

## **Revisiting the Confucian Norms in Korean Church Growth**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper will explore the Confucian cultural norms, which the author believes have played a crucial role for the Korean church growth. There have been a considerable number of works dealing with the common aspects of Korean Christian and Confucian thoughts. However, not much comprehensive research has been done on the role of Confucianism particularly for the Korean church's growth. The author will discuss five major Confucian cultural norms: 1. Collectivism or Community-centered Value, 2. Heavy emphasis on education, 3. Heavy emphasis on excellent leadership, 4. The obsession with the orthodoxy and 5. The role as civil religion.*

### **I. Introduction**

Church growth in South Korea is one of the most interesting yet least studied topics, particularly in the field of religious studies. Many Christian leaders and scholars are well aware of the Korean church's explosive growth and overwhelming number of megachurches.<sup>1</sup> The Protestant population in particular had consistently grown by the late 1990s and reached almost 30% of the entire population in 2002.<sup>2</sup> In exploring the driving force of such an unprecedented phenomenon in church history, the insiders, without hesitation, would attribute it to the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit and the restless hard work and devotion of the Korean Christians.<sup>3</sup> The outsiders, especially scholars of religious studies and sociology, however, may feel the necessity of a different kind of explanation that could consider diverse socio-cultural factors *beyond* the spiritual discourse. Some focus on the cataclysmic political and economic crises in which people often seek a new soteriological path. Some focus on the role of the indigenous religious tradition, *shamanism*, which provides down-to-earth spirituality, and others simply on the unique lifestyle of the Koreans.

This paper will explore the Confucian cultural norms, which the author believes have played a crucial role for the Korean church growth. It is, of course, not a new topic. Many scholars have already recognized the positive role of Confucian thought and culture in Korean Christianity. Huston Smith said, "In the case of Korean Christians, Confucianism is not exactly the faith of others. For them it is 'theirs,' at least, part of theirs."<sup>4</sup> Clark made a more interesting statement. He said, "If any society can be considered a particularly favorable laboratory for the Confucian-Christian dialogue, it must be Korea."<sup>5</sup> Heup-young Kim in the late 1980s made this issue even more interesting, saying, "More than ninety percent of self-identified church-going Korean Protestant Christians are virtually practical members of the Confucian soft community who still hold to Confucian moral norms and practice traditional Confucian social customs."<sup>6</sup> There have been a considerable number of philosophical, theological and missiological works dealing with the common aspects of Korean Christian and Confucian thoughts on human nature, God and the moral ideal.

However, not much comprehensive research has been done on the role of Confucianism particularly for the Korean church's growth. Kim's work, *Christianity and Korean Culture: the Response to the Success of Christianity in Korea*,<sup>6</sup> touches on major socio-political and historical factors of the Korean church growth, including the discussion of Confucianism. His discussion is somewhat shallow, not dealing with the extensive impact of the Korean Confucian tradition. In this paper, the author will propose that some Confucian cultural norms and dispositions have played an implicit yet powerful role in the success of the Korean church. Along with a brief historical survey on the encounter between the two traditions, the author will suggest five major Confucian norms. In presenting Confucian factors, the author, however, does not focus on a particular historical timeline or events. Nor does he claim that the Confucian norms discussed here are the only factors.

The author will rather arbitrarily select from Korean church history cultural phenomena and historical figures and events that he believes as the most *Confucian* (유교적: *Yugyojeok*) and closely examine their meanings and values in the success story of Korean Christianity. The primary goal of this paper is, therefore, to revisit the old issue, *the Korean church growth*, and identify and highlight the Confucian norms, which have been noticed fragmentally by many, yet not studied in a systematic way.

## ***II Encounter between Confucianism and Christianity***

Prior to the main discussion of the Confucian adoption of Christianity and its contribution, it seems worthwhile to skim through the initial encounter between the two religions. Most missiologists and church historians recognize the fact that the Christian message was introduced to the peninsula not by foreign missionaries but by Koreans themselves.<sup>7</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable number of Confucian scholars and politicians became interested in the Christian literature in Chinese. They saw it as an advanced alternative philosophy or cultural system that represented the successful Western civilization. Chong Tu-won, an envoy to China in around 1770, brought the Koreans Matteo Ricci's *Cheonju Sil-ui* (The True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven). It was one of the earliest pieces of Christian literature. Yi Seung-hun, a Confucian bureaucrat, who was baptized in China in 1783, came back to Korea and built the first church, which was sort of a house church. The Christian message was, since then, spread by Catholic missionaries among the progressive *yangban* (the elite class) and the *jungin* (the middle) classes. Converted Confucian scholars started to translate the English and Chinese Bible into Korean and introduce the common people to various works of Christian literature: the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments and hymns, etc. Although there was severe persecution of Catholic missionaries in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, further evangelization did not stop. The inflow of Protestant missionaries from North America, who had more effective missiological strategies and skills than their Catholic counterparts, made it possible for more Koreans to be exposed to the Christian message.

The early success of the evangelization of Korea was, however, partially due to fact that the new message did not completely deviate from the existing philosophical and religious norms of the society. They believed that Christianity would make the kingdom more advanced and stronger without significantly harming the traditional values. Kim notes that a considerable number of Confucian scholars in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century found between the two religions a common understanding of God and morality.<sup>8</sup> The notion of God in Christianity made sense with that of the Korean Confucian tradition. In contrast to Confucius' attempt to eliminate personal devotion and attachment to Heaven, Korean Neo-Confucian practices were mixed with the shamanistic belief that treated Heaven as anthropomorphic God. Understanding Heaven as God, who actively responds to human situations, was not difficult for the Korean religious mind. When translating the word, God, into Korean, missionaries used the term, *Hananim*. Its Korean etymological root includes both number one (*hana*) and heaven (*haneul*). It satisfies both the Christian monotheistic theology and Koreans' traditional understanding of heaven. Yi Ik, a prominent Confucian scholar in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, argued for the similarity between *Cheonju* (the Lord of Heaven) in Christianity and *Sangje* (the Lord on High) in Confucianism.<sup>9</sup>

Their concepts were compatible in that they were the Supreme Being who watched over the human affairs and had the authority for reward and punishment. Jeong Yak-yong, a leading scholar of the *Silhak School*<sup>10</sup> in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, took a step further. He identified Christian God with Tao. According to Kim's research, Jeong defined God as "the Tao of the truth, the way and the life for all humanity."<sup>11</sup> God's character defined as the way in John 14:6 perfectly fit in the Confucian and Taoist notion of the Supreme Being or Principle. The high moral emphasis was the other important factor that made Korean Confucians sympathetic to the Christian message. After reading Didace de Pantoja's *Les sept victoires*, which discussed the Christian understanding of the Seven Sins,<sup>12</sup> Yi Ik argued that there was no significant difference between the two religions and that the systematic moral teaching of the Catholicism was superior to Confucianism in a sense.<sup>13</sup> He also recognized another similarity on the notion of filial piety in his Christian book entitled *Seonghak Jibyo* (Summary of the Holy Teaching). He argued that the Christian filial piety explicitly stated in the Bible was almost identical with the Confucian *hyo* in both content and method.<sup>14</sup> Jeong Yak-yong's description of Christian God also resonates the moral characters of Heaven in traditional Confucian understanding. In *Jungyong Gang-ui* (Lectures on Jungyong), he saw God as "a lawgiver and a judge who metes out rewards and punishments in exact proportion to the merits of each soul."<sup>15</sup> His *Igiron* (Two Theories) dealing with Confucian virtues brought out another important similarity with Christianity.

The primary ethical principle of Confucianism and traditional Korean shamanism is *gyeongcheon ein* (respect heaven and love your neighbor). It is almost identical with Jesus' summary of the Old Testament Laws. He even tried to understand the Ten Commandments in Confucian moral principles. In *Meng-ja Yu-ui*, Jeong Yak-yong put the six commandments into more simplified ethical principles, which would fit in the Confucian moral scheme. They were "filial piety, the immorality of adultery and the false act of deception of one's neighbor."<sup>16</sup> Prior to North American missionaries' full-fledged evangelizing effort, there were Confucian intellectuals and ideology makers who were already fascinated with the compatibility of the two religions. They portrayed the image of Christianity as conservative in ethics, advanced in civilization and compatible with their existing tradition. Their intellectual movement bridging the two religions should, therefore, never be underestimated. Later success in evangelization and missionary strategies are, in a sense, products of Korean Confucian scholars' successful understanding, translation and internalization of the Christian message into their own philosophical and cultural value system and historical context.

### **III Collectivism or Community-centered Value**

The first cultural norm, which the author finds as a Confucian factor for the Korean church growth, is *jibdanjuui* (collectivism) or *gongdongche uisik* (community-centered value). It is a cultural disposition or spirit regarding personal thought, behavior and decision that are oriented more to the communal will than that of the individual. As Tu-wei Ming notes, this value originally derived from Confucius' concentric metaphysics binding the individual, community and the universe in a single thread of reality. It has been, however, misunderstood and abused over time by many scholar-politicians to accomplish the goals of feudalistic Confucianism. Since the value of community is crucial in finding the true meaning of the individual, cultivating his character and thereby making his community secure and prosperous, the Confucians with power and authority have been tempted to subordinate the individual's will to the communal will. While Confucius tried to teach, in discussing *wu-run*,<sup>17</sup> the virtues guiding diverse human relations, the Confucian culture in East Asia has been often misled and obsessed to the external hierarchical structure in the relations. For example, instead of *affection* and *righteousness*, which guide and protect the relations between father and son and between ruler and minister, *obedience* and *loyalty*, which are only external behavioral characters, have been inordinately emphasized for efficient management and operation of the society.

It is like the unbalanced relationship between form and content. For a form to be fully revealed, its content should be accompanied. People, however, easily become complacent only with the form. Pharisees and Sadducees, who were extremely rigid in rituals and law yet indifferent to faith and love, are, according to the Christian text and understanding, similar with the feudalistic Confucians, who understood the community-centered value only in the form of collectivism. Korean society has been deeply influenced, since its introduction, by this feudalistic Confucianism in which the community, whether family or state, and its leader have priority and authority over the individual. What is important in the success story of the Korean church is, however, not necessarily the negative aspect of collectivism. There are positive sides from which the Korean church has greatly benefitted for her growth. In the collective or community-centered mentality, the Confucian individual does not necessarily feel deprived of his rights and interests. He or she believes that the ultimate goal of life should be realized within the will of the community or the will of the leader representing it. Personal decisions are always to be guided and adjusted *for* and *by* what gives and sustains one's life. The community and its leader are the frame of reference, which the individual seeks before decision-making. When the individual's will and decisions correspond to the will and expectation of his community, they are believed to naturally lead to success for both the individual and society.

This Confucian collectivism was not a fleeting cultural phenomenon derived from a particular historical crisis but a staunch traditional ethos deeply embedded in the Korean society at large. The overall social structure of Korea provides a good explanation. Like other East Asian countries, Korean society is characterized by the active role of family and its networks. As Min notes, three major family names make up about 45% of the total population.<sup>18</sup> Although the same last name does not necessarily mean the same family, people's will to preserve the family line and tradition and to keep a strong tie is very prevalent in Korea. In spite of the demise of the extended family in the modern era, the family is still the highest value from which Korean people seek their motivation for success and with which they make important life decisions. Min found the utility of this familial collectivism in explaining the Korean church growth. He argued that Korean people sought both security and belongingness from the family. They pursue happiness from what their family would feel happy about.

They, at the same time, keep away from what their family would not approve. This collective mentality is seemingly unfriendly to the evangelization of Korea. It, however, played a crucial role in the explosive growth of the early Korean church. Min himself recognized this paradoxical nature. He said, "This sense of belonging was a shortcut for mission, at the same time it could be a detour for the mission, too."<sup>19</sup> Once one of the family members, particularly one with authority, becomes Christian, further evangelization is much easier and quicker through strong family ties and networks. Chung acknowledges it, stating that "the traditional patriarchal family system and ancestor worship helped to shape the Korean Christian Church as the familial community-based church."<sup>20</sup> Since spiritual activities such as ancestral worship and shamanistic rituals like *gut* were performed by the family unit, the conversion of the patriarchal head to Christianity meant that the other family members and close relatives, as Kim notes, should "obey and accept it as the normative religious practices without any resistance or disobedience."<sup>21</sup>

Shearer accepted this theory. He said, "A converted father became instrumental in the conversion of his entire family and neighbors."<sup>22</sup> The best example is Seung-hun Lee, a preeminent Confucian scholar in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who established the first Korean Catholic church. After his conversion in China, he came back to Korea and evangelized his family members. He also converted his close friends and colleagues to Christianity. Among them were many renowned Confucian scholars such as Jeong Yak-yong, Lee Byeok, Jeong Yak-jeon and Gwan Il-sin. All of those friends had family ties to Lee Seung-hun. Since the basic social unit in Confucian system is the family, not the individual, it was not unusual, as Chun points out, that "all members of a family group adopt Christianity at the same time."<sup>23</sup> The church growth in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century specifically shows another collective conversion. According to Bang's research, the number of new converts between 1790 and 1794 reached almost 3000. It was a remarkable phenomenon, considering the fact that it was the time period when the first official persecution against Korean Christians happened. Bang argues that the collective conversion from the general populace, not from the elite, was the primary cause of the growth.<sup>24</sup>

The family is not the only source of this collective spirit. It can be found in any community. The neo-Confucian metaphysics that Korea received from China and revamped in the 16<sup>th</sup> century concentrically linked all human communities into a single body. The familial spirit of respect and loyalty permeates all sides of the social dimension. People with authority in whatever social circle, whether from the village, schools, the government or the military, often enjoy a similar parental respect. When someone is asked by an authority figure to visit his or her church or join a Bible study meeting, he or she would feel more difficult to say, no, than do people in other cultures. Many Koreans have their conversion experience in their military. 7200 trainees were baptized in the Nonsan Military Training Camp in 1997.<sup>25</sup> Although religious conversion is about individual decision in nature and new generations deviate from traditional values, it is still convincing that the evangelization of Korea and its growth should be attributed to the strong influence of the community-centered value in various social dimensions.

#### **IV Heavy Emphasis on Education<sup>26</sup>**

The second cultural norm is the heavy emphasis on education. Like most Asian religious traditions whose common soteriology is based primarily on the enlightenment of the soul, the Confucian spiritual and moral project is about cultivating the ideal personhood and lifestyle through continuous learning process. Just as almost all classical thinkers in ancient China tried to find the characters of the excellent man (*chun tzu*) and follow his prototypical life style, the Confucianized Koreans were no exception. They have long sought wisdom not just for the convenience of life but for success in every aspect of life including spirituality. They have never been hesitant to go abroad to get it. China was the most popular place where Koreans would encounter new knowledge, new artistic skills and new philosophy and religion.

Once the Neo-Confucianism was accepted as a better philosophical and ethical paradigm especially during the Joseon Dynasty, Koreans put forth great effort to internalize the new wisdom in both culture and institutions. Educational institutions like *Hyanggyeo* and *Seodang* that were based on Confucian teachings were the most advanced academic institution for social mobility. They were also the ultimate conduit through which one can be born again as a true human. Confucianism, whether the Classical or the Neo-Confucian, made the necessity of intellectual enlightenment a permanent virtue and norm in Korean society. An uneducated human is, in other words, nothing more than an animal governed by natural impulses. Korean people's passion for education has become even stronger in the modern era. Education is the highest priority to the Korean family. Hahm, president of the Korean American Community Association of Howard County in Virginia, made an interesting yet controversial statement. He said, "They (Koreans) have to go to a brand name university.

It doesn't matter that they're not happy. Go to a prestigious school, and then be happy after that."<sup>28</sup> Due to their abnormally high expectation on education, the public school system has never been a satisfactory means for social mobility or success. Many students from the elementary school to college students and even to adults with a job attend more than two private academies to successfully prepare for various academic aptitude tests and to pursue better careers. Private academies called *hagwan* teach a variety of subjects ranging from piano and arts to TOEFL and American aptitude tests such as SAT and LSAT are one of the big industries in Korea. There are numerous stats to show the Koreans' *education fever*. Korean young students' academic achievement ranked at the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> places in reading, math and science respectively among the OECD countries in 2006. They ranked first in problem solving in 2003. Korea is the first ranked foreign country in the number of students who study in American universities. There are 37 Korean undergraduates at Harvard. The number is more than that of any foreign country except Canada and Britain.<sup>29</sup> Korea is also the first ranked country in the world in the number of high school students who go to college. One may ask for the reason why Koreans are so passionate for education. It is partially because the country does not have plenty of resources for social mobility and success.

It does not have a big territory. Nor is it rich in natural resources. The human resource is the key asset with which anyone from any social location can compete for a successful life. That is not, however, all. Along with their desire for success is there the traditional Confucian norm that to be fully respectable human, one has to be educated. This emphasis on and obsession with education became a key factor in the success story of the early Korean church. When Western missionaries came to Korea, they first recognized how seriously Koreans took the value of education. Jones argues that "the love of learning and respect for a scholar" was a primary characteristic that American missionaries thought made the country distinctive from other East Asian countries. He said, "The Koreans highly valued scholarship and deeply respected all members of the teaching profession." "If a stereotypical Chinese was a merchant and a Japanese a warrior, the image of an ideal Korean that missionaries encountered was a scholar,"<sup>27</sup> he added. Every Korean married man was called *seobang*, which means writing-room. The mature man was regarded as scholar. It represents, according to Gale, "the universal desire" to share "the glory that went with men of books."<sup>30</sup> Missionaries themselves could easily get the idea by the way they were treated. As Allen testified, Westerners were treated differently in Korea. While treated as foreign devils in China, they were all treated with the highest respect in Korea. They were called *Dae In* (대인: great man).<sup>31</sup>

They were respected because Koreans thought that they had advanced knowledge and skills. Koreans treated them as teachers. Gale notes that missionaries were called *gyosa* (teacher). He said, "The missionaries, in the minds of Koreans, was the man with the book...a spiritual master of literature, a teacher, a guide and a model."<sup>32</sup> Western missionaries could, therefore, effectively take advantage of their authority for evangelization. They could successfully impose extremely high moral standards on Korean Christians,<sup>33</sup> not experiencing great resistance because they were the teachers with the new wisdom through which Koreans thought they could escape from both their helpless life situation and historical chaos. Yun Chi-ho, a prominent Methodist national leader in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, testified that "missionaries were bosses to whom he had to surrender...(his) freedom of opinion and of conscience."<sup>34</sup> He did not mean a coerced submission. Since the traditional Confucian learning normally happened in one-way relationship in which the teacher had the exclusive authority over the students, Yun's description of his obedience was not surprising. The authority of the missionaries was often expanded even further. Ryu notes that American missionaries were regarded as parents meticulously guiding and admonishing "the infant Korean church."<sup>35</sup>

Missionaries did try a variety of strategies that could effectively utilize Koreans' passion for education. The Nevius method was one of the most powerful strategies. While the Catholic missionaries and the early Protestant missionaries such as H.N. Allen focused on the elite, many of them after 1890 shifted their focus to common people. The Nevius method marked a strategic transition from the elite to the commoners. Nevius, a Chinese missionary, who had been frustrated at his old method, devised a new mission strategy based on the Three-Self Formula: self-propagating, self-governing and self-support. He found the chronic problem that natives depended too much on missionaries both financially and spiritually.<sup>36</sup> He wrote the blueprint of his new strategy in *the Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. He emphasized the importance of educating the natives and establishing and sustaining the church through their own faith and ability. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Horace G. Underwood found his method very interesting and adopted it for the Korean mission field. What should be noted in the success of the Nevius method in Korea was not just the emphasis on financial independence but the emphasis on learning.

Eiko Takamizawa said, “The Nevius method played a significant role in Korean church growth because of its focus on Bible study.”<sup>37</sup> Park made a similar analysis. He regarded Bible study as a more central factor than financial autonomy.<sup>38</sup> All the self-supporting principles are useless without the mature church members equipped with the healthy understanding of the gospel. The primary function of organized Bible study groups in Korea was more than the doctrinal study of Christianity. Not only did the Bible study and the teachings of missionaries provide the Koreans the spiritual direction but they also introduced new secular knowledge and reconstructed the overall values systems on a new platform. The ideal image of *the chun tzu* (the excellent man) was thus replaced by the exotic yet attractive image of Anglo-American missionaries, who had brought brand new wisdom and skills. The major strategies that the first Korean Presbyterian Council for Mission adopted included similar characteristics of those of the Nevius method. The first four items were all about Bible study. They particularly emphasized the education of women and children. The Bible study class covered more than the scripture. Teachers would teach geography, history, music and other subjects.

Many scholars of church history agree that what ignited the explosive revival movement in Korea in 1907 was Bible study. Shearer says that Bible study was the most crucial factor for the rapid growth and revival of the Korean church. It is known that almost 65 percent of the Korean Christians participated in Bible study during the early church periods.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Kim notes the importance of *the sagyeonghoe* that Horace G. Underwood started with 7 people in 1890.<sup>40</sup> *The Sagyeonghoe* was a popular form of Bible study all over the country. It was held for a particular theme or people with a particular profession or social status. According to Clark’s description, a Bible study gathering lasted almost about a week. It normally started with early morning prayer at about 5 AM. Work was ceased all day long. People joined a series of lectures and sermons led by a variety of pastors, elders or other famous itinerant preachers. The *Sagyeonghoe* eventually hit the climax in revival worship services at night. Clark says, “The Bible was the center of all things in the Korean Church.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition, it is worthwhile to note missionaries’ contribution to the founding of various educational institutions. Prestigious private schools and scholarly organizations started to be built by missionaries. The *Baejaehakdang* was founded by Mr. Appenzeller for young boys in 1886. Mrs. Scranton established *Iwhahakdang* for young girls. Those schools were the first modern schools in Korean history. The Korean Religious Tract Society made a great contribution to Biblical education and translation. Not only did it hold a lot of conferences for missionaries but it also published many valuable books such as the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John.<sup>42</sup>

Missionaries clearly understood the Koreans’ passion for education and effectively utilized it for their missionary work, linking it further to the nationalist movement against the Japanese colonialism.<sup>43</sup> Since Confucian culture already had the tradition of putting great emphasis on textual study, Koreans’ passion and effort for the Bible was natural. Many Korean church leaders treated the Bible just as Confucian scholars, *seonbi*, had treated the Confucian literature. They intensely studied in a solitary room, reading and reciting the texts like Jewish Rabbis. They would try to memorize the entire texts. Korean church leaders like Gil Seon-ju did the exact same thing. Pastor Gil’s method was “a deep, meditative, solitary and repetitive reading of the Bible.” It is well known that he read the Book of Revelation 10,000 times.<sup>44</sup> This great emphasis on learning and studying has been a key source to let the Korean Christians both find meanings in their chaotic reality and help the nationalist movement that the country’s historical circumstance urgently demanded. Although the kind of wisdom has changed over time, the passion for learning has never died out. It has always made Korean Christians well informed of their spiritual duty and well equipped to proselytize their faith.

### ***V Heavy Emphasis on Excellent Leadership***

The third cultural norm is the heavy emphasis on excellent leadership. Excellent leadership, the author suggests, includes but is not limited to charismatic leadership. Many scholars in church history have recognized the crucial role of the charismatic leader in church growth. The author here, however, sees more than spiritual leadership in the Korean church growth. Church leaders are expected to be all excellent in spirit, morality and intellectuality. Similar with the traditional ethical model of classical thinkers in Greek and Judea-Christian civilizations, the Confucian moral project for individual enlightenment and social welfare is based on the emphasis on *arete* rather than *techné*. Although having different images and ideals, most classical Confucian scholars tried to picture the images and characters of the excellent man and imitate them. Since man is the one that makes the way great, according to Confucius, a good life and society come from good human agents. The Confucians believed that they could achieve their enlightenment by following an excellent leader, who had higher intellectual, moral and spiritual character.

There has been remarkably strong spiritual and political leadership in the success story of both the Korean Church and nation. The history itself of the full-fledged American missionary started from the personal contacts between Allen and the royal family instead of certain strategic moves of the American Church. A series of persecutions on Christian missionaries had ceased when Allen successfully treated Min Yeong-ik, a member of the royal family, who was seriously injured in *Gapsinjeongbyeon* in 1884. Allen's high political IQ and his attractive personality helped the royal family lift the ban on evangelization in Korea. Christian national leaders were always in the center of numerous political crises from the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty in the 1940s to decades of military dictatorship in the 1980s. The role of charismatic ministers has been, likewise, always a critical factor of the explosive growth of Korean mega churches.

Among the kinds of excellent leadership is the charismatic character. Hong defines it in two ways. Sociologically speaking, charismatic perception can be explained by church members' perception of their pastor as "extraordinary and as worthy for them to dedicate themselves to the pastor with a strong following." Spiritually speaking, "the charisma leader is perceived as the messenger who is speaking God's message to the people."<sup>45</sup> Both perceptions resonate the Confucian notion of the excellent man. The *chun tzu* is someone from whom the mass people seek guidance. He is also believed to know and practice *Tien-ming* (the Mandate of Heaven). Followers perceive him not just for the learning of the Confucian literature but for the comprehensive guidance for every aspect of their life, including heavenly wisdom. His authority goes beyond the intellectual and spiritual dimension. It includes paternal character. Followers give their church leaders paternal authority and seek approval for their major life decisions, whether spiritual or secular.

In other words, the explosive growth of the Korean Church did not come from fancy strategies, plans or buildings but mainly from great church leaders. As Confucius remarked, what makes things great is the human. Just as Korean people in politics, for example, pay more attention to politicians than their policies and institutional measures, Korean Christians focus more on their leaders than any other factor for their growth. When the church has a great leader from whom all the members can confidently think they could find the comprehensive frame of reference, whether spiritual, moral or intellectual, it does naturally brings success. Investigating the secret of the success of the Korean mega churches regardless of the denominations, one can easily find that they all have strong charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership here again represents the special authority as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him."<sup>46</sup> It is of the Confucian mentality. According to Confucius, peace, security and prosperity of the community come from the presence of *chun tzu*, not from political institutions, because not only does the enlightened remain in cultivating himself but he is the source to benefit his neighbors and community.<sup>47</sup>

When one looks at the general leadership structure and characters of the Korean church, the above thesis will become more clear. The role of the pastor is more important and comprehensive in Korea than other countries. It is no doubt that any successful mega church in the world must have a great pastor. The congregation's overall perception of the pastor, however, distinguishes the Korean church from others. Grayson characterized the role of the Korean pastors as "a surrogate father."<sup>48</sup> It means that they are traditionally respected as a minister, a father and a teacher, drawing the feeling of "loyalty and love"<sup>49</sup> together. This idea obviously came from the Confucian concentric notion of familial community and authority. Social leaders receive paternal respect. They often exercise their authority beyond the limit of their professional capacity. Korean pastors' authority has been, likewise, more than about ministering. According to Min, they are highly authoritarian. "They hold a paramount place in all affairs of the church both religious and administrative,"<sup>50</sup> said Grayson. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the success of a Korean church depends significantly on the pastor.

A survey done by *Wolgan Mokhoi* in 1981 shows that the primary factor for Korean Christians in selecting their church is the pastor and the quality of his sermon.<sup>51</sup> Hong's research in 2002 on the impact of charismatic pastoral leadership shows that the primary factor of the growth in mega-and large churches is the performance of the leading pastor.<sup>52</sup> There are, of course, a lot of negative sides of this inordinate dependence on the pastor. Kim pointed out some pathological aspects as well.<sup>53</sup> Pastors exercise their authority to the extent that they can ignore the formal order of the worship service. They even directly influence the congregation on political affairs such as elections.<sup>54</sup> The author, however, thinks that the rapid and explosive growth of the Korean church shows more positive things than the negative about the charismatic leadership.

Although there are numerous examples, the author will introduce only three of the most prominent pastors, who he believes have become icons for revival and success in Korean church history. The first two represent the success of the Korean church during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The other represents its success in modern era. Their images, characters and stories will ultimately bring a relevance to the Confucian ethos. Among many of the church leaders throughout 120 years, Gil Seon-ju is the most important figure. He is called “The father of Korean Christianity.”<sup>55</sup> “During the first half century of the Korean Church’s history, nobody influenced the formation of the faith of Christians as did the Reverend Seon-ju Gil,”<sup>56</sup> said Song. The success of the early church was about his faith and his charismatic leadership. Kim puts it more dramatically. He said, “The day when Gil was converted was the laying of the foundation of the Korean Church, and the day when Gil began to read the Bible and pray was the beginning of the building of the Korean Church.”<sup>57</sup> During his 28-year ministry, Gil preached more than 2000 times and baptized 300 people.<sup>58</sup> He also joined a series of nationalist movements against the Japanese colonialism, helping establish the Independence Club.

What the author wants to focus on is, however, his personal contribution to the establishment of the Korean Christian culture as a whole. He invented *sabyeok gidohoi* (the early morning prayer or dawn prayer), which is “the distinguishing hallmark of Korean evangelical spirituality.”<sup>59</sup> He was the one, who made a significant effort to reconcile Christian thoughts with traditional religious thoughts. He argued that the Taoist notion of universal unity did not have to conflict with the omnipresence of God. Various practices of the devotional Mahayana Buddhism were reinterpreted for “the higher spiritual life of Christians.”<sup>60</sup> In particular, he was very confident about the compatibility of Confucianism and Christianity. He argued that “the values of obedience to higher authorities and of reverence of ancestral spirits” could be directly applied to the Christian values.<sup>61</sup> His emphasis on higher moral standards is well known. Joining the Christian Temperament Society, Gil asked his Christian fellows for a revolutionary moral regeneration. He was one of the early church leaders who encouraged Korean evangelical Christians to have inordinately legalistic moral standards such as no-smoking and no-drinking. In Confucian perspective, Gil was a *chun tzu* (excellent man), whom all of his members honored and tried to imitate as their role model. They saw enlightenment, security and bliss from his faith, charismatic character and life.

Kim Ik-du<sup>62</sup> was another prominent church leader with great charisma, who made a significant contribution to the spiritual revival movement in the early 1920s. He is a good example to show the role of the charismatic individual for the Korean church growth. Kim was a brilliant Confucian man. A series of misfortunes such as failures in the government service examination and business brought him to the revival meeting led by William Swallen, where he converted to Christianity. He is known as “the most famous pastor in Korean church history especially in healing ministry.”<sup>63</sup> He emphasized the confession of sin. Without the sincere admission of sin, one cannot experience God’s grace of healing. Like many other evangelical leaders, Kim preached the dichotomy between *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*. He demanded Korean Christians to renounce the worldly life pursuing material happiness and success. His revival meetings covered not only the Korean peninsula but also areas of Manju and Siberia. He did 776 revival meetings, preached 28000 sermons, ordained more than 200 pastors and established 150 local churches.

What the author tries to highlight here, however, is not just his successful ministry but the spiritual heritage he personally left to Korean Christianity. Like Gil Seon-ju, Kim was another excellent man (*chun tzu*) in Christian sense from whom his followers could find their moral and spiritual direction. Not only did people seek from his ministry supernatural healings but they also wanted to change their entire life style for his teaching. The feeling of antipathy toward secularism and socialism has been dominant in the Korean Church. It can be attributed at least partially to Kim’s pietistic philosophy along with Gil mentioned above. People loved him and tried to put his teaching into practice in everyday life. Many other prominent church leaders came from his revival meetings. Ju Gi-cheol, the most famous Korean martyre, and Kim Jae-joon, the founding father of Korean liberal theology, converted to Christianity through Kim’s ministry. The success of his ministry was not about the denomination or material benefit but about his character, presence and message.

One can find the powerful nature of his message from a cultural trend of hairstyle that swept the female community at the time. Many upper class women who listened to Kim’s message gave up their sumptuous *walja* and *eonjeun meori*<sup>64</sup> and took *jjok meori* instead to show their pietism. *Yangbangamun*<sup>65</sup> women were not supposed to have *jjok meori* because it was for the low class. Kim’s spirituality and leadership was powerful to change their life style. He was a charismatic leader who had the characteristics of the Confucian *chun tzu* such as superior wisdom, power and morality.



There are many other contemporary church leaders whose extraordinary charismatic leadership cannot be easily found in the Western churches. Pastor David Cho is a prototypical leader of the Korean charismatic pastors in the modern era. His church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC), which was started in a poverty-stricken area in 1958, has explosively grown at the same pace as the Korean economy. Pastor Cho, who was strongly influenced by Sam Todd, an American Pentecostal healing minister, appealed with prosperity theology the Korean people, who were struggling with economic and political hardship. The Guinness Book of World Records has recently confirmed his church as the largest congregation in the world. The Christian World has ranked YFGC as the first among the fifty great churches of the world. The membership of 800 in 1962 climbed to 200,000 in 1981 and hit the milestone number, 720,000, in 1992.<sup>65</sup>

What is important here again is not the number but his personal character and contribution. The church, of course, has highly advanced administrative and organizational systems. It is the cell program that makes the mega church physically operate. Pastor David Cho was probably the first Korean pastor who adopted the cell program. No one, however, will object to the fact that when it comes to the success story of YFGC, his charismatic leadership is bigger than any other factors. He is the most influential Christian figure in Korea.<sup>66</sup> As Hong notes, Pastor Cho was not a preacher only for Sunday service. Nor was he a counselor who gave advice for a particular life issue. Church members try to follow the way he thinks, speaks and acts.<sup>67</sup> He is a *chun tzu* (excellent man) in a Christian sense, who provides both secular and spiritual wisdom. There is a humorous example. When Korean Christians say *jussi-op-sosseo* (give us) or *missipmida* (believe) in their prayer, many of them often heavily accentuate the *ss* sound like rough *sh* in English. It is known to be Pastor Cho's unique habit of prayer. Many Korean pastors also imitate his preaching style, which is simple in content, yet powerful in emotional deliverance like Billy Graham's.

His unique theology represented by the Tripartite Human nature and the Threefold Blessing resembles in many ways the traditional thought of enlightenment that the Confucian *chun tzu* was expected to pursue. If one carefully looks into his notion of human nature and the threefold blessing, he or she will realize that his soteriology demands the presence of a strong charismatic leader. Humans consist of body, consciousness and spirit. Among them does spirit make body and consciousness properly and effectively function. Not only is spirit the fundamental source for the functions of other physiological organism but it is also the root cause of all the blessings including material success. It means that spiritual nourishment, growth and transformation are the key for life success. This is obviously a Christian prosperity theology. In contrast to the Presbyterian mainstream theology emphasizing pietism, Pastor Cho explicitly promoted the role of spirit in bringing physical health and material blessing. According to his theology, everything is related to each other. There is no need to renounce any one of them.

This idea resonates in Neo-Confucian metaphysics, anthropology and sociology. Just as Pastor Cho argues that all the blessings come from the spiritual transformation of the inner self, Neo-Confucian philosophy emphasized the leading role of heavenly principle (li) in bringing the harmony of material things (chi). Pastor Cho's soteriological paradigm is based on the spiritual enlightenment of the inner being. The Neo-Confucian paradigm is, likewise, based on the heavenly enlightenment of the inner being. The question that the author raises, however, is why the charismatic leadership is crucial in this type of soteriology. Park answers the question. Many people go to YFGC not for intellectual enlightenment but for the power that can solve life's problems.<sup>68</sup> The power is, however, not what individual Christians can have on their own but something that can be delivered by a pastor who is specially ordained by God and who has extraordinary spirituality. Likewise, the Confucian mediocrity cannot reach the enlightenment by themselves. They need the sage (*seong in*) or the excellent man (*gun ja*), who will show examples and guide their life with heavenly wisdom and authority.

This heavy emphasis on the excellent leadership is not just a phenomenon of the past. A recent news article in the *Jung Ang Ilbo*<sup>69</sup> proves that it is still an ongoing phenomenon. Korean Christians' notion of the excellent leader demands more than the charismatic character. They want to find a pastor whose leadership can satisfy the need for both a CEO and spiritual leader. These days, many Korean mega churches try to hire pastors whose excellent leadership, whether charismatic or not, has been already widely proved, especially in the U.S. Pastor Kim Seung-uk, who is highly respected by Korean-American Christians, has been recently appointed to Halleluiah Church, which is one of the largest mega churches in Korea. His Sarang Community Church has ranked, since the inauguration of his ministry in 2006, in the 100 largest churches in America.<sup>70</sup> Lee Young-hoon, a Ph.D. scholar from Temple University, who had made a great contribution to the establishment of Pastor David Cho's theology, took the senior pastor position for the Yoido Full Gospel Church.

O Jeong-hyun, a renowned minister in LA, was invited to Sarange Church, another megachurch. Lee Mun-jang, professor of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has recently replaced Pastor Kim Jin-hong, who is famous of his slum ministry, *Doora Community Movement*. Korean Christians' emphasis on the pastoral leadership have never been diminished. They have become stronger and more extensive. The charismatic character of the pastor cannot enthrall the people unless it is accompanied by good moral character and intelligence. The author believes that the *chun-tzu-like* church leaders, who can provide excellent guidance for various domains of life, have been a key factor of the Korean church growth

### **VI The Obsession with the Orthodoxy**

What many scholars often miss in identifying the major factors of the Church growth is, however, Korean people's obsession with the orthodoxy. The author believes that their excessive adherence to the orthodoxy has contributed to the evangelical solidarity of the Korean Church. Koreans have a strong cultural tendency that highly values the traditional and the original. They believe that when something has become a tradition, there must be particular reasons. People believe that the fact that it has not faded away for long time indirectly proves its validity and efficacy for the value of use. Likewise, when a new knowledge, technology or commodity is imported from a foreign country, Koreans lay great emphasis on the originality and relentlessly investigate it. Behind that cultural tendency is the fact that Koreans tend to prefer something whose values have been proved from where it started. In other words, a strong empirical proof derives from "tradition" and "originality." According to the Wall Street Journal, South Korea is "one of the most luxury friendly places in the world." It means that "luxury goods appeal more to South Korean shoppers than in other countries."<sup>71</sup> McKinsey and Company, a management-consulting firm, attributed it to the monolithic culture of Korea.

People do not want to fall behind and look different. Nor do they want to be seen as old fashioned. When they get a new thing, they want to get the original and authentic one. No one knows when that cultural tendency started. Since the feudalistic Confucianism was culturally settled in Korea, people have focused obsessively on finding something right and just, whether knowledge, value or commodity. They felt secure when they thought they had and did the right thing approved by the authority and the mainstream culture and society. The question is what the authority and the mainstream society approve. When they approve it, it becomes orthodox. Once the orthodox values are set, it is really hard for a new idea to infiltrate. The Korean church growth is, strictly speaking, the growth of the conservative and evangelical church. The conservative theology was introduced first and successfully settled as the orthodox Christian thought. The collective culture of Korea, which was mentioned in a previous section, brought the people under the same unified theological and ethical orientation. It has become a key factor to keep from internal division and losing members. The author believes that the obsession with the orthodoxy is a product of the Korean Confucian culture.

The Neo-Confucian philosophy was introduced to Korea and settled as a philosophical discourse seeking the orthodox. As Ryu notes, the Confucianism that the Koreans encountered for the first time was a form of Chinese philosophy whose theoretical legitimacy and orthodoxy was severely being debated. Not only were there internal debates over the legitimate succession of Confucius' philosophy, but there was also a wide range of interrogatory dialogues with other traditions. Confucianism tried to establish and develop its institutional and philosophical identity through critically judging as heterodoxy other traditions such as Buddhism and Taoism.<sup>72</sup> Neo-Confucianism in China competed with other religious traditions and often positively utilized their thoughts for further philosophical and spiritual development.

When Koreans received neo-Confucianism, such an interrogative attitude toward other traditions was, however, more intensified.<sup>73</sup> They strictly adhered to Chu Hsi's version of Confucianism. Making a great contribution to the establishment of the full-fledged Confucian state, the Joseon Dynasty, Jeong Do-jeon, a founding scholar, tried to drive off all other traditional thought systems such as Buddhism and Taoism. Yi Hwang, probably the most important Confucian scholar in Korean history, also put forth great effort to deter the thoughts of Lo Ch'in-shun and Wang Yang-ming, labeling them as crypto-Buddhists.<sup>74</sup> Since the Chu Hsi's philosophy was established as orthodox by the founding scholars of the Joseon Dynasty, the mainstream Confucian scholars had been restless in sorting out heterodox elements and protecting the established system. Yi Hang-no, who inherited Yi Hwang's orthodox thought, once said, "Revere China and expel the barbarians." Scholars who did not follow Chu Hsi's version were called "despoiler of the true way or traitor to Confucian culture (*samunmanjok*)."<sup>75</sup> Reischauer made an interesting analysis on this obsession with the orthodoxy.

He said, “As the borrowers, the Koreans...adhere to the minutiae of the Confucian system with a rigidity that exceeded that of the Chinese. It perhaps took greater courage to be innovator in Korea than in China itself.”<sup>76</sup> In particular, intellectual and cultural borrowers focus more on the originality. Christian theology and practices, when Koreans adopted them, had to go through a similar process. Although the Christian message by early Catholic missionaries was notoriously rejected, once Koreans thought it was the right time to accept it, what they encountered first, naturally took the orthodox status. North American missionaries mainly from Presbyterian and Methodist denominations set the tone of the ideal Christian thought and practices. As Takamizawa notes, since most of them came with great spiritual enthusiasm through revival movements in their countries, the theological orientation of the early Korean churches were strongly conservative and evangelical.<sup>77</sup> Just as the Chu Hsi’s Neo-Confucian philosophy was settled as orthodox because of the dominant number of his followers and their powerful social status, the overwhelming number of evangelical American missionaries played a key role in helping the Korean churches perceive and adopt the conservative theology as original or orthodox.

Since the first formal treaty between Korea and the U.S. in 1882, two American denominations, according to Hutchison, had constituted “an oligopoly.”<sup>78</sup> The northern and southern counterparts of each denomination had divided up the entire Korean territory as their mission field. Hutchinson said, “No mission field, with the possible exception of Brazil, was so thoroughly dominated by America’s mainstream Protestantism as was Korea...More than two-thirds of Protestant missionaries who came to Korea in 1884-1910 were American, and more than 95 percent of the American missionaries were the children of mainline denominations.”<sup>79</sup> The orthodox thoughts that they established can be epitomized by two faith statements. One is the Westminster Confession, which was accepted by the American Presbyterian churches in the nineteenth century. The other was John Wesley’s Twenty-Five Articles, which was formally adopted at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784. Both creeds emphasized literal interpretation of the Bible, the universality of salvation and the role of the Holy Spirit. They both demanded the strict application of faith to every aspect of life. They were very conservative both theologically and ethically. The intellectual and ethical rigorism was a perfect fit in the traditional Confucian culture.

The orthodox theology and practices initiated by American missionaries were further strengthened and made permanent by Korean church leaders. Not only were the missionaries the role model for the new life style of Korean converts, but their understanding of the Bible and ethical rigorism were also meticulously imitated. The most positive side of this conservative theology is the ability to keep the intellectual and spiritual solidarity of the community and deter a divisive movement within it. Since diverse interpretation of the sacred text was not allowed from the beginning, when orthodox norms were set, the established membership, hierarchical structure and disciplines became very solid. Just as the mainstream Neo-Confucian scholars of the Joseon Dynasty relentlessly sought out heretics, labeling them as *samunnaenjeok*, and persecuted them, the Korean churches have successfully deterred the influence of a variety of Christian liberal thoughts.

From the 1910s through the 1930s there were a series of administrative and theological challenges to the mainstream Korean Church. For example, Choi Jung-in and his Church of Freedom in Jeon-buk province in 1910 challenged the American Southern Presbyterian Church missionaries particularly on their exclusive authority on mission policy, missionary funds, adjustments of missionary districts and the management of missionary institutions. Missionaries immediately rejected his request and labeled him as disobedient heretic. In 1923, Rev. Lee Man-jip made a similar challenge. While working as a Presbyterian pastor in Namsung-ro Church, Daegu City, he was helping an organization called the Self-governing Church. When involved in a conflict in Degu Gyesung school owned by missionaries, siding with the college students with liberal thoughts, he was also quickly dismissed from the denomination. Various progressive thoughts trying to demand independence from foreign missionaries also failed. Liberal theological movements from the 1930s could not avoid the same fate.

The Abingdon Bible Commentary case was the biggest event. When translated into Korean, it was immediately controversial because of the presence of the liberal hermeneutic methods such as form criticism, redaction criticism and higher criticism. The 24th Presbyterian Assembly promptly disapproved the authority, saying, “We don’t accept the commentary because it does not fit in with our creeds.” As Suh notes, there was no room for liberal theology to play any positive role even as an intellectual movement. While liberal theology is recognized in the West at least for its scholarly contribution, it is always regarded as negative in Korean theology. Korean theology is only the instrument to protect what has been already established as orthodox. Suh suggests as a good example the status of Karl Barth’s theology in Korea.

While Barth's theology in the West is not known to be a liberal theology, it is a liberal theology in Korea. The standards to identify the liberal theology are not particularly complex theoretical elements but simply the difference from the orthodoxy. The primary reason for the failure of most sectarian movements in the 1930s is the same. There were movements emphasizing the spiritual role of women. The Wonsan Spiritualist Party was the movement that started in the Wonsan Methodist Church. A woman named Yu Myung-wha acted like Jesus and performed healing ministry. Kim Chun-be, a Presbyterian pastor, requested the General Assembly to ordain women as presbyters in churches. Whang Kuk-ju led the Jesus Church, claiming his mystical union with Jesus, and attracted and disturbed many Christians.

However, they were all looked down on and failed simply because they were different from the Christianity that most Korean believed to be original and traditional. The only way for a sectarian group to succeed would be to look like the orthodox, whether by theology or simply by images, or to grow to a mega-church. The YFGC is the best example of the latter. Pastor David Cho's prosperity theology and his Holy Spirit movement were severely criticized as cultish and heretical because of the shamanistic interpretation of blessing. Growing as the world's largest church, the YFGC, however, has secured a bridgehead in dealing with controversies. Its gigantic size and Pastor David Cho's leadership and world-known reputation have set off his heterodox character. This is, however, a very rare case. The obsession with the orthodox is still pervasive in the Korean church. It is obviously the negative force to restrain the germination of a creative and progressive thought within the community. It is also the driving force to keep and strengthen the mainstream values and the solidarity of the members.

### ***VII The Role as Civil Religion***

The last Confucian norm that the author finds in the success story of the Korean Christianity is its characteristic of civil religion. The concept of civil religion, which was created in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's discourse of social contract and has been further elaborated upon by many other modern scholars such as Robert Bellah, seems useful to understand the Koreans' traditional perception and utilization of religion for the society at large. A civil religion provides a set of beliefs, which can effectively unite people together in both intellectual and spiritual dimensions and maintain the established stability with higher values than those of the state. There is obviously a parallel between Confucianism and Christianity in that they both, when introduced, greatly impressed the mainstream political leaders about their ability to benefit the society. Neo-Confucianism was successfully embraced because of its extensive utility ranging from philosophy to political ideology and even to religio-cultural paradigm. The Korean literati saw the powerful instrumentality to unite the people together and make the kingdom more stable. The Neo-Confucianism provided not only a new set of advanced legal and bureaucratic systems, but also a way of life that would effectively guide and control both the human and the spiritual relationships.

When the Korean Three Kingdoms were exposed to Confucianism for the first time around the 7<sup>th</sup> century, they all saw the possibility as a new educational paradigm and state ideology. They used it to establish a variety of educational institutions, which would foster a unified spirit. King Sosurim of the Goguryeo kingdom established Taehak for the study of Confucian classics. The gravestone of the King Gwangeto shows a Confucian ruling philosophy. There was a serious Confucian scholarship in the Baekje kingdom. It is well known that Japan received Confucianism from scholars of the Baekje kingdom. It is also no doubt that the principle of the *Hwarangdo*<sup>80</sup> in the Silla kingdom was deeply influenced by Confucian philosophy. The Goryeo kingdom, which united these three kingdoms in the 10<sup>th</sup> century expanded Confucian institutions further. King Gwangjong (925-975 CE) launched the national civil service examinations whose primary subjects were on the Confucian literature. King Seongjong (960-997 CE) established *Gukjagam*, which was the highest educational institution, to embrace Confucianism as the state ideology. Such an attempt led to the establishment of another significant Confucian institution, the *Seonggyugwan*, where the students intensively studied the Confucian literature and the King performed religious rituals for ancestral worship. Differing from other traditional religions such as Buddhism, Taosim, and Shamanism, Confucianism had powerful intellectual and spiritual assets for social solidarity.

While the common philosophy of Buddhism and Taoism were incompetent in providing a single unified value system and practical wisdom to benefit the secular realm such as political institutions and community, Confucianism had a very clear moral principle, which could meticulously guide and control the society at large from top to bottom. Such a utility of religion as state ideology culminated during the Joseon Dynasty, which had been established by a military coup. Revolutionaries needed a new ideology that could legitimize their authority and unite the kingdom in all dimensions from the spiritual to the moral.

Confucianism flourished because it satisfied all demands. Jeong Do-jeon (1342-1398 CE), a prominent founding thinker, led the Confucianization of the Joseon Dynasty. Engaging in a series of dialogues with Giwa, a leading Buddhist monk, and writing his *magnum opus*, “*Bulssi Japbyeon* (Array of Critique of Buddhism), Jeong Do-jeon emphasized the superior characters of Confucianism in building the new strong kingdom. Confucianism was successful as state ideology in the entire Joseon periods. Not only did Confucianism embrace the traditional spirituality based on ancestral worship, but it also provided a variety of benefits ranging from practical skills for effective governance to meticulous codification of moral values such as *chung* and *hyo* for social solidarity. Confucianism was a good religion, philosophy, ethics and wisdom for both the people and the state.

Korean intellectuals during the early church period saw a similar utility from Christianity. It was not just the religious message that captured their attention. Many of the early converts were attracted to what Christianity could bring in for the Korean society at large. It was more than individual interests. Seo Jae-pil, a prominent intellectual and nationalist during the late Joseon Dynasty and the Japanese Colonial period, paid great attention to the connection between Christianity and “the historical evolution of Western civilization.”<sup>81</sup> He saw many positive sides of Christianity as civil religion when he was in exile in the U.S. after his failure of *gapsinjeongbyon*, a military coup, which had been executed with other progressive revolutionaries for political reformation. He said, “The Protestant form of Christianity would be best suited for the development of the moral and spiritual initiatives of the Korean people and for inculcating a new civic morality and love of freedom, justice, and rights among his people.”<sup>82</sup> He introduced the Christian message to many of his compatriots and emphasized its prospect as the new ideological foundation of the nation.<sup>83</sup> Yun Chi-ho, another leading nationalist and a prominent Christian lay leader, found a similar value.

He saw Christianity as a cultural instrument for advanced civilization. Just as the Neo-Confucianism had been adopted as a new cultural paradigm, Christianity was understood as a brand new cultural package from the West. He believed that “America represented the height of Protestantism and forces associated with modernity such as capitalism, science, technology, education, and civil society.”<sup>84</sup> The images of Christianity did not just remain in the religious dimension. Most political reformers, who advocated open policy, identified Protestantism with modernization. They believed that Christianity could eliminate the regressive civil mentality of the people and Confucian cultural heritage and fix the corrupt government. Yun Chi-ho explicitly declared, “Only Protestantism, not the corrupt government, was fit to assume the task of restoring the moral fibre of the people.”<sup>85</sup> The March First Movement against the Japanese Colonialism in 1919 indirectly shows how deeply Christianity was involved in the restoration of the nation. Thirty-three nationalists gathered at Taehwagwan restaurant in Seoul and made the Korean Declaration of Independence. It ignited a series of street demonstrations by unarmed students and civilians. More than 7000 people were killed by Japanese troops. It became a milestone movement from which the Koreans’ passion for independence was further inspired and their systematic effort was more accelerated than before. Almost half of the thirty-three nationalists, who participated in designing the Korean Declaration of Independence, were Christians.

Syngman Rhee, the first President of the Republic of Korea, shared the same thought. Educated from George Washington University and Princeton, he openly claimed that Christian education would raise “the moral standard of the Korean people.”<sup>86</sup> When his nation was annexed by Japan, Syngman Rhee suggested that Christianity would be the symbolic resource to equip the Korean people with new values and attitudes for national independence.<sup>87</sup> He was the one who helped the First National Assembly (the House of Representatives) inaugurate from a Christian prayer in 1948.<sup>88</sup> Yi Kwang-sun, a prominent intellectual and writer in modern Korea, had a similar belief. He argued that Korea encountered Western modern civilization and civil morality through Christianity.<sup>89</sup>

Although the Conservative churches during the modern era were completely behind the political scene, focusing on spiritual growth and revival, liberal churches with progressive theology continued the tradition. Deeply influenced by liberation theology, many progressive churches such as Methodist churches and Gidokgyo Jangnohoe churches projected the Christian message as the soteriological paradigm to liberate the *minjung* (the masses) from the oppression of military dictatorship. The Gospel of Jesus became both the hermeneutic paradigm to understand the fate of the *minjung* in soteriological narratives and the ethical paradigm to justify the active political participation of the church. What is important here is that Christianity has been always a useful resource for Koreans to deal with a series of national crises.

Just as the scholars in the 14<sup>th</sup> century found the positive utility of the Neo-Confucianism for the establishment of their new dynasty and for the sustainment of harmony and stability, Koreans have seen and taken advantage of the strengths of Christianity in both its message and institution for the new nation. Its messages of the liberation from suffering and oppression and of the hope of a new kingdom perfectly fit in many of the important historical contexts. Its enlightened intellectual and cultural package, whether conservative or liberal, has played a significant role in the successful settlement and growth of Christianity in Korea.

### Conclusion

Many scholars note that the rapid growth of the Korean church has recently come to a halt. Some scholars like Jeon Ho-jin argue that Korean Christians are deceived by “a statistical illusion (*tonggyejeok heosang*).” Many believe that the Christian population has hit 30% of the entire population. Jeon rather suggests the maximum 20% as the realistic number.<sup>90</sup> According to his analysis, the Korean church is already in a period of decline. A considerable amount of research has been done on finding primary causes for the decline. What most scholars commonly point out are related to what the author has presented in this paper as Confucian norms. The Korean church is losing some of the traditional strengths that the author characterizes as *Yugyojeok* (유교적: Confucian). Moral corruption of the church is unprecedentedly high. Many prominent church leaders were involved in financial corruption and sexual misconduct. Christian politicians are often even worse than secular politicians in both their professional and moral performances. It is hard in these days to find a *chun-tzu-like* Christian leader who the general populace is willing to follow for both their moral and spiritual direction. There are many CEO type pastors who are versatile in managing the church as an entrepreneurial entity.

They cannot, however, be as appealing as *chun-tzu* type leaders, who have the complete package for spiritual and life direction. Nor is it easy to find a prophetic church, which actively responds both intellectually and spiritually to peculiar historical circumstances of the nation. The adherence to the orthodoxy, which was positive in the early church period when a set of strong mainstream theology and institutional system was necessarily demanded, has been distorted and perpetuated into anti-intellectualism and close-minded or regressive conservatism.<sup>91</sup> The active adoption of advanced programs from American mega-churches such as Willow Creek Church and various institutional reforms such as the abolition of *gyohoiseseup* (church inheritance<sup>92</sup>) would not make the Korean church escape from the fate of decline. The author believes that the Confucian cultural norms found in Korean church history represent some of the key components of success, which Korean Christians can always refer to. They are the community-centered values, the emphasis on education, high moral standards, the *chun-tzu-like* holistic leadership, the strong adherence to the orthodoxy against internal division and the active role as a civil religion.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> According to Hong's research, Korea has 15 megachurches with more than 10,000 adult members in 1999. The number of the churches with more than 1000 adult members was 400. See Young-gi Hong, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 112.

<sup>2</sup> Han-sik Kim, “The Influence of Christianity,” *Korean Journal* 23, no. 12 (1983): 6.

<sup>3</sup> David Chung, *Syncretism, The Religious Context of Christian Beginning in Korea*, ed. Kang-nam Oh (NY, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 390.

<sup>5</sup> Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Yee-heum Yoon, “The Contemporary Religious Situation in Korea,” (paper presented at the Conference on Religion and Contemporary Society in Korea, Center of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, November 11–12, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> See Jung-han Kim, “Christianity and Korean Culture: the Response to the Success of Christianity in Korea.” *Exchange* 33, no. 2 (2004): 132-152.

<sup>7</sup> Chung, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Young-gwan Kim, “the Confucian-Christian Context in Korean Christianity,” *B.C. Asian Review* 13 (Spring 2002): 70.

<sup>9</sup> The Research Center for the Study of Korean Confucianism, *Chosun Yuhak ei Hakpales (The Schools of Korean Confucianism)* (Seoul: Yemoonseowon, 1996), 498.

- <sup>10</sup> It is a progressive Neo-Confucian movement. Based on *silsa-gusi-jihak* (실사구시지학), the school argued that the ultimate truth could be found in the material world. Silhak scholars focused more on the practical value of the Confucian scholarship than theories.
- <sup>11</sup> Kim, Young-gwan, 75.
- <sup>12</sup> Covetousness, arrogance, avarice, lust, idleness, jealousy, and anger
- <sup>13</sup> Yi Ik, *Chilguk, Songho Saseol (Minute Explanations on Various Topics by Songho)* (Seoul: Kyongchi ch'ulp'an-sa, 1967), 368.
- <sup>14</sup> Kim, Young-gwan, 72. See Chai-sik Chung, *Christianity as a Heterodoxy: An Aspect of General Cultural Orientation in Traditional Korea, in Korea's Response to the West*, ed. Yung-hwan Jo (Kalamazoo, Michigan: The Korea Research and Publications, 1971), 61.
- <sup>15</sup> Kim, Young-gwan, 75. See Jan-tai Keum, *Dongseo Kyoseop Kwa Keundae Hanguk Sasangui Gyeonghyang-e Gwanhan Yungu (A Study of the Tendency of Korean Thought through the Modern Interaction between East and West)* (Seoul: Sunggyungwan University, 1978), 77-111.
- <sup>16</sup> Kim, Young-gwan, 76.
- <sup>17</sup> Confucius said, "The sage...appointed Hsieh to be minister of education and teach people human relations, that between father and son, there should be affection; between ruler and minister, there should be righteousness; between husband and wife, there should be attention to their separate functions; between old and young, there should be a proper order." See Wing-Tsit Chan, trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 69-70.
- <sup>18</sup> Eiko Takamizawa, *Kankoku Kirisutokyoshi (Korean Church History)*, (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppan Kyoku, 1986), 124.
- <sup>19</sup> Keunbae Min, *Hanguk Gidog Gyohoisa (Korean Church History)*, trans. Masahiko Sawa (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppan Kyoku, 1986), 124.
- <sup>20</sup> Do-yong Chung, *Christianity and Confucianism* (Seoul: Sungkwang Munhwasa, 1994), 176-178.
- <sup>21</sup> Kim, Young-gwan, 70.
- <sup>22</sup> Roy E Shearer, "The Evangelistic Missionary's Role in Church Growth in Korea," *International Review of Mission* 54 (1965): 463, quoted in Kim Young-Gwan, "The Confucian-Christian Context in Korean Christianity," *B.C. Asian Review* 13 (Spring 2002): 74.
- <sup>23</sup> Sung-Chun Chun, *Schism and Unity in the Protestant Churches of Korea* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1979), 16, quoted in Bong-rin Ro and Marlin Nelson, *Korean Church Growth Explosion* (Seoul: Word of Life Press, 1983), 191- 192.
- <sup>24</sup> Sang-geun Bang, *Sinyubakhaegi-e daehan Tongaejeok Gochal (A Statistical Study of the Sin Yu Persecution)* (Seoul: Samok, Hanguk Cheonjugyo Jungang Hyeop-ui-hoe, 2001), 35-43.
- <sup>25</sup> "Gundae Bogeumhwaneun Hanguk Gyohoiga Matayahal Munje" (The Evangelization of the Military is the Duty of the Korean Church), News Power, accessed August 24, 2010, <http://www.newspower.co.kr/newnews/print.php?uid=3720>.
- <sup>26</sup> Eu-jun Jo, "Strong Korea on Crisis, the Best in Education," *Choson Ilbo*, May 6, 2009, accessed July 9, 2010, [http://businessnews.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2009/01/01/2009010100275.html](http://businessnews.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/01/01/2009010100275.html).
- <sup>28</sup> Len Lazarick, "Korean Community driven by Success," *Examiner.com*, Jul 31, 2007, accessed May 22, 09, [http://www.examiner.com/printa-855241~Korean\\_community\\_driven\\_by\\_success.html](http://www.examiner.com/printa-855241~Korean_community_driven_by_success.html)
- <sup>29</sup> Sam Dillon, Elite Korean Schools, Forging Ivy League Skills, *The New York Times*, April 27, 2008, accessed June 11, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/world/asia/27seoul.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/world/asia/27seoul.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1)
- <sup>27</sup> George Herbert Jones, *Korea Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1910), 384.
- <sup>30</sup> James S. Gale, *Korea in Transition* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909), 45-46.
- <sup>31</sup> Horace N. Allen, *Things Korean: A Collection of Sketches and Anecdotes, Missionary and Diplomatic* (New York: Fleming H. Revell 1908), 116-117.
- <sup>32</sup> Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 140.
- <sup>33</sup> Da-young Ryu, "the Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Church History* 77. no. 2 (2008): 383.
- <sup>34</sup> C. F. Reid, *The Touch of Christ: A Tale of Missions* (Nashville Tenn: Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, n.d.), 26. Also see Yun, Chi-ho, *Yun Chi-ho Ilgi (Diary of Yun Chi-ho)*, 8 vols. (Seoul: Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, 1973-1986).
- <sup>35</sup> Ryu, 383.

- <sup>36</sup> According to Nevius, native Christians, who could not spiritually and financially stand by themselves, were called *rice Christians*. It means that they come to the church when getting material benefit. They leave the church, when they do not receive material benefit.
- <sup>37</sup> Mamoru Ogata, *Nikkan Kyokai Seicho Hikaku* (Comparison between Japanese Church and Korean Church: Cultural and Historical Perspectives) (Tokyo: Hope Shuppan, Inochino Kotobasha Oroshibu, n.d), 102.
- <sup>38</sup> Eun-yeol Park, "Nevius Jeongchaek-I Hanguk Gyohoe-ye Michin Younhyang mit Haeyoi Seongyo-ui Jeoggyong" (The Influence of the Nevius Method on the Korean Church and an Application to the Mission Fields) (M.A. thesis., Hanil Jangsindae Sinhak Daehaggwon, Gyoyukhak, 2005).
- <sup>39</sup> Sun-ae Chou, "Korean Church Growth and Christian Education," in Korean Church Growth Explosion, ed. Ro Bong-Rin and Marlin L. Nelson (Seoul: Word of Life, 1983), 314.
- <sup>40</sup> See Kim Young-han, Malsseum Sagyeonghoiro Sijakdoen Pyeongyang Dae Buheunghoi (Revival Movement in Pyeongyang in 1907 from Sagyeonghoi Bible Study), December 12, 2007, *Christian Today*, accessed September 16, 2010, <http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/view.htm?id=189314>.
- <sup>41</sup> C.A. Clark, *The Presbyterian Church of Korea, The Growing Church* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1939), 149-150.
- <sup>42</sup> James Huntley Grayson, *Early Buddhism and Christianity in Korea: a Study in the Implantation of Religion* (Leiden, the Netherlands: n.p., 1985), 6.
- <sup>43</sup> Andrew E. Kim, "A History of Christianity in Korea: From Its Troubled Beginning to Its Contemporary Success, Korea Overseas Information Service," *Korea Journal* 35 no.2 (1995): 34-35.
- <sup>44</sup> Bo-myung Seo, "Korean Contributions to Christian Theology: Some Initial Thoughts" (paper presented at the CSKC Monthly Forum, Chicago Theological Seminary, September 2007).
- <sup>45</sup> Young-gi Hong, "The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3. no. 1 (2000): 112.
- <sup>46</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 215.
- <sup>47</sup> Confucius, the Analects, 14:45, trans. Wing-tsit Chan. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 43.
- <sup>48</sup> James H. Grayson, "Elements of Protestant Accommodation to Korean Religious Culture: A Personal Ethnographic Perspective." *Missiology: An International Review* 23, no.1, (1995): 50.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> See Wolgan Mokhoi, March 1981, Vol.3, 72-73.
- <sup>52</sup> Young-gi Hong, "The Impact of Charismatic Pastoral Leadership On Religious Commitment and Church Growth in the Korean Mega-Churches," *Mission Studies* 18, no.1 (2001): 30.
- <sup>53</sup> Seong-gi Kim, *Heretic Elements in the Worship Services of the Korean Church* (Seoul: Jangrohoi Sinhak Daehaggwon, 1990), 48.
- <sup>54</sup> See the following youtube clip. It is an example that shows how explicit Korean ministers are in expressing their political views. <http://youtube.com/watch?v=emanHhArGBE>
- <sup>55</sup> Gil-sop Song, *Hanguk Sinhak Sasangsa* (History of Theological Thoughts in Korea) (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1987), 150.
- <sup>56</sup> Song, 150.
- <sup>57</sup> In-suh Kim, *Yeonggye Seonsaeng Socheon, Brief Biography of Mr. Yeongagye, in the Collection of Kim In-suh's Writings* (Seoul: Kimoonsa, 1976), 48.
- <sup>58</sup> Jin-kyoung Kil, *Yeonggye Kil Seon-ju* (The Biography of the Rev. Seon-ju Kil) (Seoul: CLS, 1968), 326.
- <sup>59</sup> William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, ed. *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 461.
- <sup>60</sup> The Mail Sinbo (Daily Newspaper), August 11, 1930, quoted in In-soo Kim, "The Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Verginia, 1996), 174.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Myeong-seop Huh, "Kim Ik-doo and the Spiritual Revival in the 1920s," *Christian Today*, December 15, 2005, accessed July 15, 2010,
- <sup>63</sup> Tae-heun, Song, "Kim Ik-doo, Man of prayer and Evangelism," *Christian Today*, January 27, 2010, accessed July 16, 2010, <http://www.christiantoday.co.kr/view.htm?id=206442>
- <sup>64</sup> *Walja* and *eonjeun meori* were a kind of wigs that were placed on the top of the head. They represented a higher social class. *Jjok meori* was another classic up do hairstyle used by the mediocrity.



- <sup>65</sup> Aristocratic class
- <sup>65</sup> Hong, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega Churches in Korea,” 105.
- <sup>66</sup> Jun-seop Kim, “Jo Yong-gi, the Most Influential Pastor,” *Gidokgyo Times*, September 1, 2009, accessed July 20, 2010,  
<http://www.kmctimes.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=29236>
- <sup>67</sup> Young-gi Hong, *Charis and Charisma, David Yongjin Cho and the Growth of Yoyo Full Gospel Church* (Colorado Springs: Regnum Book International, 2003), 37.
- <sup>68</sup> Myung-soo Park, “Korean Pentecostal Spirituality as Manifested in the Testimonies of Members of Yoido Full Gospel Church,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no.1 (2004): 22.
- <sup>69</sup> A major news media in South Korea.
- <sup>70</sup> Soo-yeon O, Rev. “Kim’s Decision to Move,” *Los Angeles JungAng Ilbo*, June 1, 2010, accessed September 2, 2010,  
[http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art\\_id=1039582](http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art_id=1039582)
- <sup>71</sup> Evan Ramstad, “South Korea Becomes Fertile Spot for Luxury,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2010, accessed September 12, 2010.  
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405274870372050457537-6913847224810.html?KEYWORDS=korea+luxury+friendly>
- <sup>72</sup> Ryu Da Young, 384.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Weon-yeol Chou, *The Confucian Roots of Fundamentalist Ethos in the Korean Presbyterian Church* (Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 103.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 313.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup> Takamizawa, 94.
- <sup>78</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 128,
- <sup>79</sup> Hutchinson, 128.
- <sup>80</sup> Hwarangdo was the national academy in the Silla kingdom (the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE). Its members consisted of young boys of the elite class. Its primary goal was to train future leaders, who were strong in both mind and body, through Buddhist and Confucian education.
- <sup>81</sup> Chai-sik Chung, “Which Christianity? The Gospel Culture, and the Problem of Cultural Transformation in Korea” (paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Han Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities, George Washington University, Washington D.C. Jan 9, 2001).
- <sup>82</sup> Chung, “Which Christianity?,” 6.
- <sup>83</sup> Kwang-rin Lee, *Hanguk Kaehwa Sasang Yeongu* (Studies on Korean Enlightenment Thought) (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1979), 199-238.
- <sup>84</sup> Chung, “Which Christianity?,” 7.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup> Yi Syngman, *Chongnyon yi Sung-man Chasojon* (the autobiography of young man Syngman Rhee), trans. Yi Chong-sik (Seoul: Sin Tong-A, 1965), 425-426, quoted in Yong-ik Yu, *Yi Sung-man Ui sam kwa kkum* (Syngman Rhee’s life and dream) (Seoul: Chungang-Ilbos, 1996), 218.
- <sup>87</sup> Chung, “Which Christianity?,” 9.
- <sup>88</sup> Chung, *Syncretism, The Religious Context of Christian Beginning in Korea*, 19.
- <sup>89</sup> Chung, “Which Christianity?,” 9.
- <sup>90</sup> Ho-jin Jeon, *Wolgan Gosin* 8 (1995).
- <sup>91</sup> Many Christian scholars point out the excessively closed-minded theology in the Korean mainstream churches. They argue that conservative theology is strictly applied for keeping from not only the incursion of heretic theology but also scholarly productive debates and thoughts. It often causes unnecessary internal division and gives a negative image to the general public. See Union Press Up News, 2004, July 5, accessed in August 13, 2010.  
<http://www.unionpress.co.kr/news/detail.php?number=29967&thread=05r01r01>
- <sup>92</sup> *Gyohoseseup* is a culture of the Korean church in which a son of the senior pastor inherits the next senior pastorate. It is not common. However, recently, some Korean megachurches such as Geumran church, Gwangrim church and Emanuel church did gyohoseseup and caused a lot of public criticism.