

HISTORICAL RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE AND THE RAPID GROWTH OF PROTESTANTISM IN KOREAN SOCIETY, 1945-1990

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The underlying purpose of this paper is to explain the rapid growth of Protestantism in modern Korean society. My basic argument is that this phenomenon is not simply a change in the religious sphere but the culmination of changes in contemporary Korean society arising from its historical, political, and economic development. To overcome the problems latent in previous studies, I develop a new framework that incorporates historical religious structure, organizational aspects of religion, and the role of the state as contributory factors to the Protestant boom in Korea. From a societal perspective, this paper will first examine the anomic, social context induced by rapid political and economic changes in Korea. Second, at an organizational level, the various aspects of each religion as an organization will be explored, including evangelical strategies and social activities designed to increase legitimacy. However, I will argue that the fundamental basis for the explosive growth of Christianity in modern Korea lies in the discrepancy between the nominal religious identification and the actual belief system of the Korean people. The origin of this discrepancy can be traced to the historical religious structure of Korean society, in which the state occupies a dominant position, particularly during the First Republic.

"In and around the capital city of Seoul, ... there are half a million at Yöüido Full Gospel Church; 40,000 at Yöüing Nak Presbyterian; 15,000 at Söng Nak Baptist American Christians have come to regard the tiny peninsula as a veritable Mecca, where pilgrims can gather the secrets of revival and church growth (Christian Today, 1987:24)."

The underlying purpose of this paper is to explain the rapid growth of Protestantism in modern Korean society. I argue that the fundamental basis for the explosive growth of Christianity in modern Korea lies in the discrepancy between the nominal religious identification and the actual belief systems of the Korean people. The origin of this discrepancy can be traced to the historical religious structure of Korean society, in which the "belief system" is separated from the "value system," and indigenous "belief systems" hold an inferior status. I illustrate how the state, which always occupied the dominant position vis a vis the various religious groups in society, rein-

forced this discrepancy. In conclusion, I maintain that the rapid growth of Christianity in Korean society stems from the process of modernization in which the state occupies a dominant position as it is superimposed upon its historical religious structure.

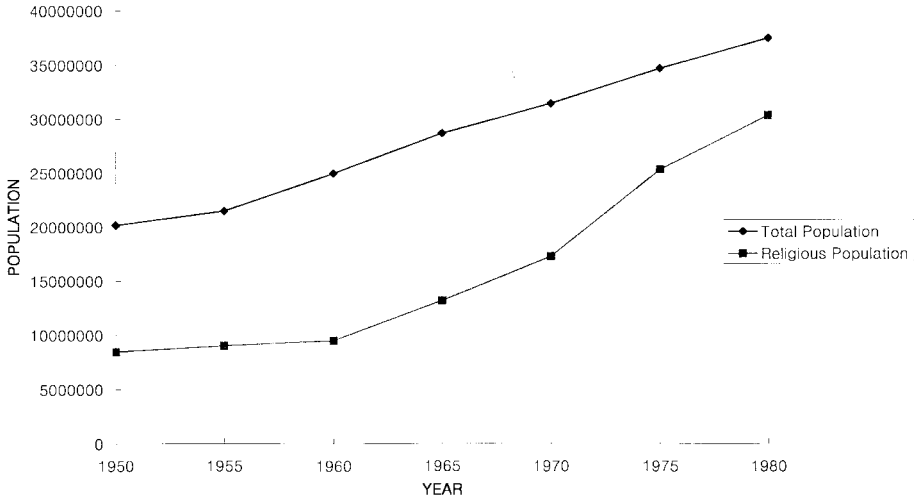
This study challenges the traditional perspectives emphasizing vast cultural change in modern Korean society. In the first section, I present a brief literature review pertaining to the rapid rise of Protestantism in Korea. The second section provides a background for understanding the discrepancy between the nominal religious identification and the actual belief systems of the Korean people. I begin with a brief history of modern Korea, its major religions, and the relations between the various religions and the state. In the third section, the rapid growth of Buddhism prior to the 1980s and its decline in the 1980s, as well as the rapid growth of Protestantism and Catholicism after the 1980s, is analyzed within the context of the theoretical and historical backgrounds provided in the previous sections. I also note the peculiar characteristics of various religions in Korea. In effect, this paper illustrates that the rapid growth of Christianity in Korean society stems from the processes of modernization as it is superimposed upon its historical religious structure.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Peculiarities in the Rapid Growth of Christianity in Modern Korean Society

The primary interest in the sociology of religion has been the relation between religion and social change. Because of the tremendous power of religion since the Medieval period, changes in the societal place of religion is a prominent theme in the sociology of religion. For Durkheim and Weber, the declining influence of religion is an important phenomenon in modern society (Durkheim, 1982; Seidman, 1983: 267-278). Secularization entails the gradual weakening and retreat of religion in society. While Weber maintains that religious influences decline as individuals become increasingly rational, Durkheim continually sought to identify the phenomenon which would replace the role of religion in society.

In support of secularization theory, many scholars argue that as a result of the diffusion of scientific knowledge, the power and presence of religion is waning (Freud, 1960: 37-43; Wallace, 1966: 265; Wilson, 1966; 1982; 1985; Martin, 1976: 69-91; Lechner, 1991: 111). Until recently, secularization was said to be particularly evident in Europe.¹ The spread of science and modernity was believed to be responsible for declining church attendance, waning



Source: Ministry of Culture, Republic of Korea(1993)

FIGURE 1. TOTAL POPULATION VS RELIGIOUS POPULATION, SOUTH KOREA, 1950-1980

beliefs, and the fading power and presence of religion in public life. On the other hand, scholars such as Peter Berger and Roland Robertson insist that secularization occurs only in certain public spheres, while religious influence remains strong in the private sphere through a process of “privatization (Luckmann, 1967: 30; Berger, 1967: 133-134; Robertson, 1970: 56-60).” According to the prevailing theory of modernization, however, the secularization of Europe represents the inevitable and irreversible process that is to dawn on all societies in the future. In contrast, the religious population in Korea rose phenomenally since the 1960s, despite its rapid modernization during this period. In particular, the ranks of Christianity soared in Korea (see Figure 1).

In almost every other country in the Asian region with a long-standing traditional culture, however, Christianity did not acquire successful missionary results due to barriers of strong indigenous antagonism (see Table 1). Despite a long lasting cultural and religious tradition of Confucianism, the number of Protestant followers in Korea increased to 3,200,000 (10.5% of the total population) in 1969 from a mere 30,000 in 1900. This growth rate accelerated during the 1970s. In 1982, the number rose to 7,600,000 (19.9%)

¹The case of the United States is always presented as a counter-example to secularization trends. In the United States, it is clear that American religious activities and involvement have increased substantially over the past several centuries (Greely, 1989; Finke and Stark, 1992).

TABLE 1. CHRISTIANS AS A PERCENTAGE OF NATIONAL POPULATION IN ASIA IN MID-1980

Nations	Percentage
India	3.9
Indonesia	11.0
Japan	3.0
Korea (South)	30.5
Malaysia	6.2
*Philippines	94.3
Singapore	8.6
Taiwan	7.4

*The national religion of Philippines has been Catholicism since the Spanish Conquest.

Source: Barret (1982)

and reached 11,888,374 (24.4%) by 1989 (Ministry of Culture, 1993). The number of churches and church staff members rose correspondingly with the rapid growth of Korean Protestantism. According to the *NCC Christianity Year Book* and the *Korean Religion Year Book* published by the Ministry of Culture, the number of churches increased from 13,007 in 1970 to 23,346 in 1982, and finally to 34,407 by 1989. Likewise the number of church staff members rose to 58,288 in 1989 from 15,708 in 1970 and 33,851 in 1982. Consequently, Korea is the most representative Christian country among all the countries being proselytized around the world.

The rapid growth of Christianity in Korea, as opposed to the trend towards secularization in Western advanced industrial nations, has attracted much attention.² Most of the literature concerning this subject was written in the early 1980s, focusing on the rapid growth of Protestant churches in the 1970s and early 1980s. Also, many of these articles were written by ministers or church-related figures with theological or ethical overtones.³ For example, articles written by church figures emphasized the Holy Spirit among the Korean people, God's will, etc. Further, among the few sociological studies conducted, most placed great emphasis on the anomic situation of the 1970s and early 1980s in Korea. According to these studies, unbalanced economic development, industrialization, political turmoil, rapid

²This summary is based on 60 articles which were selected from the *List of Literature Relevant to Religion: 1978-1987* (Kyo-bo-mun-go, 1993). After 1984, there is little attention to the growth of Christianity in Korea, though the rapid growth is continued. Articles written in the early 1980s showed little attention was paid to the phenomenon. As a result, most articles relevant to the rapid growth of Christianity are included.

³45 of the 60 articles are written by church figures.

urbanization, and the modernization of Korean society induced Koreans to search for a new belief system and a mechanism to relieve emotional distress. Thus, rapid social change and the resulting anomie was maintained to be an important contributing factor to the rise of Christianity in Korean society (Han, 1982; Kim, 1981).

This traditional interpretation of the relation between anomie and religiosity is indeed pertinent to the Korean case.⁴ In addition to rapid industrialization and political instability, Korea experienced tremendous change over the past 100 years that affected all aspects of Korean society. These aspects include the collapse of its last dynasty (in 1910), colonization by Japan (1910-1945), and the tragedy of fratricidal war (Korean War of 1950-1953). According to Weber, who views religion as the solution to the problem of theodicy (Weber, 1964: 138-150), religion plays an important role in providing interpretations of and answers to fundamental questions regarding death and suffering in human life (Freud, 1960: 18; Geertz, 1973: 87-125; Berger, 1967: 22-28). Such fundamental questions arise more frequently in a society such as Korea that is undergoing change and is being confronted with the anomic "limit situation".⁵

However, three fundamental problems become apparent with this traditional interpretation of the rapid growth of Christianity in modern Korean society. First of all, the "secularization debate" about religious change in Europe flourished during a period which Ritzer(1983) would characterize as one of rapid social change. Why did the factors of modernization that pulled Europeans away from Christianity work to push the Koreans towards Christianity? Or, is it useful to identify the rapid growth of Christianity in modern Korean society as a counter example of "secularization"?

Second, Japan constitutes an important counter-example to the ostensible "elective affinity" between Protestantism and capitalism (Bellah, 1957; 1970; Geertz, 1956). Despite remarkable economic growth in Japan, not only is the percentage of Christians in Japanese society very low, but Christians are treated with slight animosity. According to Bellha(1957), the Japanese state

⁴This explanation is closely related to the traditional models of religious beliefs and sacrifices that have dominated micro sociological thinking about religion from the very beginning. How can people possibly believe in supernatural beings and forces, and what drives people to make irrational sacrifices in the name of faith? Stark argues that social scientists are forced to frame answers that postulate personal flaws among those who believe and sacrifice. Many have offered elaborate psycho-pathological explanations concerning religious commitment (Smelser, 1965; Stark and Iannaccone, 1993: 2033).

⁵Limit situation" refers to the events or experiences which raise the fundamental questions.



FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF PROTESTANTS, CATHOLICS, AND BUDDHISTS, SOUTH KOREA, 1950-1990

played a pivotal role in the development of capitalism, such that religious contributions to economic growth were different in comparison to European cases. Although Korea shares similarities with Japan in terms of its religious traditions, as well as a political tradition of strong state intervention in the economy, unlike Japan, rapid economic development in Korea coincided with the rapid growth of Protestantism.

Thirdly, the different religions in Korea did not grow in the same fashion or at the same rate, despite operating within the same anomic situation. The graph in Figure 2 illustrates the differences in rates of growth among the various religions, summarized as follows: 1) rapid growth of Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism before the 1980s; 2) steady and rapid growth of Protestantism and Catholicism; and 3) the decline of Buddhism after the 1980s (see Figure 2). Why did only Protestantism, as compared with other religions, grow so successfully and rapidly?

Toward a New Framework

This section will present a framework which addresses the three problems stated above, as well as to understand the peculiar religious situation in Korea. This framework utilizes the theoretical concept of religion as an organization that is operating within a competitive market situation, attempting to secure its survival, and maximize its influence on society. The strength of this approach is that it focuses not simply on competing units or on net-

works of organizations that directly interact with each other, but on the relevant actors themselves. Consequently, the rapid growth of Christianity in modern Korea can be understood to a certain extent in terms of the failure of traditional religions to maintain the loyalty of their religious consumers.

Second, important organizational theories, including neo-institutional theory, organizational ecology, and resource dependency theory, acknowledge the importance of the state in many respects (Davis and Powell, 1991). Despite the commonality of strong states that led to similar economic development trajectories in Japan and Korea, the state can exercise its power differently in relation to religion in the two societies. Because the state is strong, however, whatever actions it takes will have a tremendous influence on the religious sphere. In this sense, the Korean state is identified as a significant agent in the rapid growth of Protestantism in modern Korean society.

1) Religion as an Organization

Many Korean scholars who study religion describe the religious situation in Korea as one of "extreme religious pluralism (Oh, 1990; Yun, 1993: 37; Choi, 1995: 3)." Berger and Luckmann emphasize that religious pluralism leads to the formation of a "religious market," which is a competitive situation between religions not unlike that of a capitalist commodity market (Berger, 1967; Berger and Luckmann, 1969). A set of religious organizations or "religious firms" compete for religious customers by offering various product lines.⁶ Stark and Finke use economic concepts such as markets, firms, market penetration, and the segmented market to analyze the success or failure of religious bodies in the United States, reinterpreting the history of American religion in terms of human actions and human organization rather than in terms of ideas (Finke and Stark, 1992; Stark and Iannaccone, 1993). Stark and Finke's concept of "religious economy"⁷ suggests that the rapid growth of Protestantism in Korea should be studied in relation to other religions as well as to the state. This view emphasizes religions as organizations, shifting the focus from the demand side (believers) to the supply side (religious organization) in order to explain the growth of partic-

⁶I accept Shin's (1994) concept here. Each religion rather than each denomination, is considered here as a separate organization or "religious firm." Protestantism as a "religious firm," includes all of its denominations, sects, affiliated organizations, etc.

⁷All religious activities occurring in any society consist of "religious economy" that is just like a commercial economy in that it consists of a market of current and potential customers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and religious product lines offered by the various firms.

ular religions.

Furthermore, within this framework of religion as an organization, the structural relation between religion and the state will be explored. The supportive function of religion as an ideology, or "the opium of the people," in maintaining social order within the Marxist tradition, versus the revolutionary function of religion in inducing social change in the Weberian tradition, is one of the important debates in the sociology of religion. Ironically, Weber's comparative historical studies undermine both the Marxist and Weberian traditions. For example, Weber argues that Buddhism and Hinduism in China and India lack the transcendental, ethical God and, consequently, the prophet that is necessary to promote social change (Weber, 1964a: 55-56). However, in Burma and Sri Lanka, Buddhists actively led the nationalist movement and revolution, and in India, the Independent movement was strongly based on Hinduism. The active leadership of the Catholic Church in Latin America on behalf of democratization and social justice after the 1950s also challenges the notion of religion as an anti-change force (Brunea, 1974; 1984; Adriance, 1994).

Many scholars adopt the structural approach toward religion. Whether one religious organization supports or criticizes change against an established system is dependent more upon the structural features of the religious organization rather than the particular religious belief system itself (Maduro, 1982; Neuhouser, 1989; Billings and Scott, 1990). The structural approach therefore attempts to identify the structural situation that may lead a religious organization to support or criticize the established regime. Because the structural situation is not fixed but variable, the social role of religion is also varies with changing circumstances.

Neuhouser(1989) conducted a comparative study of Catholic Churches in Brazil and Chile, commonly regarded as the most radical and progressive Catholic churches in Latin America, and those of Argentina and Columbia, regarded as the most conservative. He concluded that structural difficulties largely determined the role that the church would play within each society. At the critical point when the Church is unable to maintain its social influence due to a declining number of believers and financial difficulties, the church decides to take a radical position against the established social order.

Under the leadership of a strong authoritarian regime in Korea, the Buddhist organization supported the military regime, while Protestant and Catholic organizations actively participated in the democratization movement. This paper analyzes the structural factors underlying the different positions of these religious organizations in regard to the political regime.

2) The State as an Important Agent

In his comparative study of 16th century England and France, Wuthnow argues that the "autonomous power of the state" over the landlords was the decisive factor in England's successful religious Reformation, unlike that in France (Wuthnow, 1987: 299-330). In modern Korean history, the state maintained strict control over the domestic society, despite its external dependence on American protection and good will. Despite the legal separation between church and state, and a constitution that guaranteed freedom of religion, state intervention in the religious sphere was pervasive in Korea.

Types of state-church relationships will vary according to differences among societies and among religions. Even within the same society, different types of state-church relationships may arise as the society progresses through different historical or developmental stages (Smith, 1974; Wood, 1989). During the period of state formation and political crisis, Krislov notes that the ideology of the political leadership largely determines the nature of state-church relations, which may change gradually over time (Krislov, 1985). Based on Krislov's studies, this paper examines the role of the Korean state in reinforcing the discrepancy between the religious identification and actual belief system of the Korean people. It also explores how state-church relations shaped the various roles played by religious organizations during the period of Korean democratization from 1972 to 1987.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the explosive growth of Christianity in Korean society, previous research indicate that the daily practice and value system of the Korean people continue to be based upon Shamanism and Confucianism. Although the religious beliefs of Christians are not very different from that of Shamanism, the Korean people's concept of what constitutes a religion aligns most closely with the doctrine of Protestantism. This discrepancy, a product of the historical religious structure in Korea, resulted in the rise of Protestantism and the corresponding decline of Confucianism and Shamanism. This study presents the reasons given by leaders of Confucianism and Buddhism for the decline in their religious followers. Modern Korean history, particularly the period of rapid economic growth and political instability, is briefly outlined in order to grasp the anomic situation that existed in Korea during the past 30 years. In particular, the role of the state in reinforcing the discrepancy between the nominal religious identification and the actual belief system of the Korean people is analyzed.

Discrepancy between Nominal Religious Identification and Actual Belief System of Koreans

According to Stark's comparative studies of the United States, Canada, South America and the Islamic states, rapid conversion to a new religion occurs in regions where the proportion of traditional religious members is low, while the proportion of non-believers is high (Stark, 1985: 146). In Korea, I argue that the large number of people who identified themselves to be non-believers is an important, contributing factor to the rapid growth of Christianity. Most Koreans proselytized into the Protestant or Catholic faith previously considered themselves as non-believers. In 1987, only 25.7 percent of Catholics were believers since childhood. Among the 75.3 percent who were converted to Catholicism, 30.8 percent converted from Protestantism and Buddhism, while 43.5 percent had previously been non-believers (No and Oh, 1988: 24).

According to Yun's research, in 1985, 91 percent of respondents were practicing Confucianists, 49.3 percent were practicing Buddhists, and 36.3 percent were practicing Christians (Yun, 1988). From his study of Yöŕng-Nak Church, which grew rapidly following the Korean War to become the largest Presbyterian church in the world, Han identifies the religious values of church members as those of fundamentalism and Shamanism (Han, 1979). Moreover, despite his great contribution to the historical Protestant movement in Korea, Horace Underwood suggests that the real religion of the Korean people is Shamanism (Underwood, 1980). While it is difficult to establish the exact number of believers in Shamanism, judging by the membership in the nation-wide "Mu-dang"⁸ or priestess organization, the number of believers who pay for a Mu-dang's services such as fortune-telling or exorcism exceeds several million.⁹ Despite their cultural propensity for Confucianism and Shamanism, however, Koreans identified themselves as non-believers and entered into the Christian faith (Choi, 1994: 44-46).

Kün-Dük Choi, a leader of Confucianism in Korea, believes that the number of followers of Confucianism declined because it failed to define itself as a religion (Choi, 1994). He insists that institutional modernization, efficient administration of organization, the image of a modern doctrine, and self

⁸Mu-dang means a female shaman who is a kind of fortune teller in Korea.

⁹This number is estimated from the numbers of regular members who pay membership fees from the most representative national wide Shamanism organization, "Han-guk-ch'ong-sincho-hap." It has over 15,000 members. At least, the twice of the numbers of "Mu-dang" as an occupation exist, that is, the numbers of believers who support them exist in Korean society.

definition as a religion, are all necessary in order to maintain or increase the number of followers. These necessary conditions mirror the institutional structure and strategies employed by the Christian religious organizations in their drive to increase membership. Since the late 1970s, Buddhists attempted to undergo “modernization” as well. Buddhist monks increasingly descended from the hills, moving to cities, towns and villages to actively seek converts. In 1972, they held 20 seminars to discuss strategies for modernization, published the “Buddhist Bible,” and held “Sunday services,” which were all attempts to mimic Protestantism or Christianity.¹⁰ Ultimately, Confucianists and Buddhists perceived their “mimetic processes” of Protestantism as a route to modernization and recognition as religions.

Historical Religious Structure

As tribal communities developed into federations and states in the second century BC, Confucianism began to have an impact on Korea.¹¹ Until the Lee Dynasty (1393-1910), however, Confucianism did not have any religious connotations, but had limited political and moral significance (Han, 1981: 149; Koryosa 8). Previously, the strong tie between the previous Koryo dynasty (918-1392) and the state religion of Buddhism had led to the corruption of monks. As successor to the Koryo Dynasty, the Lee Dynasty employed the Confucian system as an exact governing system and moral code to extirpate the corruption of the former dynasty. As schools were established in towns and villages, Confucianism became synonymous with the educational system.¹² The social hierarchy, intellectual pursuits, as well as social and ethical behavior soon conformed to Confucian principles. Confucianism was later refined into Neo-Confucianism and became the state-religion of the Lee Dynasty, in which the bureaucratic class served as proxy for priests.

In spite of the dominant social influence of Confucianism during the Lee dynasty, it was very different from that of Christianity in Europe. Neo-

¹⁰To reduce the uncertainty, the fact that the “mimetic mechanism” is used, and consequently the “isomorphism” which is performed in an organizational field which is “new iron cage”. The rapid growth of Protestantism is the most important reason for it to the process of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1991).

¹¹I mainly refer to the following literature for this section: Chang (1974), Kim and Rhee (1986), Hyun (1986), Kim (1988), Cha (1992), Educational Department of Korea (1990), and Choi (1995).

¹²“Chu-ja-ga-ryae,” a code of neo-Confucian ceremonies, became a subject on the state examination.

Confucianism never constituted an autonomous "Church" vis a vis the dynasty. Because it does not embody a notion of deity and salvation, neo-Confucianism cannot provide a system of interpretation for problems of theodicy. Therefore, Koreans turned to Shamanism and Buddhism. However, relegating Shamanism and Buddhism as superstitions and deviations from "Lyae" (the right code of ceremonies), the Lee Dynasty officially prohibited the practice of Shamanism and Buddhism. According to national law under the Lee Dynasty, previous rites based on Buddhism and Shamanism were to be replaced by neo-Confucian rites, and various provisions were made against violation of this law (Sejong Shilok, 1427; 1428; 1430; 1433).

Yet the Lee Dynasty was unable to eliminate all elements of Shamanism and Buddhism, in spite of its official position. Ancestor worship, a common element of both Shamanism and Buddhism, and consistent with the Confucian virtues of filial piety ("Hyo") and loyalty ("Ch'ung"), was institutionalized by the Lee Dynasty and elevated to a state rite. However, as Weber observed in China (Weber, 1964a: 431-466), the state rite merely consisted of a prosaic sacrificial offering, recitation of a written prayer, and temperate Korean music. There was no private prayer. Private ancestor worship, which was similar to the state rite, was carried out as an obligation to the community and clan rather than for the sake of individual interest. When seeking answers to personal problems, Koreans turned to the traditional "Mu-dang," or Buddhist monk (Weber, 1964a: 434, 458; Lee, 1982; Cha, 1992).

Some scholars distinguish between a "belief system" and a "value system" (Parsons, 1951: 367-368; Bellha, 1970: 260-265)." Geertz refers to the "belief system" as a "world view" and the "value system" as an "ethos" (Geertz, 1973:126-141)." The belief system provides a normative explanation for world events and answers to fundamental questions such as death and suffering. This belief system forms the basis for a value system, such which includes a system of moral judgments. Accordingly, every religious doctrine embodies both metaphysics and a system of morals. In the Lee Dynasty, however, neither Confucianism, Shamanism, nor Buddhism could provide both a belief system and a value system as Christianity provided for Western society. Confucianism could only provide a value system, while Shamanism and Buddhism only constituted a belief system. While the Lee Dynasty identified Confucianism as Korea's official value system, the belief systems embodied in Shamanism and Buddhism were relegated to the margins of society.

In the seventeenth century, Christianity entailed a new value system with

a balanced belief system. However, the Christian idea of equality before God and religious activism ran contradicted to the traditional Confucian notion of hierarchical social relations and social structures (Chang, 1984; Lee, 1990). The Lee Dynasty criticized the Catholic religious movement of 1777 as a dangerous Western force aimed at the overthrow of established society. Catholics were persecuted and even massacred for rebelling against the Confucian ethic (Lee, 1988: 337-348).¹³ It was upon the conclusion of a friendship treaty with the United States in 1882 that the Korean government finally granted tacit sanction to the Catholic movement. Individuals who converted to Christianity in this initial period from 1884 to 1920 were mostly women and members of the lower class (Min, 1987: 27-122; Lee, 1989; Lee, 1990: 38).

From this time on, both Catholic and Protestant missionary programs were openly conducted through modern educational, medical and social reform programs, employing advanced scientific techniques and information. Under Japanese colonial rule beginning in 1910, Western-sponsored Christian programs were relatively free from Japanese oppression. With the help of plentiful financial aid and modern technology from Western countries, Christianity was able to cultivate an image of modernity after Korean liberation from Japanese occupation. By providing relief goods to Koreans mired in poverty after the Korean War, Christian institutions made a favorable impression upon the Korean people. The educational institutions and hospitals established by Protestant missionaries became particularly influential, producing a structural integration of "informal contact and friendship between religious leaders and the ruling class (Oh, 1990: 272-276)." Graduates of these Christian schools later rose to important positions in the state and church, paving the way for preferential state policy towards the Christian church.

This examination of the historical religious structure illustrates the separation of the belief system from the value system in Korean society, and the inferior status held by the indigenous belief systems in Korea. With the collapse of the Lee Dynasty, Confucianism could not survive as the official state religion, thus, creating a vast number of non-believers in modern Korean society. Although both Shamanism and Buddhism constituted a belief systems that addressed individual issues, they could not compete effectively against other religions because of their low social prestige.

¹³This period is characterized as the strong "seclusionism policy" toward Western force which is the most important factor of three severe massacres in 1801, 1839 and 1866, in which about 11,200 Catholics were beheaded.

Within this historical religious structure, Koreans took into consideration public legitimacy when selecting among religions, as indicated by state authorization and support, among other things. An analysis of government policy during the First Republic and the role played by each religion in the democratization movements of the 1970s and 1980s indicate that the growth and decline of each religion corresponds closely to its perceived public legitimacy.

The Impact of the State on the Failure of Shamanism and Confucianism to Define Themselves as Religions

Berger conceived of religious pluralism as an "era of religious uncertainty," in which the traditional religious authority collapses and fails to confine other religions under the rubric of heresy (Berger, 1979: 11-40). In Korea, however, it was not the dominant religion but the state which established the boundaries of religious doctrine and heresy. While the state and Church enjoyed relatively equal status in Western society, the Korean state always occupied the dominant position vis a vis the various religious groups in society. State dominance over the religious sphere was particularly evident under Japanese occupation and the First Republic, when the ranks of Protestantism first began to soar.

During the Japanese colonial period, the government-general enacted policies designed to maintain strict control over religious organizations (Kang, 1977; Park, 1992). Religions were separated into legal and illegal domains as the Japanese government-general arbitrarily categorized each as an officially sanctioned religion, pseudo religion, or non-religion. Under the *Chong-gyo Sŏn-p'o-e gwan-han kyu-ch'ik* (Regulations on the Propagation of Religion) of 1906, Shintoism, Buddhism, and many other religions were officially recognized by the government as religions. According to the *Po-gyo Gyu-ch'ik* (Regulations on Propagation) of 1915, however, only Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity were recognized as religions under the new law. Those religions relegated to the status of a pseudo religion or non-religion were often ones the Japanese government feared would incite nationalist sentiment and activism among the Korean people. While religions categorized as pseudo religions or non religions remained under strict government supervision, the officially sanctioned religions received strong government support. However, such preferential treatment came at the cost of strict adherence to government policy. When Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, Shintoism was abolished, leaving Buddhism and Christianity as official religions. Meanwhile, the religious status of

Confucianism and Shamanism continued to erode.

After national liberation, various religious groups formerly oppressed by Japanese colonists rebuilt their organizations and endeavored to expand their influence. However, the First Republic was an authoritarian regime under the dictatorship of SyngMan Rhee, a faithful Protestant who had once studied theology to become a minister (Kang, 1993). Under SyngMan Rhee's command, the government provided preferential treatment towards Protestant organizations, while simultaneously imposing undue pressure upon other religious organizations, either directly or indirectly. Despite the legal separation between Church and state, many scholars regard the First Republic under SyngMan Rhee as one of "Christendom." President Rhee formally opened the Constitutional Assembly with prayer (Lee, 1984:267-268; Yun, 1991:209-211) and he also conducted the Presidential inaugural ceremony in Christian style as well (Lee, 1988:301). Not only were Sundays and Christmas observed as legal holidays, but he held a grand Christmas party in the National Assembly Building in 1955 (Cho-sŏn Il-bo, 1955. 12.24). He proclaimed the Christmas message every year, even challenging Koreans to send more Christmas cards in 1953 (Dong-a Il-bo, 1953. 11.12). Furthermore, the salute to the national flag was abolished at the NCC's request (Kim, 1982:195-196), a chaplain was appointed as a public servant, permission was granted to broadcast Christian missionary messages on public airwaves, and textbooks containing anti-Christian material were edited (Kang, 1994).

Moreover, Shamanism was dismissed as superstition by the pro-Christian government in 1949, and strong legal action was taken against Shaman activities (Cho-sŏn Il-bo, 1949. 9. 25). In January 1950, Rev. Yun-Young Lee, the Minister of Social Affairs, announced the enforcement of the *Mu-dang-Gŭm-ji-ryŏng* (Prohibition law on Mu-dang) (Dong-a Il-bo, 1953. 11. 12.), and the state police was ordered to crack down on *Mu-dangs* across the nation in March 1957 (Cho-sŏn Il-bo, 1957. 3. 10). In September 1958, the state established the *Kyo-ri-Sim-sa-Wi-woen-hwae* (Religious Doctrines Examining Committee) to scrutinize the doctrines of so-called pseudo religions, and the Department of Education warned each province to be wary of such pseudo religions (Dong-a Il-bo, 1958.12.30).

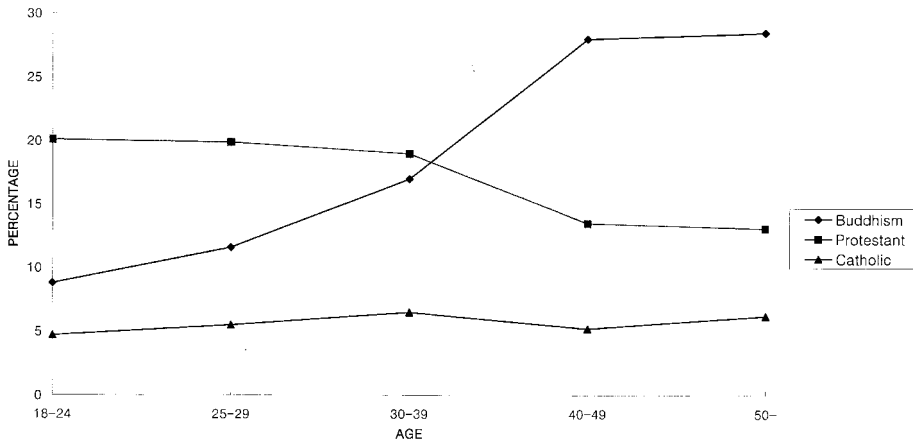
Not surprisingly, the relatively low prestige of Shamanism and Buddhism precluded these indigenous religions from successfully competing with the Christian religion, which was bolstered by state support and an image of modernity. Thus, in spite of the actual belief system of the Korean people during this period, Protestantism and Catholicism confused to flourish.

THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF VARIOUS RELIGIONS IN MODERN KOREAN SOCIETY

The general public perception of each religion will be examined to explain the rapid decline of Buddhism in the 1980s, as well as the rapid growth of Protestantism and Catholicism after the 1980s. Although the state exercised tremendous influence in categorizing and sometimes pigeonholing religious organizations during the first half of the 20th century, the realm of religion remained relatively undisturbed from the early 1970s onwards. Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism became socially recognized as the major religions in Korea. This outcome was in large part due to the historical religious structure and the public legitimacy accorded to these religions by the Korean state. The distinctly different distribution of age and education levels among the Buddhist, Protestant, and Catholic religions is rooted in the relationship between the state and each religion during the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Republics, periods relatively sympathetic to the concept of democracy.

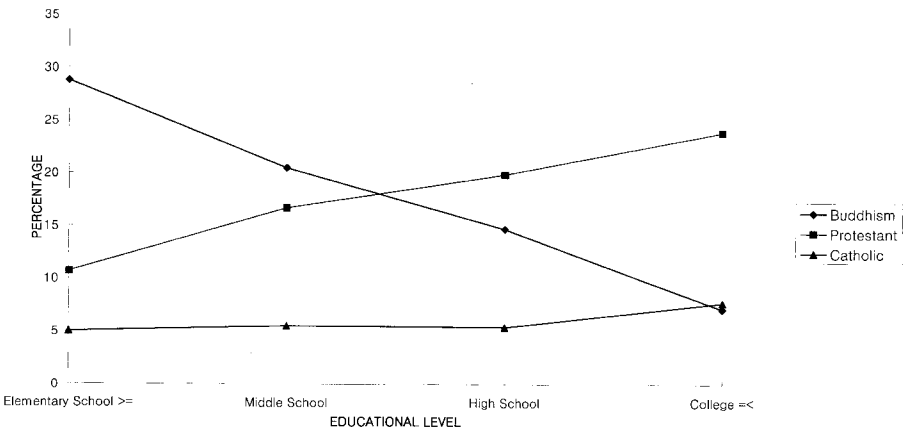
General Characteristics of Each Religion

Two Gallup surveys conducted in the early 1980s indicate that the following figures are rising. In 1982, the first survey questioned Koreans of all ages and found that 29 percent were Buddhists and 20 percent Christians (16 percent Protestant, 4 percent Roman Catholic). The second survey in 1983 polled young Koreans between the ages of 18 and 24, and discovered that 30.4 percent "believed in Christianity" (Protestant 24.3 percent, Catholic 6.1 percent). Corroborated by other studies, these surveys strongly suggest a significant decline of approximately 1 million Buddhists, and a steady rise in the number of Christians, particularly among young Koreans. In addition, the 1984 Gallup survey indicates that the distribution of age and education levels among religions coincides with how conservative or liberal the religion is perceived to be; assuming that the older generation is relatively more conservative and the younger generation is relatively more liberal (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). In Korea, Buddhism is generally considered to be the most conservative religion, and Catholicism the most liberal religion. According to Table 2, Buddhist parents failed to transmit their religious beliefs to their children.



Source: Ministry of Culture, Republic of Korea(1993)

FIGURE 3. RELIGION BY AGE GROUP, 1984



Source:Ministry of Culture, Republic of Korea(1993)

FIGURE 4. RELIGION BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

The Impact of State-Church Relations on Religious Membership in the 1970s and 1980s

In 1961, the “5.16 military coup” led by Chung-Hee Park established a military administration, and in 1963, he was elected as the President, estab-

TABLE 2. CHILDREN'S RELIGION BY PARENTS' RELIGION, 1984

Children's Religion	Parent's Religion					TOTAL
	Buddhism	Catholic	Protestant	Other	None	
Buddhism	213	0	1	1	5	220
Catholic	9	94	4	1	20	128
Protestant	48	9	263	1	69	390
Other	7	0	0	27	5	39
None	306	27	49	3	268	656
TOTAL	583	130	317	33	367	1,430

Source: Keumkang (1985: 32)

lishing the Third Republic. President Park instituted the "The October Reform Regime (Si-woel Yu-sin Ch'e-je: 1972-1979)" to secure autonomous power for himself; formally justifying it in terms of national security and economic growth. Tight state control over all sectors of Korean society facilitated Korea's economic miracle in some respects, but also led to social problems arising from economic inequality, high inflation, human rights violations, and repression of democracy. After the political assassination of President Park in 1979, General Chun Du-Whan assumed to power in the military coup of 1980, and exercised authoritarian leadership throughout the 1980s that was reminiscent of the Park regime. The Chun government finally conceded to providing some democratic reforms in the June 29th Declaration (Yuk-i-gu Sŏn-ŏn) in response to unrelenting anti-government demonstrations that often enjoyed national, public approval.

Dong Shin argues that the Korean Catholic church was the most effective in acquiring legitimacy during the democratization movement (Shin, 1994). The issue of democratization was the defining criterion for justice and morality in Korean society throughout the 1980s. According to Table 3, the participation or lack of participation of religious organizations in the democratization movement from 1972 to 1987 helped shape the general public perception of how liberal or conservative each religion was.

In order to rectify the First Republic's excessive preferential policies towards Christianity, preferential policies were enacted on behalf of Buddhism. A Buddhist chaplain was appointed, Buddha's birthday was recognized as a holiday, and many Buddhist temples were built or restored. Supported by leaders of the government who were primarily Buddhist believers, Buddhism held out as the dominant religion in Korea, benefiting from favorable government policies until the mid 1980s.¹⁴ Buddhist organi-

TABLE 3. THE FREQUENCY OF DEMOCRATIZATION ACTIVITIES

Year	Protestant	Catholic	Buddhist
1972	5	3	0
1973	46	8	0
1974	113	54	3
1975	34	28	0
1976	9	5	0
1977	21	9	0
1978	86	38	0
1979	85	36	1
1980*			
1981			
1982	2	2	0
1983			
1984			
1985	5	2	0
1986	13	10	3
1987	9	9	1
TOTAL	428	204	8

*After 1980, due to strict control over all press activities, the accurate estimate is very delicate.

Source: Shin(1994).

zations remained almost silent regarding issues of democratization due to their friendly relations with the government and the doctrine of nonsecularity, and they were therefore regarded as conservative (Lee, 1990; Cha, 1992; Shin, 1994).

In contrast, Catholic churches were active in the democratization movement of this period, despite their relatively low percentage of devotees. Until 1974, the Catholic Church had silently conformed to the state.¹⁵ However, unlike most other bishops, Cardinal Su-Whan Kim, the archdioce-

¹⁴Both Chung-Hee Park and Du-Whan Chun were Buddhists. In comparison with the number of Buddhists among the political elites of the First Republic, that of the Third Republic was large.

¹⁵Bishop Hak-Sun Chi was arrested and sentenced to 15 years. Bishop Chi was charged with providing financial resources to Chi-Ha Kim, the famous resistant poet. Exasperated with the case and a lukewarm response from the Bishop's Conference (the Catholic church's formal decision-making unit), young priests found the Catholic Priest's Association for Justice (Chung-wi-gu-hyŏn Sa-je-dan: CPAJ) on September 24, 1974. CPAJ actively participated in a wide range of activities for workers, urban poor problems, the democratization of the political system, the release of political prisoners, etc. CPJA primary used non-violent means, such as the Independent; investigation of social problems, open letters to the government, press conferences, and the organizing of rallies and prayer meetings (Lee, 1990; Yun, 1992; Shin, 1994).

san of the Seoul Archdiocese, made public his anti-governmental opinions about human rights and social justice. The active participation of the Catholic Priest's Association for Justice (Chung-wi-gu-hyön Sa-je-dan: CPAJ), which was composed of young priests involved in the democratization process, also left an indelible impression on the Korean people.

The friendly relationship between the state and the Protestant church critically changed from the mid 1960s, when the Park regime attempted to normalize diplomatic relationships with Japan (Shin, 1994: 36).¹⁶ The Protestant church fiercely opposed the diplomatic policy. However, in Korean Protestant history, the conflict between conservative theology stressing the literal immaculateness of Bible, and liberal theology emphasizing the historical interpretation of the Bible, have caused frequent breakups of existing denominations. During the 1980s, despite the Protestant origin of the most scathing anti-government criticism, referred to as "the People's Theology (Minjung Sinhak)," 70 percent of Protestant Churches were affiliated with conservative denominations, which succeeded in expanding their membership despite criticism from their liberal counterparts. A well-organized church system that encouraged strong membership, regular attendance at services, and various subgroup activities helped alleviate anomic despair by fostering feelings of kinship and providing a primary support group. Proselytizing activities on the streets (No-sang Jön-do) and in homes (Ho-gu Jön-do), as well as social welfare functions, including the establishment of child care centers, nurseries, etc, were effective in drawing Koreans to Protestant churches.

Consistent with Stark's(1994) "Supply-Side interpretation," Protestant churches were able to attract the radical young generation as well as the conservative older generation because they could satisfy both politically conservative and radical tastes.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Catholicism attracted primary the young and educated, who usually harbored liberal and anti-government sentiments. In contrast, Buddhism was unpopular among young Koreans because it was perceived to be conservative and status-quo oriented, both at the individual and political levels.

¹⁶Park's regime needed funds for economic development and political legitimization. However, since the Japanese government had not officially apologized for the thirty-six year occupation, many Korean people objected to the diplomatic policy. Specifically, the relentless persecution of the Protestant church and forced worship of Shintoism were main issues of Protestant Churches.

¹⁷There were 112 denominations in 1985.

CONCLUSION

This paper mainly focused on Korea's historical religious structure to account for the explosive growth of Christianity in modern Korean society. Other contributory factors emphasized in previous studies, including the anomic situation at the societal level and the strategies of Protestantism at an organizational level, should not be underestimated. To overcome latent problems in previous studies, however, a new framework based on the role of the state and its relations with various religious organizations was introduced. Non-believers were shown to be the product of Korea's historical religious structure. The successful capture of these non-believers by different religions was largely predicated on their status of public legitimacy, which to a great extent was accorded by the state. Indeed, state policies regarding religion during Japanese Imperialism, the First Republic, and the Third Republic had a profound influence in determining which organizations officially constituted a religion, as well as in shaping the general characteristics of each religion.

Despite the appearance of rapid and profound cultural change in Korean society (e.g., the rapid growth of western religion), the fundamental value system of Koreans is mostly intact and changing very slowly. Wilson claims that the rise of Christianity in various regions led to the elimination or marginalization of indigenous religions, and ultimately to the diffusion of secularization (Wilson, 1985: 17). Indeed, Christianity was an important agent of modernization in Korean society, and its rapid growth was associated with a rapid decline in Korea's indigenous religions. According to Shils (1981), however, some things changed and others did not. Most studies of cultural change in Korean society focused only on those aspects of Korean society that changed. This study was more concerned with those religious factors which seemed to undergo a fundamental change, but only changed in form, and not substance, and contributed to an underlying continuity during the decades of rapid economic change in Korea.

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