to aid them in their nationalist ambitions, they should not also expect them to come home to be docile and subservient. Korean women are happy to be warriors in both the public and private areas of their lives and in spite of the patriarchy Korean men have imposed upon them, the way Korean women have fiercely attempted to create better lives for themselves and their families over the past century shows that they are the warriors of their homes. In much the same way, womanist theologians are offended that African American men ask them to separate being Black from being women. One part of the identity cannot be separated from the other. As women, both African American and Korean women have a history of having struggled all the time on account of both their ethnicity and their gender.\textsuperscript{67} Both African American and Korean women have been surrogates within the framework of their own histories. African American women have been the nurturer, the field laborer, and the sexual object. They have been the “mammy” figure, taking over all of the housework for the master’s wife. She devoted her entire life to taking care of the master’s family and thus was left with no time to take care of her own family’s needs. When she became too old and slow, she would simply be discarded. In spite of the setbacks, this was the


highest role an African American woman could achieve as a slave so other African Americans encouraged it because of its relative safety in comparison to other roles. Many African American women were treated like males in terms of the treatment of their bodies. They were forced to work in the field for even longer than the male slaves. Working in this way deprived them of the social standards of femininity which took away from their ability to fall along traditional gender norms which of course was injurious to their relationships in the African American community although they had no control over the situation. African American female slaves became sex objects for their male slave owners. The image of the pure Victorian woman often prevented slave owners from using their pure wives as objects sexual pleasure so instead they turned to African American women who were considered to be impure and furthered a negative perception of them as being unclean women. Because of this misuse of the bodies of African American women, a societal stereotype began to emerge which perceived African American women as being prostitutes. Korean women had similar problems in terms of sexuality because during their colonial experience, they became “comfort women” and “Yanggongju” (women who work for American soldiers). Comfort women were used during the Japanese colonial period as sexual slaves for the Japanese military government. The recruitment was organized in the name of the nation’s need and familial piety. During this time, the Korean women who became “comfort women” served as surrogates for Japanese women to prevent the soldiers from raping Japanese women. By taking control over the bodies of Korean women, the Japanese colonial government simultaneously killed the spirits of Korean men. After the Japanese colonial period, Korean women’s bodies became the possessions of American soldiers. Prostitution remained a key franchise in Korea after Japanese colonialism ended there primarily as a result of United States militarism. The Korean government needed to find ways for Korea to survive economically and
Korean women’s bodies were used as international exchange. Since the nineteenth century, both
groups of women have had to find a way to reclaim their bodies and Christianity has been one of
the tools that both groups have explored.68

Many Korean theologians use the term han to classify the feeling of oppressed Koreans.
Korean people have felt violated throughout their history by their more powerful neighbors and
their feelings of powerlessness culminate in the term han.69 While Chung calls this an unresolved
feeling, I would argue that the fact that theologians have taken control over their liberation, they
are resolving their pain. After the destruction and chaos of the past century and the upheaval of
Korean people to form new identities all over the world, Korean Christian theologians are using
the Bible to re-imagine a God who cares deeply about the situation of the oppressed. It is up to
them to share this new concept of God with the masses to help them resolve their pain and
feelings of powerlessness.

Out of the struggles that both Korean and African American women have experienced,
you must find ways to love themselves and to love one another. Unfortunately, for both groups,
their religious traditions and texts are oppressive to women in and of themselves. In many ways,
both groups have been forced to pick and choose the Biblical passages that align with their own
needs as women. For Asian women, the creation story has proven to be particularly useful in
validating them. In particular, Genesis 1:27 confirms the equality of men and women “So God
created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he
created them.” (NRSV) Asian women have grasped onto the word “image” to define their
perspectives on humanity. They read this verse as saying that we as humans are who God is. This

2004. Pages 143-147.
69 Chung, Hyun Kyung. Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis,
1990. Page 42.
is an unorthodox way of saying that God is defined by our suffering, furthermore, God feels and identifies with the suffering of Asian women. Their suffering literally defines who God is and is a source of grief for God. Because of the influence of other Asian religions which have both male and female gods, it is not a challenge for Asian women to believe that the Christian God must have both male and female qualities. Asian women yearn for a God who will exemplify this reality because it would mean that men and women are to be regarded as equal partners in every aspect of their daily lives.

In addition, Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’” speaks to the idea of community. Asian female theologians argue that to be made in the image of God is to be in community. In a community all the parts must work together and each part has its role. Asian women also have a compelling take on God as the creator. They believe that God inspires creativity and encourages individuals to be co-Creators with God. To be a co-creator is to be a cook or a mother. By creating such things, Asian women believe they also create history. When women are able to escape from their oppression to create something that gives life, they meet God in the process. They quite literally become a partner of God. An emerging generation of Asian female theologians sees God as a life-giving force which they can encounter both within themselves and within everything that fosters life. These types of ideas are a radical break away from Western Christianity which envisions an absolute God. Because of the influence of Western theologians and philosophers, the idea of an absolute God is prominent with the older generation of Asian theologians. However, today a new wave of Asian women have by and large come to see God as a life-giving power which can be
personified as a woman because women give birth to children and God gives rise to life. God as a mother and a woman challenges the old concept that God is immutable and unchangeable. When Asian women can envision a female God who can relate more directly to women, they can come appreciate their own bodies more fully. Their trust in a God that is just like them allows them to have hope in themselves and what they can accomplish, the idea being that if God’s female form is all-powerful their female bodies are as well.70

African Americans and Koreans have had similar colonial histories. Both have been oppressed in the hands of a much stronger power that tried to control their bodies, their finances, their politics, and most importantly their minds. Both ethnic groups have had to invoke passionate nationalist movements to try to preserve themselves in the midst of the struggles. To a large extent both groups have found themselves clinging to a new form of Christianity that better fit their needs as oppressed people. Two serious questions remain. The first question is whether or not these two ethnic groups can meet on their common ground to defeat a mutual enemy. The second question is does the patriarchal nature of the white Christian church both groups were first introduced to on top of the already patriarchal nature of both cultures only compound upon their oppression.

In response to the first question, both of these ethnic groups have dwelled more on their differences than their similarities in past encounters. There are obvious cultural differences between African Americans and Koreans. The two have an almost insurmountable language barrier and both groups live in fear of the other and considering they have otherized one another, the gulf between them only widens. The colonizer has been able to take advantage of the obvious lack of understanding between the two groups to galvanize them against one another. Instead of

seeing that they were both minority groups with similar needs and similar backgrounds of intense oppression, they allowed the majority group to embellish their differences, to make each of them “the other” to one another. However, if either group could collectively approach the facts, they would see that they share the exact same struggle. They both have a struggle for rights in a foreign country and the struggle for rights in their own country. Men in both ethnic groups have been intentionally intimidated and mocked by their colonizers. Women in both ethnic groups have been physically and sexually abused to protect the women of the dominant ethnic group. Both have had to cling to their faith to survive.

In response to the second question, the traditional, Anglicized, Christian Church has made the oppression worse. However, it is also both of these cultures that make the oppression severe because of the patriarchy that already exists within them. Even if Christianity had never been introduced to African Americans, the African American family is still extremely patriarchal. It forces certain gender roles which while elevating young men can also be constraining to those who wish to break out of the gender roles. Those same gender roles automatically keep women under tight wraps which is evidenced by the hesitation to allow women into leadership roles in the church even in the 1970s. There are even African American churches to this day that hesitate to allow women into leadership roles. That is a cultural problem, not a fundamental problem of Christianity seeing as the Bible does indicate that women served in leadership roles and were respected for their service. Korea also has the patriarchal Confucianism underlying society at every level. Were it not for the charismatic Shamanism and the dominance of women there, spiritual Korean women probably would still struggle to be taken seriously in Korea. However, the trajectory the African American church has taken makes it clear that Christianity will continue to grow and flourish in Korea in the coming years and that
with patience and time, Korean women can take on the most serious leadership roles within their
churches. If the relationship between the Christian Church and the African American community
is any indication of the future of the Christian Church and the Korean community, Christian
 teachings will continue to infiltrate at every level of Korean society and every Korean church
from the small ones in the countryside to the mega churches in Seoul will feel the impact of a
surge of Christian spirituality.
The Future of the Korean Church: Making Disciples of All Nations

Throughout my research for this thesis, I have drawn several conclusions about the Korean and Korean American Church. When I was headed into the research portion of this project in the late Spring of 2011, it was already apparent to me that the power Korean Church was unwavering both because of its sheer size and because of the passion with which individuals in Korea practice Christianity. It was also undeniable that the Korean Church would continue to grow and attract new members in the years to come. However, I had a number of questions about these simple observations. I wanted to know what was making the Church grow as quickly as it did and what exactly was behind the spirituality of Korean Christians. I also wanted to know what the impact of this rapidly growing ethnic church would have on other churches worldwide. This thesis has provided a few answers to these questions although I am keeping the door open for further enlightenment on the topic.

However, one unexpected discovery that I have made as a result of this project is learning that one of the reasons why the Korean Church is as strong as it is has to do with Korean’s deep desire for spirituality as a response to life’s troubles. Even outside of the context of all the problems Koreans faced in the twentieth century as discussed in previous chapters of this thesis: Japanese colonialism in Korea, World War II, Korean women being used as sex workers, the divisive Korean War, and the struggles of migration to North America, my research reiterated to me that to be alive in the world is to struggle and Korean Christian spirituality rises even out of the struggles of everyday life. “All is vanity”, gripes the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes about the meaninglessness of life. As the author uses the Book of Ecclesiastes to explain, nothing, including oppression, is new. In Ecclesiastes 4:1 he explains “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them!
On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them.” (NRSV) This oppression has always been part of life and the absence of the presence of God throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes speaks directly to our life struggles when God seems to have fallen silent as we struggle. Even more important than using the intense spirituality they learned to deal with the struggles of the historical events occurring between 1895 and the 2000s in both Korea and the United States, the Korean spirituality that was developed during these years helps Koreans even today to bear the pains of daily life. What Koreans are now poised to share with the world is more than just the Christianity that North American missionaries shared with them beginning in 1884, they are poised to share an intense spirituality that gets us through the struggle and that even more importantly that will give us what the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes clearly lacked, liberation on Earth in the here and now.

Throughout my research and writing over the course of this project, I have been constantly disappointed by the mixed motives of North American missionaries to Korea who travelled there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In word, these missionaries went to Korea to use the liberating power of Christianity to transform the lives of Koreans. They wanted to infuse a deeper spirituality into the everyday lives of Koreans and they felt Christianity would do so. Many of these early missionaries built schools and hospitals in the American style and did great service in Korea. Yet, I quickly learned that in deed many of these same missionaries were agents of the United States and served as insiders in Korea on behalf of the United States Government. In 1890 Horace Allen became Secretary of the American Legation in Seoul. Of course a missionary like Allen would have been the ideal diplomat for the United States because through his medical missions he had formed a close bond of trust with the leadership of the Korean Government through his medical missions efforts in Korea over the
course of the previous six years. Secular diplomats had no opportunity to form those sorts of unbreakable bonds with Koreans who were generally still wary of the foreigners. Other missionaries’ motives were even more suspect than those of Dr. Allen’s because they blatantly profited financially from the physical work of Koreans.

In spite of saying that they had gone to Korea to liberate Koreans, some American missionaries were surprised to learn from their conversions that there would be people other than Euro-Americans in Heaven. The fact that missionaries were discovering the diversity of the Kingdom of God for the first time through their efforts disgusts me. In the concluding verses of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissions the disciples to be missionaries. Many of the missionaries who travelled to Korea in the 1890s and 1900s went in response to the message of The Great Commission and in spite of their sacrifice in leaving home to go to a foreign missions field; they carried barely concealed racist perceptions with them. They did not follow the explicit instructions Jesus in gave Matthew 28:19 to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, instead they believed that perhaps there was a second heaven for people who were not like themselves.

(NRSV) They had so restricted the idea of a Christian in their mind that they created a perception in the minds of many early Korean Christians and I would argue even to this day that to become Christian was to become more modern and more Western.

For the missionaries who did not go to Korea seeking to force their form of Christianity onto the Koreans, they went seeking a different standard of living than they had enjoyed in the United States. The missionary homes in Korea were modeled after those that had already been established in Japan. The homes allowed them to live as Americans instead of helping them to forget that they were Americans and instead focus on their mission. The Apostle Paul
exemplifies the idea of forgetting himself in order to serve his congregations. His letters to his congregations to help them as they received their footing as Christians demonstrate his level of commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ above the preservation of his national identity. Like North American missionaries, Paul had a lot to lose by neglecting his nationality since he was a Roman citizen. More than once, Paul suffered willingly to promote Christianity and to sacrifice his own livelihood to build boldness in his congregants. As he expresses in a letter from prison in Philippians 1:13-14, “It has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brother and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.” (NRSV) In spite of the bold example set by Paul, the early missionaries, and especially missionary wives like Ella Appenzeller, enjoyed their opportunity to live in greater extravagance in Korea than they could in the United States. They reveled in the trust the locals placed in them because of their reputation as social servants. Although they did many good works while serving in Korea, they also took advantage of the smallest amount of trust to increase their own wealth and prestige in the eyes of the United States especially since Americans that did not participate in missions work were often willing to contribute financially to the cause. The missionaries enjoyed the support they received from a very missions oriented nineteenth and early twentieth century United States and they basked in the deference they received from Koreans since they were foreigners. Some children of missionaries who still remained in Korea during World Wars One and Two took advantage of their relationships with Koreans from an economic standpoint by convincing them to travel to the United States as laborers on the sugar plantations of Hawaii telling them that the Americas were a promised land. They used Koreans in particular for this task beginning around 1904 because the Chinese and
Japanese male migrant workers who had been there since the 1800s were becoming frustrated by the system and protested against it. Thus, deceived Koreans men travelled to the United States to join the masses of African, Chinese, Japanese, and Latino migrant workers who had already been there for centuries.

In spite of the flailing attempts of the North American missionaries to Korea to teach a genuine theology of love to Koreans, Korean Christians, both those living on the Korean peninsula and those who have emigrated abroad are strong in their faith. Although they have a tendency toward syncretism because of the long religious history of Korea, they have created a Christianity that is pure, Scriptural, and that wherever possible has sought to unify people unlike the North American Christian Church which too often only serves to perpetuates division.

At the 2011 Episcopal AsiaAmerica Ministry Convocation in Seoul, South Korea, Father Paul Mun discussed the widespread missions work Koreans are undertaking throughout the world. Like the North American missionaries who aided them in their conversion, they too are committed to fulfilling the words of the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28 and they truly are taking the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. Their fearlessness is comparable to that of the early North American missionaries to Korea in that they go to lands which are relatively unknown but they take an even greater risk by going to places which are known both for their violence against one another and for their violence against outsiders. Koreans involved in missionary work are both rooted in their spirituality and dedicated to missions.

Today’s missionary efforts take place in much different circumstances than the missions of 1885 did. The following statistics about Korean missionaries are from Father Paul Mun’s Power Point Presentation about Korean overseas missionary work from a presentation given in 2011. In 1990, Koreans founded The Korea World Missions Association to increase their focus
on sending foreign missionaries. Clearly Koreans wanted to do for the world what North American missionaries had done for them and they quickly began sending missionaries overseas to over ninety nine countries which is equal to more than a third of the known countries in the world today. In terms of sheer numbers, Korean Presbyterian Churches lead the way in the number of missionaries they are sending abroad each year. In 2010, Korea celebrated the one hundred twenty fifth anniversary of Protestant Missions in Korea celebrating Henry Appenzeller and Horace Underwood for their diligent efforts in Korea beginning in April 1885. Ironically in 2010, South Korea also became the second largest missionary sending country in the world after the United States. The relationship between the missionaries who had come from the United States had just come to Korea 125 years prior to teach them Christianity for the first time and a new world leader of missions is not soon to be broken in spite of their different approaches to missionary efforts. The unique struggle Korean missionaries since they did not begin Christian missions in earnest until the twentieth century is that the world has modernized significantly since 1885. Even in the slowest developing nations of the world, globalization is on the rise. Brands like Coca-Cola and Apple have taken over the world so today’s missionaries from Korea operate under a different context and have to maintain their enthusiasm for missions and for spreading the Gospel in a world that changes quickly and that has constantly changing technology and social networking. At the same time, the relative smallness of the world because of the internet, social networking, and i-pads also makes Korean’s missions easier than that of nineteenth century missionaries because of the diverse opportunities they have to share their faith even outside of the traditional missionary trip concept.

Another even deeper challenge Korean overseas missionaries will face is honing in on their Scriptural reasons for missions. Doing intense missions is one thing Koreans seem to lack a
sense of purpose for as individuals. Many Korean Christians today go on missions trips simply because the churches they attend strongly encourage it. This is one area in which the Scripture is not the basis for the action. Like some American missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is clear that there are some Korean missionaries who are participating in missions because it is an available opportunity or because they are simply swept up in the fervor of the mission. They do not participate in missions out of a personal calling to do so. Without the Scriptural basis which, of course, is the basis of all other action for Korean Christians, being an effective Christian missionary which is already a taxing and challenging task becomes exponentially more difficult.

However, if Korean missionaries can truly come to understand their own purpose they will change not only the Christian Church, but also the world as a whole. As explained earlier, Korean spirituality is spirituality for the daily struggle. All cultures might not fully accept the Christian message as even many Koreans have not. However, the need for spirituality to deal with life’s troubles is needed by everyone everywhere and will especially be a source of comfort in the developing world.
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