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Korean Religious Culture and its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea

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This study offers an analysis of the affinity between Korean traditional religious culture and Protestant Christianity in order to bring into sharper relief several important points of contact that strengthened the appeal of the imported faith in South Korea. In particular, Korean Shamanism, the enduring core of Korean religious and cultural thought, is given special attention in order to explain the prominence of its worldview and practices in the uniquely Korean form of Protestantism. The paper also examines the way in which specific Protestant doctrines and practices were modified or accentuated to suit the disposition of the Korean people. What this study reveals is that Christian conversion in South Korea did not involve an exclusivistic change of religious affiliation, meaning that it did not require the repudiation of traditionally held beliefs. Instead, millions of South Koreans eagerly embraced Christianity precisely because the new faith was advanced as an extension or continuation of Korean religious tradition.

An estimated 73 million Protestant Christians live in Asia, comprising about 2 percent of the total Asian population. While Protestant Christians are to be found in virtually every Asian country, it is South Korea that has witnessed the most spectacular and sociologically significant Protestant expansion. Since its introduction in 1884, Protestant Christianity had proceeded to become — after Buddhism — the largest religion in the country. By 1989, nearly one fourth of South Korea's 40 million people were Protestant Christian. The growth was particularly pronounced from the early 1960s to the end of the 1980s, the period of the country's remarkable modernization. Since the early 1960s, when South Korea's Protestants scarcely topped the one million mark, the number of Protestant Christians increased faster than in any other country, more than doubling every decade. Moreover, by 1989, there were 29,820 Protestant churches and 55,989 pastors, making the Protestant Church in South Korea one of the most

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vital and dynamic in the world. This is all the more astonishing given the fact that only about 2 percent of the Asian population is Protestant Christian (South Korea alone accounted for over 14 percent of the total Protestant population in Asia in 1989), and that Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has failed to strike roots in Japan — a neighbouring country with strikingly similar social organization and shared cultural traditions — where less than one percent of the population has converted to Christianity.

Despite the importance of addressing the "Christian question" in its Asian context, there has to date been but limited social scientific attention to the subject; most glaringly, the sociology of religion has yet to turn its research focus on the remarkable spread of Protestant Christianity in South Korea. There have of course been numerous important specialist studies (Kang 1997; Paik 1971; Min 1982; Clark 1971; Moffett 1962; Grayson 1985), but these offer essentially historical treatments. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, this study offers an analysis of the affinity between Korean religious culture and Protestantism in order to bring into relief various points of contact that strengthened the appeal of the imported faith in the host society. It is argued here that the dramatic progress of Protestantism in South Korea during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s[1] was due in part to the way the imported faith converged with certain concepts and practices of Korean religious tradition.[2] It is also argued that Korean clergy, in an effort to make Protestantism more acceptable to potential converts, accentuated certain messages and doctrines, particularly those pertaining to shamanistic worldview. Examples of convergence between Korean religious tradition and Protestantism abound, but the following themes stand out as the most important: an emphasis

[1] Protestantism in South Korea grew rapidly only since the 1960s for two main reasons: one is Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), during when Christianity suffered severe oppression from Japanese authorities; and the other is the Korean War (1950–1953), which devastated the country and claimed millions of lives. The growth of Protestantism since the 1960s coincided with the country's economic development and rapid urbanization. Acute feelings of despair and alienation engendered by the interminable social and national ills, i.e., Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War and dire poverty as well as anomie arising from rapid industrialization and urbanization provided psychological impetus for a large segment of the Korean population to seek a satisfying response in the Christian faith. Churches, in turn, served as welfare agencies and as points of contact for displaced individuals, including millions of refugees from North Korea, seeking an identity, comfort and fellowship.

[2] It must be noted, however, that the primary aim of this study is to examine the basic religious values embedded in the uniquely Korean psycho-cultural dynamics, rather than attempting to offer a comprehensive survey of traditional religions in Korea. Virtually all Koreans who converted to Protestant Christianity did not convert from another religion nor did they have any ties to a religious organization before they became Protestants. They were, nonetheless, deeply imbued with traditional religious values: spiritually, a shamanistic value system permeated virtually all aspects of people's consciousness; and socially, quasi-religious Confucianism governed almost all aspects of social interaction and personal interrelationship. Many Koreans still changed their allegiance to the new religion because its liberating gospel — liberation from poverty, inequality, insecurity or gender discrimination — appealed immensely to the aspirations of the underprivileged Koreans. The Church's role as an agent of democratization and modernization in the nation provided another impetus for the acceptance of Christianity among large numbers of modernity-minded Koreans.

on this-worldly life; the concept of *Hananim*; the image of God as the savior; the primacy of faith-healing; and the centrality of ethics and family values.[3]

As we shall see, a full explication and proper understanding of this unique dynamic will necessarily draw upon James Grayson's theory of emplantation. The theory asserts that growth and development of a missionary religion in a host society is contingent upon five sets of related factors, two of which are pertinent to this study: 1) the resolution of contradictions between the new doctrine and the core values of the receiving society; and 2) the resolution of conflict between the new doctrine and the existing religions of the host society (Grayson 1985: 130). As an analytical framework, the model of emplantation mandates attending to the congruence between "appeal" and "reception," i.e., fitting together both the message and the core values of the receiving society. This study will also draw upon other studies of Christian conversion to see if it lends support to any particular line of argument, e.g., "intellectualist" accounts of Christian conversion (Horton 1971).

EMPHASIS ON THIS-WORLDLY LIFE

Shamanism has traditionally exerted the most powerful religious influence upon the Korean people (Moon 1975, 1982; Jo 1983; Howard 1998). The most striking characteristic of this folk religion is its preoccupation with and emphasis on the fulfilment of material wishes. In fact, the fundamental purpose of Shamanism is to fulfill practical needs: People solicit the service of a shaman in hopes of realizing their material wishes, such as longevity, health, male births, and wealth. With its emphasis on the existence of spirits, particularly those of ancestors, that are believed to wield power on shifting fortunes of each individual, Shamanism has thus catered to this-worldly, materialistic, fatalistic, magical, and even utilitarian tendencies of Koreans. As such, Shamanism has been the enduring core of Korean religious and cultural thought, exercising a profound influence on the development of Korean attitudes and behaviors as well as cultural practices. Its influence was so powerful that newly introduced religions had to compromise with and absorb elements of Shamanism in order to be accepted by the Korean populace. Protestant Christianity was no exception: It had to be "shamanized" considerably in order to be more agreeable to the religious imagination of the Korean people. Protestant churches selectively stressed Christian doctrines that are similar to shamanistic beliefs and incorporated many aspects of shamanistic rituals.

In catering to the material interests of the traditional belief system, therefore, Korean Protestantism consciously and deliberately assumed the form of a

[3] Biblical passages are cited throughout the paper to support my arguments. The citation of these biblical passages is based on my observation as a regular churchgoer, interviews with pastors and leading specialists of Korean Christianity, and consultation of literature on sermons of leading Protestant churches in South Korea.

magical religion, accentuating the present and this-worldly rewards. The utopia that was emphasized by a vast majority of Protestant churches in South Korea was a material and economic paradise to be realized in this life, not in the next (Ryu 1965; Yun 1964; Lee 1977). Korean churches also exaggerated the impression of God's ability to improve living conditions, arousing expectations similar to those provoked by the conception of magical potency. Much emphasis was accorded to the this-worldly aspect of the Kingdom of God, projecting a society in which the will of God is done and in which a bounteous life would be a privilege for all.[4] While these are the ideals which Korean churches called upon adherents to strive to attain with an undivided devotion, too often these ideals were understood to be a promise that Protestant Christianity would create such a community for its members.

This stress on God's grace in granting people's materialistic wishes was especially conspicuous in sermons. For example, in his analysis of collected sermons by thirty leading pastors in South Korea, Daegon Kim (1983) found that the theme of material blessings upon accepting God as the savior was the predominant focus of their sermons, and that the instances of miracles in the Bible were given a particular attention. A compelling example of such emphasis on God's material blessings in the present life was found in the central message of Paul Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the Central Full Gospel Church in Seoul, the world's largest church with 500,000 members in 1989. The church's slogan that attracted large audiences — and inspired other churches to emulate — was the threefold blessings of Christ, i.e., health, prosperity, and salvation, contained within the second verse of the third epistle of John. Preaching the "theology of prosperity," Cho and his imitators advanced the idea that the acceptance of the Holy Spirit can mean that one is, besides being blessed with salvation in the next life, graced with health and materialistic successes in this world. In addition to the threefold blessings, South Korean pastors also stressed eight other blessings of Christ from the Book of Matthew (5: 3–10), especially those passages with materialistic implications (Park 1982: 38–39): "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (literally interpreted as gaining land ownership); and "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." They also maintained that illness, poverty, business failure, or any other misfortune is simply due to sin and spiritual impurity.

Such emphasis on material rewards by Korean clergy was paralleled by the equally enthusiastic this-worldly inclination of Korean Protestants. According to the 1984 Korea Gallup Polls (1984: 40), for example, nearly 55 percent of the Protestant respondents (N = 334) agreed that heaven or paradise is not to be

[4] A this-worldly tendency was so pervasive that even names of the Korean churches carried terms traditionally associated with conspicuous material wishes, such as plenty (e.g., "The Church of Plenty"), blessing (e.g., "The Church of the Blessed"), happiness, and hope.

found in the other world but in this world.[5] Furthermore, they regarded this-worldly values as being more significant than those of religious or doctrinal ones: 19.8 percent of the respondents identified health and 16.7 percent selected money and wealth as the most important matters in life, while only 13.1 percent, 6.6 percent, and 5.9 percent of the respondents recognized truth and honesty, love, and trust as the highest values, respectively (Korea Gallup Polls 1984: 40). A survey of the adherents of the Central Full Gospel Church in Seoul also demonstrated the primacy of a this-worldly orientation among Korean Protestants. When asked to identify motivations for believing in Protestant Christianity, 30.6 percent of 921 respondents identified healing while 37.6 percent recognized material blessings as primary reasons for turning to the imported faith (D. Kim 1981: 94). This was significantly higher than the respondents' religious motives, such as salvation (16.9 percent) and eternal life (7 percent). In the same survey, a majority of members expressed that their conversion to Protestantism actually resulted in a more enriching and prosperous life (41.2 percent of the respondents said that their attendance at church resulted in a better living standard).

The this-worldly tendency of Korean Protestants was also reflected in the way many Christians associated the purpose of offerings with secular blessings. A good example of this is the practice of *sowonhongeum* or the "offering of petition" in which Christians regularly dedicated, in an envelope, money and a list of wishes to be prayed for. *Gamsahongeum* or the "offering of gratitude" also exemplifies the this-worldly nature of Christian life, as Korean Christians contributed money to their churches whenever "good fortunes" occurred (e.g., birth of sons, sons and daughters passing the university entrance examination, prosperous business, or the return of health), all in an attempt to display their gratitude to God and to ensure the continuation of God's blessing. Survey results consistently substantiate Korean Christians' general tendency to associate the offering with wish-fulfilment. According to Korea Gallup Polls (1984: 49), 34.8 percent of the Christian respondents (N = 334) agreed with the statement that "one who offers money to the church will be blessed with more prosperity in return." In the follow-up survey in 1989, 34.2 percent of the respondents (N = 383) concurred with the same statement (Korea Gallup Polls 1989: 152). Similarly, Joonggi Kim *et al.* (1982: 101) found that 68.9 percent of Protestant Christian respondents (N = 1,234) identified "the gratitude for God's blessings" as their reason for giving the offering. All of this prompted Jingyong Chung (1977: 42), the noted Korean theologian, to claim that "Korean Christians' attendance at church, and their enthusiasm for dawn prayers and generosity in offering to the church are all intimately linked to their desire for this-worldly wish-fulfilment."

[5] A later survey by the Korea Gallup Polls in 1989 produced similar results: 52.2 percent of the Protestant respondents (N = 383) concurred that heaven is not to be found in the other world but in this world.

In addition to the articulation of individual material interests, another feature of Korean Christianity, reflecting its this-worldly inclination, pertains to the nation. Many pastors and Christian leaders advanced the notion that the establishment and prosperity of Korean churches as well as the Christianization of the nation is a patriotic and assured means to save the country from all social ills. If Korea were to become a Christian nation, they argued, God would in return bless the nation, bringing prosperity and national strength. This view figured prominently in the sermons of many clergymen throughout the history of Protestantism in Korea, particularly since the 1950s (Jung 1986: 19–26).[6] A favorite passage from the Bible in this regard was "Righteousness exalts a nation" (Proverbs 14: 34), and an extensive use was made of the Old Testament history depicting how Yahweh brought prosperity to the Hebrew nation when it was obedient and national calamity when the people idolized other gods: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19: 5); and "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance" (Psalms 34: 12). Undoubtedly this emphasis on the national salvation, often linked with secular national enrichment and empowerment, helped Korean churches to capitalize on the patriotic sentiment of South Koreans, particularly in the aftermath of Japanese colonial rule and the Korean civil war.[7]

The Korean people, therefore, who long embraced Shamanism in hopes of resolving a this-worldly frustration through the prayer and rites, adopted the Christian faith for the very same reason, thereby replacing, in effect, the traditional form of magical religion with a new one. The notion that material prosperity and spiritual comfort were a token of God's blessing for one's good faith appealed strongly to many converts. For the emerging Korean middle-class with its eminently material concerns, this materialist gospel seems to have offered an irresistible attraction.

THE CONCEPT OF *HANANIM*

The adoption of the traditionally revered concept of *Hananim* ("god in heaven") was another way Korean Protestantism resolved the potential incongruity between the new doctrine and the core values of the Korean people. It is no accident that the early Korean Protestants adopted *Hananim* as the supreme

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[6] Korean clergymen boasted about the remarkable economic success of South Korea in the past three decades as an evidence of God's benediction.

[7] This theme of national Christianization engendered a tendency among Korean Christians to view Korea as the chosen nation, as "new Israel." Echoing this popular sentiment, Harold Hong (1983: 181) wrote: "We strongly believe that we are now the chosen people of God and that we are under the special providence of God. This strong faith has actually made the Korean church the most rapidly growing church in the world." As an extension of this belief, some Korean Christians even spelled the traditional term for Korea as *Chosen* in English, rather than the conventional *Choson*.

God of their new found faith, for they perceptively recognized that the term referred to the highest deity in the religious culture of Korea from primitive times, and that its use as the supreme deity in Protestantism would prepare Koreans to accept the imported faith with ease. The early missionaries also appreciated *Hananim* as a distinctive Korean deity suited to their own image of God (Grayson 1985: 137).

> The Koreans always have had *Hananim*, a name which covers the idea of the one supreme mind, one God. This God of the Koreans is similar to the God of the Jewish Old Testament. . . . On this deep-seated monotheism the Christian missionary has built the amazing success (Scott 1920: 699).

Similar to the Christian conception of God, Koreans long understood *Hananim* as the supreme God presiding over the affairs of heaven and earth, and controlling the fate of human beings.

The power of *Hananim* is considered absolute: he is almighty, omnipotent, and omniscient.[8] Virtually every Korean knows and believes in the existence and power of *Hananim*. *Hananim*, like Yahweh of old, is believed to have created human beings and the world, giving life to the Korean people and founding their civilization. *Hananim* is also believed to have an all-embracing sympathy, to answer people's prayers, and to liberate people from suffering. In times of weakness, Koreans prayed to *Hananim* for his mercy and charity as well as for his power to overcome adversities beyond the reach of human will. Koreans also believed that *Hananim* punished unfailingly those who committed crimes and sins against the public interest: wicked persons or misdeeds were believed to be "visited" by divine punishments or "Heaven's vengeance." For Protestantism in Korea, therefore, the adoption of the term *Hananim* as the Supreme God was fundamentally significant in providing a point of contact between the Korean religious culture and the imported faith, thereby allowing for a smooth transition from the native concept of God to that of the Christian image (Ryu 1965: 37; C. Kim 1945).

The significance of this terminological consistency cannot be underestimated, particularly in light of the fact that in the annals of missionary history all around the world, conflicts between native religious concepts and those of the new (Christianity) were commonplace, seriously constraining missionary efforts. In the Korean context, however, terminological conflicts never existed; in fact, the exact use of the native term for the Supreme Deity in the Christian

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[8] As a polytheistic religion, Korean Shamanism does worship large numbers of spirits, but the supreme God in its pantheon is *Hananim*. In Korean Shamanism, *Hananim* is believed to govern the universe and control the lives of the people through the powers entrusted to lesser gods, ranked according to their functions (Jo 1983: 94–103). Following *Hananim* in the ranking and power are other heavenly gods, including the sun, the moon, and the star. Next in the ranking are gods of the earth, the river, and the mountain, while the spirits of the underground world are at the lowest rank.

guise not only gained acceptance among the natives but also helped win new converts. The remarkable growth of Protestantism in South Korea can be thus partly explained by the fact that the shamanically-inclined Koreans found a mirror image of their own supreme God in the imported faith. Koreans' familiarity with the concept allowed for a smooth transition from the native concept of God to that of the Christian understanding. In this sense, the term *Hananim* can be understood as a symbol of the link between Korean shamanic tradition and Protestant Christianity, or as a symbolic or actual continuation of the former in the latter's disguise.

THE IMAGE OF GOD AS THE "SAVIOR"

The terminological or conceptual congruity afforded by the Christian adoption of *Hananim* was further strengthened by the church's insistence on the functional equivalence of *Hananim* within the old and the new religions. Korean clergy advanced the belief that Christianity, as a faith that believes in the omnipotence of *Hananim*, is a religion that would yield prosperity in this world and spiritual salvation in the next world. Accordingly, *Hananim* and Jesus Christ came to be thought of as "favor-dispensing machines," like the gods of Shamanism. Like *Hananim* of old, the Supreme God of Christianity was portrayed as a merciful god who attends to all kinds of human need. For many Christians, moreover, this emphasis on the fulfilment of material wishes through faith in *Hananim* came to represent the essence of the new religion.

In the history of Korean Protestantism, God, besides being portrayed as the creator and the sustainer of the universe, was most conspicuously characterized as the magical ruler, dispensing graces at his will. Indeed, the belief that God will intervene miraculously to help those in need was widely popular among Korean Protestants. Such an image of God as the Savior was emphasized through references to the omniscience and omnipotence of God: through the power or grace of God, one can be liberated from suffering, attain salvation, be healed, or receive consolation. Not surprisingly, Korean prayer books depicted God as an entity one turns to in times of need; he is an "entity" human beings manipulate in order to have their wishes fulfilled (Biernatzki *et al.* 1975: 6). Just like their ancestors did, many Korean Protestants learned to manipulate divine power in hopes of controlling the events of everyday life.

There are two ways in which God's image as savior had been sustained in Korean Protestantism. One way was the Christians' intimate understanding and acceptance of the miracles in the Bible and of the omnipotence of God. Surveys of Korean Christians repeatedly showed their faith in miracles and the potential re-enactment in the present. For example, in a survey of 1,231 Protestant Christians from churches across South Korea, Joonggi Kim *et al.* (1982: 75) found that 84.5 percent of the respondents believed in the biblical accounts of miracles, while an overwhelming 99.4 percent perceived them positively. Similarly, a

survey by the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (1982: 56) found that 94.6 percent of the respondents expressed their belief in the miraculous deeds of Jesus Christ. In the same survey (1982: 59–60), moreover, 63.6 percent of the respondents voiced their faith in God's power to resolve all the problems of the churches in South Korea, demonstrating their conviction in God's omnipotence. Later surveys conducted by the Korea Gallup Polls (1984, 1989) also indicated similar tendencies: 83.9 percent of the Christian respondents in 1984 (N = 334) and 88.8 percent of their counterparts in 1989 (N = 383) expressed their belief in miracles.

The idea of God as the Savior was also reinforced through constant references to the verses in the Bible that illustrate God as the messiah and the liberator: for example, "When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them" (Isaiah 19:20); "The Lord is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior — from violent men you save me" (2 Samuel 22:2-3); "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God" (Psalms 42:5, 42:11, 43:5); and "I will make your oppressor eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior" (Isaiah 49:26). Reiterated through these verses, the image of God as the Savior served as a "selling point" *par excellence* for Korean clergy. The masses, for whom the entreaties to *Hananim* or spirits had been traditionally linked with their material wishes, identified the Christian God as the supreme deity who can liberate them from their miseries, grant them material wishes, and bring them happiness. In this sense, Protestantism in the South Korean context can be said to have been transformed into a form of millenarianism or messianism, through which many Korean Christians, particularly the socially underprivileged classes, secured hopes and inspiration to face the harsh reality of contemporary society. Moreover, biblical accounts of miracles — and the assumed possibility of their re-enactment in contemporary circumstances — attracted millions of converts who wholeheartedly embraced Christianity's promise of a better life in the near future.

FAITH-HEALING AND EXORCISING FUNCTIONS OF KOREAN CLERGY

Disease-curing and exorcising of evil spirits are two of the four most important functions — the other two being priestly and prophetic roles — of shamans in Korean Shamanism. In this sense, Christian accounts of the miraculous power of Jesus Christ correlate remarkably well with the indigenous folk belief in the magical power of shamans. Many Koreans, brought up in a culture that exulted the exorcising and healing powers of shamans, found the supernatural elements of the Scripture, i.e., faith-healing and casting out demonic spirits, neither

difficult nor surprising. In fact, this element of enchantment proved to be eminently favourable to the spread of Christianity in South Korea.

Put forth as a demonstration of God's love and power, the miraculous healing in the Bible was advanced by a vast majority of Korean clergy to the level of magical potency. By making repeated references to the biblical accounts of Jesus Christ's healing deeds — for example, the curing of leprosy (Matt. 8:2–3; Luke 17:14), the blind and mute (Matt. 12:22), the deaf (Mark 7:32–35), the lame and the crippled (Matt. 15:30; Luke 13:13; John 5:9), and "every disease and sickness" (Matt. 4:23, 9:35) — Korean pastors authenticated the healing potential of God and of Christian belief. The biblical narratives of Jesus chasing away demonic spirits, including those that cause seizures (Matt. 18:15–18), shrieking and foaming at the mouth (Luke 9:37–42; Matt. 8:28–32), and madness (Luke 8:27–36), were also put to effective use in capturing the religious imagination of potential converts. Such emphasis on the primacy of faith-healing by Korean clergy was demonstrated in a survey of over 1,300 sermons at ten leading Protestant churches in South Korea between 1978 and 1985 (Christian Academy 1986: 25–44). The study found that the topic of faith-healing, along with other miraculous deeds of Jesus, comprised the most prominent place in their sermons, while ethical or pedagogical themes remained relatively inconspicuous (Christian Academy 1986: 35–36). This was more marked for the pastors of larger churches or of those that grew relatively fast.

The salience of the theme of faith-healing in the sermons was paralleled by, as shown earlier, Korean Protestants' widespread belief in the biblical accounts of miracles, many of which had to do with healing. The centrality of faith-healing in the Korean Protestant life was also indicated in numerous surveys. For example, the 1984 Korea Gallup Polls found that 38.1 percent of the Protestant respondents (N = 334) personally experienced faith-healing, while 37.6 percent in the 1989 survey (N = 383) experienced the same. Anecdotes of faith-healing (Ko 1982, 1988), retold in testimonials at prayer meetings and revivals, thus became an important "drawing card" for Korean clergy who advanced them as evidence of one of many this-worldly rewards of converting to Christianity. It is not surprising then that the pastors of many leading churches who performed faith-healing were considered modern-day shamans with a magical power.[9] They used hypnotism, chanted incomprehensible words (comparable to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues in Christianity), and spoke to the evil supposedly residing in the afflicted person. All of these, of course, parallel the characteristics of Korean shamanic rites in healing and exorcising. By performing the healing rites during Sunday Services and revival meetings, Korean pastors turned the

[9] Even in the Buddhist-inclined understanding of God that is basic to the religious values of Koreans, the notion of God as savior is prominent (S. Kim 1983; see also Ko 1987). On the level of popular understanding and practice, Korean Buddhism parallels Christianity in projecting the compassion and power of Buddha in ameliorating human suffering and answering people's prayers.

two occasions into, in essence, shamanic rituals that typically featured disease-curing exorcism.[10] In parallel with the popular conceptualization of the role of shamans in South Korea, moreover, gifted pastors were expected to have the capacity to communicate with the spiritual world and to possess a mysterious power to exorcise diseases.[11] Such an emphasis on healing led to the wide popularity of revivalists who specialized in healing and of churches that were ministered by pastors who supposedly had healing capacities.[12] In addition, Korean Christians themselves valued experiences that manifest shamanic imprints. For example, the receiving of or experiencing the Holy Spirit, called *songnyong chehom*, which is very much like the shamanic spirit possession (*shindullim*), trance, or ecstasy, is exulted by Korean Christians in the belief that it is a means through which speaking in tongues, seeing visions, and healing can be achieved.

CENTRALITY OF ETHICS AND FAMILY VALUES

The moral and social values of Confucianism figure prominently in the mental landscape of Koreans, and the high moral code taught by the Protestants converged with what many Confucian-minded Koreans felt and thought. Simply put, Protestant ethical values concerning the basic teachings of a way of life agreed with the Confucian-centered moral values of Koreans. The Church's teachings against dishonesty, political corruption, moral depravity, the abuse of power by the elite, and even gambling, licentiousness, and drunkenness were largely congruent with Confucian ideals. Moreover, like Confucianism, Christianity is more than a set of beliefs to be accepted, for it is a way of life to abide by. A frequently quoted text is found in the book of Matthew (7:21): "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." The early missionaries and Korean clergy also stressed the similarities between Christian and Confucian teachings on the matter of practical morality and ethics. For example, they emphatically

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[10] Inspired by the narratives of healing deeds in the Bible, three methods have been utilized most often by Korean clergy to cure diseases: prayer (James 5: 15), laying on of hands (Mark 6: 5, 16: 18; Luke 4: 40), and consecrated water (John 7: 37–38) (Tak 1971). Another popular method of healing involves the combination of prayer and fasting, which has been usually employed by pastors or revivalists who themselves have been cured of sickness by the same procedure.

[11] It is also worth noting that the rite of healing was not limited to the weekly service, for many churches in South Korea operated their own prayer centers, known as *gidowon*, where faith-healing practices were sustained with regularity. In addition, there were large numbers of independent prayer centers which provided healing services for the sick and the mentally ill. All together there were more than 500 *gidowon* by 1989.

[12] Another way the role of ordained pastors and shamans converged was the fact Korean pastors performed many ceremonies that parallel those of shamans, such as presiding over a memorial service for dead parents at Christian homes or dedicating a service for a troubled business, a newly built house, or a newly established business.

argued that even for thoroughly Confucianized Koreans, there is little to give up in accepting the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment — "Honor your father and your mother" — was particularly stressed, for filial piety has been the supreme moral obligation for Koreans.

Protestant Christianity was also advanced as sharing the same values as Confucianism regarding the family (Park 1966). In an attempt to be more acceptable to the Korean people, proponents of Christianity compromised with the native social customs regarding family values. In the process, certain Christian principles were given prominence, unseen elsewhere. As mentioned above, the filial piety of Confucianism was shown to have its counterpart in Jesus's command to honor one's parents, and the lesson on obedience to one's parents had been a salient theme of sermons and Sunday school programs in South Korea. Furthermore, to encourage obedience to the mother-in-law, as the traditional custom demanded, Korean churches stressed the story of Ruth, in which her dedication to the care of her mother-in-law is recounted. The Confucian ideal of the subordination of wife to husband was also emphasized as being consistent with the Christian exaltation of wife's submission to husband, as in: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:22–23). Even in regards to the status of women in general, Korean Christianity conformed to the conventions of the host society. Although the role of the Church in improving women's social status in Korean society cannot be underestimated, it still maintained a conservative interpretation concerning the rights of women in relation to men. The Church held, in congruence with the centuries-old male hegemony of Buddhism and Confucianism, that women are to obey men, thereby making it justifiable for the existence of inequality between men and women. These illustrations alone reveal how the Korean Church endeavoured to stress the conservative features of Christianity in order to reconcile its ideals with those of the host culture. In addition, for a society that accorded the elderly a distinguished social status, Christian values that bestow reverence for the elderly and authority for men were comfortably accepted by large numbers of Koreans who viewed the two traditions as stipulating the same values.

Another key element in the Confucian-oriented values regarding the family is ancestor worship. By subtly permitting ancestral rites to be conducted by Christians, Korean Protestantism evaded successfully the potential alienation of the tradition-bound Koreans, ensuring, for the adherents, the sense of continuity with the past. While an overt, traditional ancestor worship was rejected, a Christian memorial service, similar in intention and meaning, was substituted in its place. In fact, the Church generally looked the other way in regards to the rites of ancestor worship. As a result, a majority of Korean Protestants are found to hold ancestral rites regularly. In his survey of Korean Protestants regarding memorial ceremonies, Soonha Ryu (1987: 200) found that more than two-thirds of those surveyed conducted syncretized rituals of ancestral worship. For

example, 21 percent of the respondents, in a manner consistent with Confucian rituals, prepared food items and set them in front of the graves before holding a private service according to a Christian convention. Further, 16 percent of the respondents held services with the candles placed in front of the picture of the deceased. In addition, 11 percent of the respondents held services accompanied by the picture, food, and candles, while 8 percent held services with the picture in place. The preparation of food and the placement of the picture of the deceased (instead of tablets containing the names of the ancestors) are, of course, main elements of Confucian rituals of ancestor worship. While these acts did not represent the rites of ancestor worship in the manner of proper Confucianism, they were nevertheless Korean Christians' own ways of paying tribute to their ancestors. By subtly allowing these time-honored rites, albeit syncretized, to be performed by Christians, Korean Protestantism evaded the potential clash of values, thereby helping the imported faith achieve its dramatic growth in South Korea.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to show that the dramatic growth of Protestantism in South Korea during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s was due in part to the way certain doctrines and practices of the imported faith agreed with those of the folk tradition. In the process, the study showed that the affinity between the two traditions was forged through selective emphases on certain doctrines and messages of Christianity. In an effort to make Protestantism more acceptable to potential converts, Korean pastors accentuated specific Christian messages and practices, particularly those pertaining to the shamanic worldview, to strengthen the appeal of the imported faith to large numbers of Koreans. Those messages included the promise of this-worldly wish fulfilment, the depiction of God as guarantor of wish-fulfilment, and the deed of supernatural healing, all of which generally suit Koreans' religious orientation. In this way, Koreans found the new doctrines and values to be compatible with the values that they were familiar with. For some Christians, at least in the way they believed and practised their faith, Christianity was not much more than their traditional religious system cloaked in the guise of modern, Western religion.

What this shows is that there was no real clash of values between the new doctrine and the existing religions of Korea. And that was made possible largely through the efforts of Korean pastors. In their zealous efforts to win new converts, Korean pastors actually shaped Christianity in accordance with the tradition-bound religious inclination of Koreans. This was particularly true for beliefs and practices that had strong shamanic characteristics. Following Shamanism, for example, this-worldly wish-fulfilment was advanced as an advantage of converting to Christianity, thereby serving as the evangelical message or "selling point" *par excellence*. An engrossing interest in both physical

health and material abundance here and now, a salient undercurrent of Koreans' religious beliefs, was thus emphasized in Korean Protestantism. Furthermore, the image and the role of Korean clergy also took on many characteristics of the shaman to give the impression that they were one and the same. In this way, the distinction between Christianity and Shamanism in general and between church service and shamanic ritual in particular became blurred in South Korea. Like other traditional religions of Korea, therefore, Christianity followed a process of growth through coalescence and accretions of traditional Korean forms of belief and practice. Both the missionaries and the native clergy, especially the latter, translated Christian ideas into forms which would appeal immensely to the Korean religious imagination.

Another factor that facilitated the growth of Christianity in South Korea was that there were no real contradictions between the new doctrine and the core values of the Korean people. The moral and social values of Confucianism, which have largely determined the attitude and behavior of Koreans, and the high moral code taught by the Protestants converged, eliminating potential conflicts of values that could have seriously undermined the expansion of the new doctrine. The Church's emphasis on filial piety and acceptance of male domination as well as its teachings on ethical values concerning the basic teachings of a way of life agreed with the Confucian-centered moral values of Koreans. In this way, Christianity did not contradict or deny much that the populace had embraced in its old beliefs. As Samuel Moffett (1962: 52), a noted historian of Korean church history, wrote: "Like Confucianism, it [Christianity] taught righteousness and revered learning; like Buddhism, it sought purity and promised a future life; like the shamanists, Christians believed in answered prayer and miracles."

This study is thus congruent with Grayson's theory of emplantation, for the remarkable growth of Christianity in South Korea rested heavily on minimizing the contradiction between the new doctrine and Korean values and on reducing the conflict between the new faith and Korean traditional religions. This study is also consistent with the existing cross-cultural studies on Christian conversion: that Christianity has shown great success in propagating itself by incorporating different cultural traits in local settings (Saunders 1988; Badone 1990; Hefner 1993). The "Koreanization" of Christianity has proved eminently successful in South Korea, and this seems to offer an answer to the question of why some societies eagerly embrace the new faith while others are so resistant. This raises the question of the validity of what is known as an "intellectualist" approach to religious conversion (Horton 1971; Skorupski 1976: 183–204), which explicates conversion as a change in religious belief to one that is preferred out of rival sets of belief on grounds of explanatory force. Also challenged is the view that conversion entails changes in the beliefs, values, identities, and the universe of discourse of individuals (Snow and Machalek 1984). The South Korean example illustrates that conversion has taken place without a major

transformation in belief or values. The only major change involved in conversion seems to have been a shift in identity. In accepting the imported faith, Korean Protestants did not have to give up much of their traditional religious beliefs and habits, for the core Korean religious values were co-opted. Indeed, conversion to Protestantism in South Korea did not require surrender of old beliefs. By reworking Protestant beliefs and practices within an indigenous framework, Korean Protestants succeeded in retaining the core of their traditional religio-cultural beliefs and practices in the new faith. The South Korean example thus contradicts the argument that world religions spread at the expense of traditional cultures and societies. What we witness in South Korea, instead, is the expansion of Christianity in peace with old beliefs. Like the other world religion that took root in Korea — Buddhism — Christianity compromised with and absorbed elements of traditional Korean religious culture in order to be accepted by the Korean populace.

This partly explains why Catholicism, with about two and a half million adherents by the early 1990s, did not grow as rapidly as Protestantism during the same period. Except for accepting the time-honored practice of ancestor worship as a traditional custom, the Catholic church had not compromised its theology and ways of worship to cater to the religious inclination of Koreans.

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