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Some Tears of Religious Aspiration:
Dynamics of Korean Suffering in Post-War
Seoul, South Korea



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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate urban religious aspirations that articulate Protestant churches' socio-political location in the Seoul landscape through analyses of some prominent Korean church founders' conversion narratives. By historicizing and contextualizing religious accounts that have mobilized a series of massive conversions in post-war South Korea, I want to shed light on a nucleus of Korean Christian practices that arise out of the aspirations that inspire a war-scarred people in search of a better life in this world and the next. My preliminary comparative analyses of some Korean church founders' religious accounts reveal that suffering, whether personal or national, appears as central in the narrativization of their conversion experiences and serves to further the church traditions they founded. With comparative analyses of two religious leaders' contributions to Christianity, this article discusses the extent to which past suffering serves to foster a religious aspiration that is reified with the increasing number of mega-churches in Seoul's metropolitan landscape, and, through missions, on the world map.

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Introduction

One of the most impressive visual characteristics of Seoul, the capital of South Korea, may be its night view with an uncountable number of lit crosses on top of small or large churches. Like the cities of New York, London, and Tokyo, Seoul is conceived as a major world city, all of which function as “*centers of finance and centers for global serving and management.*”¹ Furthermore, Seoul can be seen as an epicenter of religion, particularly of Protestant Christianity, and is home to the world’s largest mega-churches. This paper explores urban religious aspirations that articulate Protestant churches’ socio-political location in the Seoul landscape through analyses of some prominent Korean church founders’ conversion narratives.² By historicizing and contextualizing such religious accounts that have mobilized a series of massive conversions in post-war South Korea, I want to shed light on a nucleus of Korean Christian practices that arise out of the aspirations that inspire a war-scarred people in search of a better life in this world and the next.

Nonbelievers’ conversion to Christianity is integral to this rapid church growth, which coincided with the expansion of a western mode of modernization in Korea.³ Whether “individual” or “massive,” conversion to Christianity in this context is characterized by a set of “ruptures” that are supposed to be narrativized by the converted individual before witnesses.⁴

In respect to a unique aspect of the Christian tradition in which linguistic ritual (i.e., sermons, conversion narratives, and various forms of prayer) is an essential yet

1 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, and Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 342 (emphasis in the original).

2 This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant funded by the Korean Government (MEST) (AKS-2011-AAA-2104).

3 For anthropological discussions about the intimate relationship between Christian missionary and colonial modernity by the West to non-west, see Peter van der Veer (ed.), *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, New York: Routledge, 1994; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa v. I and II*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1997; and Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

4 See Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; Birgit Meyer, “Make a Complete Break with The Past: Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1998, pp. 316-349; Peter G. Stromberg, *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*. Cambridge [England]: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

largely neglected factor in discussions on Korean Christianity, in this paper I shed light on Korean church founders' charismatic narratives that, I assert, have promoted Korean forms of Christianity in South Korea and beyond.

My preliminary comparative analyses of some Korean church founders' religious accounts such as sermons, writings, interviews, etc., reveal that suffering, whether personal or national, appears as central in the narrativization of their conversion experiences and serves to further the church traditions they founded. It is right to say that Korean churches' global aspirations tend to go hand in hand with the personalization of national suffering, and with the nationalization of personal suffering as well. In these religious narratives, the Japanese occupation of Korea, national division, and the Korean War followed by the Cold War, featured as dark forces, as "external" victimizers under which the Korean nation, church, and individuals suffered. In this light, I note a critical shift in the way suffering individuals are perceived and portrayed in the biblical language from sinners to victims in the context of Korean mass conversion that accelerated in post-War South Korea.

With no caveats, I posit that a series of massive evangelical campaigns that contributed to a rapid increase in new converts;⁵ denominational divisions, particularly between conservative and progressive churches; and the emergence of mammoth churches in Korean urban landscapes and their missionaries all over the world, are all firmly rooted in and stem from competing conceptualizations, i.e., the reasons, meanings, and consequences, of Korean suffering. In the scale of world Christian communities, Korean churches' articulation of national adversity served to legitimize a leadership role. Accordingly, the translation of historical particularities into biblical language and transnational network-building became accelerated in post-War South Korea. However, it is arguably suggested that Korean Protestant leaders have put less effort into transcending politico-economic problems than into identifying the "enemy" from which their adherents are mobilized to distinguish themselves. In this respect, I wish to unveil what makes Christianity "Korean", as Donald N. Clark highlights by stating: "The missionaries never could become Koreans and, as foreigners and with few exceptions, have never been able fully to share in the experiences of their Korean co-believers."⁶

This research background stems also from the following specificities I discovered in the history of Korean Christianity. First, my empirical research suggests that there

5 Timothy S. Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

6 Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea*. University Press of America, 1986, p. 24.

is a primary difference between testimonies of the conversion processes in documents authored by American missionaries (mainly during the Pyongyang Great Revival of 1907), and contemporary Korean testimonials of faith, or *singang kanjŭng*, which I have heard in the course of my fieldwork.⁷ When describing the scenes of massive conversion, American missionaries particularly emphasized the repentance (i.e., confession of sins) and spiritual awakening aspects that are part of the conventional process of conversion in Protestantism.⁸ Meanwhile, rather than the repentance of sins, one finds a tendency in present-day Korean conversion narratives, which are made publicly in churches, to focus on articulating past “suffering” and how it was solved or its meaning shifted thanks to “God’s grace.”

Accordingly, it is critical to contextualize these massive conversions within their specific historical juncture, namely when charismatic leaders in both political and religious areas emerged to claim and found the “Korean” state and church, thereby envisioning a national restoration. Taking this into account, this paper consists of mainly three parts. First, I will present a brief historical and theoretical review on religion and state in Korea, focusing on the theme of suffering; the second part comparatively analyzes two religious leaders’ contributions to the foundation of Korean Christianity; and the last section discusses the extent to which *past* suffering serves to foster a religious aspiration that is reified with the increasing number of mega-churches in Seoul’s metropolitan landscape, and, through missions, on the world map.

Spiritual Revival and National Restoration

Billy Graham, a prominent evangelist in the United States, once stressed a characteristic of the Korean Church, namely that it “has set a pattern of perennial revival to which the church universal looks with wonder and amazement. ... It is refresh-

7 I carried out anthropological fieldwork from August 2006 to December 2007 for my doctoral thesis on the Christian encounters between North Korean migrants and the South Korean Church, the results of which I am developing to publish as a book.

8 For example, William Newton Blair addressed his witness as follows: “As the prayer continued, a spirit of heaviness and sorrow came upon the audience. ... Man after man would rise, confess his sin, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor with his fists in a perfect agony of conviction” (William Blair and Bruce Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost & The Sufferings Which Followed*, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, p. 72). The terms of weeping, sorrow, etc. are evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, according to Blair.

ing to know that the spirit of revival still prevails in Korea, and that the work of God there continues unabated.”⁹ This characteristic can be observed in the series of evangelical “revival” movements that continued to occur ever more frequently and on a much larger scale in Korea after the Korean War (1950-1953) and through the 1990s.¹⁰ This series of massive evangelical campaigns, as Timothy Lee points out, characterizes Korean evangelicalism,¹¹ and, I argue, further rooted the exponential growth of churches in the urban landscape of Korea.

Using the term “revival” (*Puhŭng* (復興) in Korean) to signify the rise and growth of Korean Christianity, however, does not mean that Koreans were once Christian and are returning to their lapsed faith. The series of revival campaigns constantly taking place in Korea is not intended to reawaken secularized people’s interest in religion. In this rhetoric, the church or Holy Spirit is present everywhere in the universe, but only reconstructed, revived, and resurrected through the newly converted or reborn believers. Korean mass conversion to Christianity thus manifests for Korean Christians that they are “chosen” to reify and prove the existence of God.

In contrast to secularization theories that show religion consistently being replaced by the nation-state,¹² and world cities frameworks that view the global flow of capital as having precedence over the defined entity of the state,¹³ it is religion and its influ-

9 René Monod, *The Korean Revival*. Translated by Anthea Bell, with foreword by Dr. Billy Graham. London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971 (1969), p. 5.

10 Timothy S. Lee, *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010, pp. 84-114.

11 Lee T., *Born Again*, p. xv.

12 For scholarly discussions about secularization theory and religion in the West and East, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003; Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; Jose Casanova, “Public Religion Revisited” in Hent de Vries, ed., *Religion: Beyond the Concept*, Fordham University Press, 2008, pp. 101-119; Jose Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” *The Hedgehog Review*, 2006; and by Peter van der Veer, *Conversion to Modernities*, 1996; *Imperial Encounters: Religion, Nation, and Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001; “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China” in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 270-281; “Religion and Education in a Secular Age: A Comparative Perspective”, in *Religion, Education, and Politics in Modern China* 33, 2011, pp. 235-245.

13 On the concepts/natures of world cities and global cities, see John Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis”, *Development and Change*, 17, 1986, pp. 69-83; “Where We Stand: A Decade of World City Research”, in Paul L. Knox, *World Cities in a World-System*, 1995, pp. 21-47; and by Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, and Tokyo*.

ences that have grown rather than declined in both public and private spaces in the process of modern nation-state building, accompanied by rapid urbanization and industrialization in South Korea. Furthermore, Protestantism is currently so prevalent that the Seoul metropolitan area, with a population of 25 million people,¹⁴ is home to the world's largest mega-churches.¹⁵ These churches have always exerted substantial power in key domestic political and economic issues such as the recent presidential election, national security law reform, private school law reform, and policies toward North Korea(ns), to name a few, and further have both competed and cooperated with other churches to advance world evangelization.

Although it has declined in recent years due to disenchanted people moving away from the Seoul metropolitan area, the size of the Protestant population in South Korea is remarkable. South Korean churches claim that 25 percent of the entire population is Protestant, whereas in Asia (where 60 percent of the world's population resides), Protestants account for only about 5 percent of the population, far behind other traditional religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. According to a 2006 report by the South Korean National Statistics Office, Buddhists constituted 22.8 percent of the population, followed by Protestants at 18.3 percent and Catholics at 10.9 percent. When combined, the numbers of Protestants and Catholics surpassed Buddhists -- 29.2 percent to 22.8 percent.

In addition, the Korea World Mission Association (KWMA) recently reported that the number of Korean missionaries serving overseas numbered 19,413 in 168 countries as of January 2009. This makes South Korea the second largest missionary-sending country after the United States; this figure represents a huge jump since

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1991; "The Global City: Strategic Site/New Frontier", *American Studies*, 41:2/3, Summer/Fall 2000, pp. 79-95. For a discussion about Seoul as a global city, see Kyoung-ho Shin and Michael Timberlake, "Korea's Global City: Structural and Political Implications of Seoul's Ascendance in the Global Urban Hierarchy", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 47 (2), pp. 145-173, 2006.

14 Thomas Brinkhoff, "The Principal Agglomerations of the World", <http://www.citypopulation.de>. The Seoul city government officially claims that it had some 10.4 million residents, one-fourth of the total Korean population, as of the end of 2010 (<http://english.seoul.go.kr/gtk/about/fact.php?pidx=3>).

15 Yoido Full Gospel Church, Association of God Grace and Truth Church, Yongrak Church, Nambu Gospel Church, Kum Ran Church, Soong Eui Methodist Church, etc., are on a list of the world's largest mega-churches, but Somang Church, Sarangui Church, Onuri Church, and Chunghyun Church, to name a few, are also famous mega-churches in Seoul in terms of their size and political-social influence in South Korea.

2000, when the number was 8,103.¹⁶ It has become well known that Korean missionaries target some of the countries considered the most difficult to evangelize, such as Iraq, North Korea, and China.¹⁷ As *The New York Times* reported, “[They] are eager to do God’s work and glorify God. They want to die for God.”¹⁸

It may be worth stressing that in the west, namely Europe, we have observed that religion, particularly Judeo-Christianity, which at times has been involved in a series of human catastrophes as a “primordial force,”¹⁹ causing suffering, sorrow, and death, has lost its socio-political powers to national and supranational organizations. A substantial example is the definition of a “refugee” as stated in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, wherein religion fell into the category of main reasons for which certain individuals and groups are persecuted.²⁰ For some European thinkers, such as Karl Marx, religion is nothing other than the opium of the masses and should be abolished in order for people to be truly happy.²¹ In other words, secularism was a modern national project that attempted to remove religion from public space and life, as it was suspected of being a threat to national unity or true emancipation in the context of Europe and arguably Communist revolution.²² In contrast, the same religion, Christianity, was embraced by new national leaders and war refugees as a major player for providing the meaning for suffering and the resources for enduring it in post-war Seoul, South Korea. For

16 S. Sang-Cheol Moon, *The Protestant Missionary Movement in Korea: Current Growth and Development*. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2003, pp. 59-64.

17 The number of Christians in China is increasing at a rapid pace. It is estimated at about sixty million both in Protestantism and Catholicism (Gardam, *BBC News Magazine*, September 11, 2011), but it seems there is no way to count increasing number of underground house churches and their congregations.

18 *New York Times*, November 1, 2004.

19 Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sander, “The Questions of Religion and World Politics,” in Fox and Sander ed., *Religion in World Conflict*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 4.

20 The 1951 UN Convention (Article 1) defines a refugee as a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”, <http://www.unhcr.org> (consulted 12 August 2012).

21 Karl Marx, “Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, New York: International Publishers.

22 See Peter van der Veer, “Religion and Education in a Secular Age: A Comparative Perspective”, in *Religion, Education, and Politics in Modern China* 33, pp. 235-245, for a scholarly discussion about secularism.

Korean Christians, the bitterness in their life originated not only from their own, or even ancestral sins, but rather from outside -- the Big Powers in the Cold War era, Communists from the North against “innocent” Christians -- in addition to stemming from a domestic dictatorship that denied the urban poor their basic human rights, as we shall see in the following sections.

Between the 1960s and early 1990s, not only Christianity, but indeed all religions, including Buddhism, Shamanism, and even new religious movements like the Unification Church (known as the Moonies), flourished in South Korea instead of declining, and the religious population increased six-fold in the context of rapid industrialization and urbanization. The case of South Korea thus indicates that the secularization theory is western-centric. Drawing on previous studies, as Andrew Kim summarizes well, the main socio-historical factors that explain the ever-growing number of religious adherents and institutions include

psychological scars and an overwhelming sense of shame felt by Koreans over Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945); traumatic experience of the Korean War (1950-1953); the anomie arising from rapid industrialization and urbanization; and the profound sense of deprivation borne by a widening income gap. Also, by serving as welfare agencies and as points of contact for displaced individuals -- which included millions of North Korean refugees seeking comfort and fellowship, religious organizations provided for the adherents a sense of belonging, identity and security.²³

From the start, the rise of Christianity in Korea has been closely related to the conceptualization and categorization of suffering and millenarian yearning for salvation.²⁴ It may be right to stress that the sacralization of suffering was and is a missionary project by which the pleasures of everyday life are overlooked in favor of the utility of using uncommon suffering as a rallying point for common faith. Upon arriving to evangelize the Korean peninsula, the first American missionaries witnessed a type of extreme poverty and political weakness far worse than in Japan and China, countries

23 Andrew Eungi Kim, Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea: A Sociological Survey, *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Jun., 2002, pp. 291-310.

24 Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction nationalism in Korea 1896-1937*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990; Yi Mahn-yol, *Han'guk Kidokkyo wa yöksa üisik* (Korean Protestantism and historical consciousness). Seoul, South Korea: Chisik sanöpsa, 1981; William Newton Blair & Bruce F. Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977; Park M-s., Tachonggyo sahoe esö üi Han'guk Kaesin'gyo wa kukka kwölyöök (Korean Protestantism and National Power in the Plural Religious Context). *Chonggyo yön'gu*, Vol. 54, 2009, pp. 1-37; Ryu D-y., *Han'guk kün-hyöndaesa wa Kidokkyo* (Korean modern history and Christianity), Seoul: p'urünyöksa, 2009.

then fighting with one another on the peninsula to occupy Korea, and they believed that such conditions were mainly, if not completely, caused by Koreans themselves. With no caveats, for both foreign missionaries and newly converted Korean Protestants, the local cultural practices such as neo-Confucianism (in particular, ancestral worship, concubinage, etc.), shamanist ritual (i.e., *kut*), Buddhism and Taoism, and popular entertainments such as gambling and drinking followed by singing, dancing, and often fighting, smoking, etc., were all considered to be sinful behavior and thus were to be wiped out. Significantly, conviviality, fun, pleasure, or what Koreans call *hŭng* (興), was degraded by the neo-Confucian ruling class as something that only belonged to the lower classes, devalued as extravagant by anti-Japanese fighters, and simultaneously demonized as evil by Christian missionaries. As I shall elaborate in the following sections, it is crucial to understand that Protestant asceticism was well incorporated into promoting South Korea's rapid economic development in the aftermath of the Korean War.

Post-Korean War Seoul, as a context, was crucial to the rise of churches. Concomitant to the armistice of the devastating war was an emergence of internally displaced refugees, namely from the North, where many early Christians lived. Seoul, as the capital of South Korea, was where these "strangers" could be relatively invisible and anonymous. The social and political dynamics of that time were instrumental in the Christianization of Seoul. The South was governed by the Christian dominated government (Syngman Rhee regime) and US military forces, while American missionaries were also active in an era (1945-1950s) that was followed by the notorious militant dictatorship that drove national restoration campaigns, in particular, the New Village Movement (1960s-1980s). Political loyalty to the South or resistance to the anti-communist state, the sacralization of Seoul as the legitimate capital of the Korean peninsula and the Korean nation,²⁵ the renegotiation with the patriarchal system in family, church, and social relations, and the desire for social mobility through social networks (equivalent to Chinese *guanxi*), all intermingled to accelerate church growth. Within this context, my particular attention is given to the religious accounts.

Addressing the causes of suffering is inherent in most religions, as Talal Asad has discussed in regard to Christian and Islamic traditions.²⁶ Primarily, the concept of

25 See Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, eds., *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, for historical and anthropological discussions about religious nationalism in relation to the sacralization of national territory.

26 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

suffering as an analytical tool is directly linked to healing, and both are central as the goal and means of the conversion to Christianity. Amanda Porterfield suggests that Christian healing calls attention to the ways in which suffering is intrinsic to living a Christian life. She states:

Part of Christianity's appeal as a means of coping with suffering is the idea that suffering is not meaningless but part of a cosmic vision of redemption. [...] Thus, many Christians have accepted the onset or persistence of suffering as part of religious life, while also celebrating relief from suffering as a sign of the power and meaning of their faith.

She continues,

Beneath this apparent paradox, a fairly consistent tendency to experience suffering as a means of both self-understanding and communion with others have enabled many Christians to rest easier with pain and death, even as healing experiences have energized Christians, enabling some to defeat pain and death, at least temporarily.²⁷

This individual-centric perspective is likely applicable to the Korean church only as an analysis of the ahistorical and universal role and meaning of the Bible and the church, for it is limited in its ability to explain phenomenal mass conversion in Korea in light of the relationship between suffering and conversion. It is in this sense suggestive of a micro-level approach that takes into consideration geopolitical factors -- for instance, colonialism and national division -- that uniquely affect Korea, thereby allowing us to better contextualize the numerical explosion of new converts throughout the modern era.²⁸ However, the sociological macro-level analyses tend to pay less attention to micro variables and dynamics in responding to and translating the greater geopolitical forces by individuals.

By following the life trajectories of the ministers introduced in this article, this paper will demonstrate how they have taken the historical upheavals intimately linked to their personal hardships into account, and will show how the set of memories that are narrativized in biblical language are also reified or manifested through the ministers' various practices in belief.

For a preliminary comparison of Korean church founders, I have chosen two Presbyterian church founders: Han Kyung-jik (Han Ky ng-Chik), who established the

²⁷ Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁸ Chung-Shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003; Danielle Kane and Jung Mee Park, "The Puzzle of Korean Christianity: Geopolitical Networks and Religious Conversion in Early Twentieth-Century East Asia," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 115, No. 2, 2009. pp. 365-404.

Young Nak Church, the largest Presbyterian church in the world; and Kang Won-yong (Kang Won Yong), who established the Kyoung Dong Presbyterian Church and the Korean Christian Academy, which initiated progressive social activism in South Korea.²⁹

Han Kyöng-jik: Grounding Korean Evangelism

Kyung-Chik Han was the founder of Seoul's 60,000-member Young Nak Presbyterian Church. His fervent work for refugees and the poor epitomized the growth of Christianity in South Korea. His experience as a survivor of war and political oppression made him one of his country's most respected religious leaders.³⁰

On April 29, 1992, in Berlin, Rev. Han Kyung-Chik (Kyöng-jik, 1902-2000), who was in his 90s, was awarded the Templeton Prize. His achievement is remarkable: The Young Nak Presbyterian Church, built by war refugees from North Korea like himself, is the first mega-church in Korean church history, and Rev. Han was the first Korean minister to send missionaries to foreign countries. As a consequence, there are more than two hundred Young Nak churches all over the world today. Additionally, he founded schools for secondary and college education, orphanages and shelters for the needy, and co-founded World Vision in Korea (*Sönmjönghoi*) with Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, Inc.³¹

In this paper, I want to elaborate the twofold meanings of his religious leadership. First, Rev. Han was a pioneer in reviving Christianity and Christian subjectivity as "Korean" while identifying non-Christian ideologies and rituals, particularly Communism, as "foreign" and "evil" in the making of the Korean nation-state; accordingly, his church members established a Korean conservative church culture in which individuals practiced a community-oriented religious life.³²

29 It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate all their achievements comparatively, but this is an excellent question for further research.

30 www.templetonprize.org

31 For more information about World Vision, Inc. visit www.worldvision.org

32 The data are based on Korean literature such as Ch'oe, C.-g., *Yöngnak kyohoe üi puhöng: Han Chonggyo Sahoehakjöök Yön'gu* (*The Revival of Youngnak Church: A Religious-Sociological Study*). Korea: Han'gungmunhak, 1974; Han, K.-j., *Han Kyöng-jik Sölkjo Jönjip 1-12* (*The Complete Works of Reverend Han Kyung-Chik's Sermon 1-12*). Seoul: Han Kyöng-jik Moksa kinyöm saöp'oe, 2009; Kim B.-h. *Han Kyöng-jik Moksa* (Reverend Han Kyöng-jik). Seoul: Kyujang Munhwasä.

Born again

Born into a Protestant family in a small rural village, it was at O-San Academy that Rev. Han was deeply impressed by nationalist teachers and learned to be a Korean patriot, a modern scientist, and above all a sincere Christian. In the summer of 1924, just one year before graduating from college, he experienced a call to be “born again” by listening to God’s voice. As he put it:

While walking along the sandy beach alone, I just wanted to kneel down to pray to God about my future. I began praying and suddenly heard God’s voice. In fact, the most important thing at that period of time was the Korean nation (*minjok*), and I was called to work for *minjok*. That night, I prayed for a long time, and changed my direction.³³

Young Kyōng-jik Han in this brief account was emblematic of a Christian nationalism that was intensified in response to the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, dubbed *Kyōngsulgukch’i*, the national humiliation in the year of *Kyōngsul*. During the 35-year Japanese occupation period (1910-1945), Protestant churches and schools played a role in enhancing in young Koreans like Han Kyung-jik “the capacity to aspire”³⁴ to be national leaders. And it was God who, in Han’s account, told him to enlighten his people’s ways of life, and bring hope to those who were suffering. Following God’s calling and the suggestion of his professor, the missionary Dr. Blair, he moved to the United States to study humanities, and later theology. Soon after finishing his studies at Princeton Theological Seminary after studying at the College of Emporia, he was diagnosed with severe tuberculosis that terminated his plan to go to Yale graduate school for a PhD. In this desperate condition, he prayed to the Lord for “just three more years to live” in order to serve his people.

Preaching and Practicing

From his return to Korea in 1929, after recovering from near-fatal tuberculosis, until the end of World War II in 1945, Rev. Han served at the Second Church of Sinuiju in the north, while struggling under the control of Japanese authorities. Soon after the

1982, and various e-articles published in the website of Kyung-Chik Han Foundation (hankyungchik.org).

33 Kim B.H., *Han Kyōngjik moksa*, Seoul: Kyujang Munhwasa, 1982, p. 23 (my translation).

34 Arjun Appadurai, “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition”, in V. Rao and M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 59-84.

liberation in August 1945, the US and the Soviet powers divided the peninsula into two and placed each side under trusteeship. By December of 1945, the brutal clashes between Christians and Communists had become irreconcilable and threatened Rev. Han's life in the north. He fled to the south and started another church ministry in Seoul with 20 to 30 refugees from the north. The church changed its name to Young Nak Church the next year and grew to 500 members, increasing to 2,000 by that summer, and to 3,000 by the following summer.³⁵ His church continued to expand after the Korean War (1950-1953), growing to 12,000 attendants by 1969.

Substantial resources provided by the South Korean state and foreign aid along with Rev. Han's leadership and "God's grace," are often stressed as the main factors for this achievement in spite of such historical turmoil. I maintain, however, that the nucleus of his church growth can be better understood in Rev. Han's own accounts. And it is through his biblical vocabularies that historical pain and evil are redefined, differentiated, and sometimes silenced in the name of the Holy Spirit, national evangelization, and world missionization alike.

First, Rev. Han translated adversity such as being oppressed, uprooted, losing family members and land, and being imprisoned, as a guarantee "for a great reward in heaven" and felt that the oppressed are entitled to "rejoice and be glad" (Mathews 5:12) (sermon of Feb. 21, 1960). Eun-Söp Kim, a research pastor at Young Nak Church, stresses the changes in time and space that occur during Rev. Han's sermons: "When the Word of God is proclaimed [by Rev. Han in church], it is as if the world around you becomes a 'heaven dedicated to my Lord Jesus,' thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit that is able to join two such opposite dimensions as rationality and emotion, faith and behavior, cross and resurrection, the rich and the poor, men and women, old and young, the preacher and his audience, etc., in good harmony."³⁶ Similar accounts praising Rev. Han's preaching have appeared in various popular and academic writings across church denominations. They suggest that a religious language serves for not only a new subject-making (i.e., blessed and chosen people) but also place-making, as Rev. Han's church turned out to be 'heaven,' a metaphor of a particular cultural space where war-scarred Korean believers and refugees could be equally empowered and redeemed.³⁷

35 Monod, *The Korean Pentecost*, p. 58.

36 Kim, Eun-Söp, "Haeje (Bibliographical introduction)" in *Hankyungchik moksa sölkyo chönjip (The Complete Sermons of Rev. Kyung-Chik Han)*. Seoul: The Rev. Kyung-Chik Han Memorial Foundation, 2009, pp. ii-11/12. (my translation).

37 Low, Setha M. ed, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Second, suffering became located temporally in the past (e.g., in the Japanese colonial period, and before the war), while at the same time spatially, in the north. Japanese “colonial” forces and Korean “materialistic” Communists were all categorized as “inhuman” persecutors under whom “spiritual” Koreans suffered. Though Rev. Han considered materialistic and totalitarian Communism in North Korea a more severe “evil” than Japanese imperialism in opposition to liberal, democratic South Korea in most of his accounts, for him the Japanese colonial period and the current reality of North Korea are signs of an uncivilized world where people were and are persecuted, as opposed to the south, where Christianity is permitted and supported by state powers (i.e., the South Korean and US regimes). This, Rev. Han considers, is an example of an ideal civilization with spirituality, science, and patriotism. In other words, pain, which is not simply imagined as being in the past, but rather recognized as alive in the present North Korea, is counteracted in modern South Korea.

In the meantime, Rev. Han’s evangelical accounts have functioned to silence or deny other historical memories and current suffering. First of all, it must be noted that the cruel clashes between Christians and Communists before and during the Korean War were not only an instance of the victimization of the former. Instead, for example, the Northwest Youth League (*Sōbuk Ch’ōngnyōndan*, *abby. Sōch’ōng*) formed by mainly North Korean refugee Christians, and in particular young members of Rev. Han’s Young Nak Church, was sent to help South Korean soldiers to suppress the Jeju 4.3 Uprising, and these armed forces notoriously took tens of thousands of lives between 1947-1954. Not to mention the Yōsu-Sunchōn incident in the south and the Sinchōn massacre in the north.³⁸ In other words, these atrocities have

38 The Jeju 4.3 Uprising refers to a series of communist-civilian rebellions and their heavy suppression by the South Korean government on Jeju Island, the southernmost island of the Korean peninsula. Allegedly about 30,000, one-tenth of the total population, were killed from April 3, 1948 until 1953-54. The Yōsu-Sunchōn incident refers to the armed insurgence of military units and subsequent government repression that caused an unknown number of civilian casualties in Yōsu and Sunchōn, cities of Chōlla Province, in October 1948 in the south. The Sinchōn massacre led to the deaths of 35,000 people, one-third or fourth of the population, in October 1950 in Sinchōn, Hwanghae Province during the Korean War (1950-53). The Northwest Youth League (*Sōch’ōng*) collaborated with the government in repressing the first two incidents in the south. I point out the Sinchōn massacre here owing to its identical nature of conflict between Christians and socialist advocates who killed each other in the village amid the chaotic war predicament. However, deeper and profound investigations of all these events have not been conducted in either South or North Korea yet. The North Korean government accuses the “imperial” US, South Korean “puppets,” and Protestants of committing the Sinchōn massacre, while

hardly been confessed within a religious context, but rather silenced or redefined as purely secular activities. In the same vein, Rev. Han chose not confess his participation in Shinto worship (1938-1945)³⁹ (which he considers a sin), until he was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1992. Further, his couching of past suffering solely in biblical terms neglected the societal problems experienced by South Korea in previous times, such as political dictatorship, human rights abuses, corruption, etc.

Indeed, Rev. Han's biblical accounts drive us to understand a characteristic of the relation between church and state in terms of spatial differentiation in the context of divided nation-state building in South Korea, and further, the different images of charismatic leadership in political and religious realms. Rev. Han shared ideas of anti-communism, economic development orientation, and western civilization with South Korean political leaders as basic instruments to further evangelize the nation and beyond. His church members were encouraged to volunteer for extended community activities in all educational and social welfare enterprises as faithful practices of altruistic nationalism, while at the same time his church space served as a holy sanctuary keeping "spiritual" Koreans safe from the evils of Communism, a space where people reiterate conversion narratives in which stories of suffering were and still are central.

This set of characteristics differentiates Rev. Han from the other strand of Korean Christianity primarily led by Rev. Kang Won Yong, to whom the following section is devoted.

in the south all the killings are regarded as having been initiated by Communists, and the connection between Protestantism and armed violence is hardly taken into account.

39 In September 1938, the Chosun Presbyterian Church Council (first organized in 1893 as the Presbyterian Mission Council) held the 27th assembly meeting, which was heavily controlled by Japanese armed policemen in order to make the delegates vote for Shinto Worship. As a result, all the schools run by churches and missionaries fell under control of the Japanese governor-general; those who resisted Shinto Worship were either executed or imprisoned, some missionaries were forced to leave, etc. It is known that the period between 1938 and 1945 was the hardest time for Korean Christians (see Lee T., *Born Again*, pp. 54-60).

Rev. Dr. Kang Won Yong

“Are you a politician?” “No, I am not.”

“Are you a social activist?” “No, I am not.”

“Are you a priest?” “No, I am not.”

“Then, who are you?” “I am a voice shouting at an empty field called Korea!”⁴⁰

While the aforementioned Rev. Han Kyung-jik laid the foundation for the growth of conservative churches through revivalism, anti-communist patriotism and the promotion of collectivist church culture, Rev. Kang Won Yong set forth a Christian model that actively engages with immanent societal issues including those of human rights, equality, and Korean reunification. Migrating from north to south after Korea’s liberation in 1945 just as Rev. Han did, he established what is today known as the Kyungdong Presbyterian Church and invited Rev. Kim Jae Joon as a senior pastor. Rev. Kang was ordained a minister in 1949, and studied at the University of Manitoba, the Union Theological Seminary and The New School in New York City from 1953 to 1957.

Rev. Kang’s most notable achievement is his effort and vision that situates religion, specifically Christianity, in the “between and beyond” of South Korean society. Equally notable is his methodological pronouncement to pursue his vision through “conversation.” He identified South Korea’s acute ideological and public interest schism and polarization after the national partition and the Korean War as the main cause of “suffering” and attempted a topological anchoring of religion in the “between and beyond” of the two extremes. In the same vein, his philosophy of the “between and beyond” also contributed to opening a dialogue among different religious organizations, mainly Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist, as their influences on society were increasing. In terms of urban aspirations in Seoul, where urban migrant workers from rural areas, war refugees, and the urban poor were concentrated, Rev. Kang’s efforts can be seen in his calling himself a “voice” to “inspire and motivate the ‘marginal man’ -- and the marginal woman -- to strike out for the city in search of a better future.”⁴¹

40 The statements appear on the flash screen of Rev. Kang’s archive webpage, <http://www.yeohae.org/yeohae-front/main/main.asp>. My translation.

41 T. Bunnell and Goh, D., “Urban aspirations and Asian cosmopolitanisms”, *Geoforum* 42(1), 2012, pp. 1-3.

While Rev. Han took up the South Korean anti-communist regime and its “economic development first” policy as instrumental to his evangelical mission, Rev. Kang seems to have oriented his mission toward addressing social problems such as human rights, justice, and democracy, as a way through which enlightened elites or Christians could play a mediator role to mobilize and inspire both the grassroots and the privileged alike. In line with this theology and these practices, he founded the Christian Academy of Korea following, and with funding from, mainly the World Church Council (WCC) and some German churches in the 1960s.⁴² Just as Rev. Han did with world evangelists, Rev. Kang pioneered cooperation with and contributing to ecumenical movements as a member of the Central Committee and the Executive Committee in the World Council of Churches.⁴³ Based on Korean literature like Ko B.-s. (1987),⁴⁴ and sizable e-articles available in the Kang Won Yong Cyber Archive⁴⁵ run by the Daehwa Munhwa Academy (formerly the Christian Academy), the following section examines the progressive form of Korean church established by Rev. Kang.

Conversion and Awakening

In considering Rev. Kang’s conversion experience and simultaneously what conversion to Christianity in that time period might have looked like, I find his born-again experience to reflect multilayered conflicts that were radically polarized in terms of culture and ideology in early 20th-century Korea. Christian conversion for Rev. Kang

42 More accurate investigation is required regarding how and which international organizations supported Korean church activities and programs such as the Christian Academy of Korea, in order to create a more comprehensive picture of transnational religious networks. As for the donors of the Christian Academy of Korea, Korean materials including newspaper articles and the organization’s official website provide no specific information. My ethnographic sense suggests that this is mainly because Korean churches, including Rev. Kang’s, tend to put more emphasis on the leader’s achievements than external influences.

43 A former secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCC, formerly KNCC), of which Rev. Kang was the president twice in 1964 and 1980, told me that Rev. Kang was skillful (*ch’alhada*) in obtaining funding from foreign churches, for example German ones, by emphasizing the poverty of Korean churches (personal conversation at a church on a Sunday in April, 2012).

44 Ko B.-s. (Ko, Pöm-sō), ed., *Kang Wŏn Ryong kwa ūi taehwa* (Dialogue with Kang Won Yong). Seoul: Pyŏngminsa, 1987.

45 www.yeohae.org

and others in his generation could be seen as a series of interactions and negotiations with historical challenges that emerged between Christianity and Korean traditional cultures like Confucianism, between foreign missionaries and domestic Korean theologians, between Christianity and Marxism, and between “true” and “hypocritical” Christians as well.

Born in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, Rev. Kang was baptized when he was about 15 years old. Until his twenties, his religious practice was based on strict stoicism and biblical literalism. Not only did he take the Bible literally, he caused trouble by not following his own family’s Confucian tradition as well as disrupting his neighbor’s ancestral worship. Then one day, an opportunity for a reawakening presented itself through the pedagogical influence of his teacher and mentor Rev. Kim Jae Joon:

[His teaching] was totally different from what I had known at the time ... He explained how and why certain contents of the Bible came to be imported and emphasized how [in Korea] particular perspectives and circumstances differed from the original nature of the Christian faith. He criticized foreign missionaries for training Koreans according to stoical doctrines, with the example that they eat Western sausage, while disallowing Koreans to eat *Soondae* (Korean style sausage). His reasoning was a great shock for people like me and I felt as if I had been hit by lightning. ... That in his life style he supported poor students financially whereas he was wearing ragged clothes completely caught my attention.⁴⁶

The experience of being born again that appears in Rev. Kang’s narrative is suggestive of the significance of an inspirational moralistic relationship. His experience of such “spiritual enlightenment,” later accompanied by his theological education, becomes pivotal for his social activism.

In a similar vein, the integrity of faith and practice even in a time of extreme turmoil, namely his experience of the Korean War (1950-1953), gave more significance to Rev. Kang’s form of Christianity. Unlike Rev. Han, during the war Rev. Kang did not evacuate out of Seoul, and as a result experienced the following chaotic event:

[...] Those who stayed in Seoul under Communist control survived miraculously just as seen in Acts, but the fellows who had run away came back in civilian military uniform to Seoul after its recovery, and ranged around to inspect those who had stayed. Where else is such an ungrateful and brazen-faced deed to be observed? That was the state of the church and the state of this country. Then, what did the Communists’ brutalities look like? [...] What they did was too cruel to imagine. I felt to the bone the inhumanity, cruelty,

46 Ko B.-s. (Ko, Põm-sõ), ed., *ibid.*, pp. 208-9 (my translation).

and falseness of Communism crying loudly about human liberation. In the same vein, I experienced how hypocritical the anti-communists were too.⁴⁷

The antagonistic relationship between Christianity and Communism in the context of Korea was not simply grounded in their individual principles, but rather actualized and experienced through brutal battle, and reproduced in discursive genres of narratives and practices in faith in church history. While Rev. Han tended to anchor the war refugee experience and suffering as anti-communism in his evangelical nationalism, Rev. Kang, who also maintained an anti-communist stance, seemed to decide to take a third direction in what he called the “between and beyond”, the situation between extreme anti-communist Christians and anti-religious Communists that governed the Cold War era on the Korean peninsula. In this sense, I may call his faith reflexive theology, and refer his social activism to the foundation of an applied Christianity on Korean soil.

Christian Activism

Many recognize Rev. Kang as the religious leader most influential on political issues in Korea. He attempted to establish Christianity as a public religion capable of checking political power. Rev. Kang has assessed his own life works in a spirit of neutrality by promoting conversations between religions, scholars, politicians, and others, and by training people to be the “middle group” to mediate between the poles of the power holder and the powerless, conservatives and progressives, and employers and employees through the Christian Academy, a non-government organization he built for ecumenical campaigns and social change.

Rev. Kang has always emphasized the importance of the mediating process through which polar opposites could negotiate and find a third direction in which to move in a dialectical manner. I frame such “middle ground” or the process across sectarianism as a socio-cultural conversion, a “break” from convention and prejudice. Strictly speaking, Rev. Kang Won Yong is not an emblematic pioneer of a large-scale parish. Nonetheless, he has established a tradition of liberal social activism based on Christianity through his formation of an ideal figure of a participatory Christian and through his work that goes beyond the categorical boundaries of the political and the religious as well as the secular and the sacred. Simultaneously, he has been less interested in idealistic matters such as a principle or an ultimate goal, whether

47 Ko B.-s. (Ko, Pöm-sö), ed., *ibid.*, pp. 256-7 (my translation).

religious or political, than in practical matters. He has suggested that people be wary of being restricted by certain religious/social precepts or of confusing a goal with a means. In this respect, constant conversation and communication across parties and sects are important.

Today, those who are influenced by Rev. Kang tend to value active participation in and contribution to social activities as part of mission works. Overall, my research suggests that one of Rev. Kang's positive impacts on Korean Christianity is the establishment of the church's image, both in South Korea and among Koreans in the diaspora, as a key social institution contributing to social progress rather than merely promoting individual salvation.

In light of church expansion in urban areas in Korea, it may not be possible to compare the Rev. Kang's church and the churches in his denomination (The Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea, simply called *Kijang* in Korean) with megachurches that are evangelical-revivalistic and politically conservative.⁴⁸ Considering the charismatic leadership that played a role in mobilizing social activism and organizing street protests and vigils for political democratization, labor movements, and national reunification, which characterized South Korea in the 1980s, few will disagree with the suggestion that progressive Protestantism fueled South Korean millenarian aspirations to live "together" (*tōburō salgi*). Such a desire for equality has barely been realized due mainly to macro geopolitical conditions, including the Cold War legacy, which inherently prefigured the current nature of Seoul and its urban religiosity. Suffering continues to haunt discourses today, in the forms of religious accounts such as sermons of ministers and conversion narratives of laypersons in church settings, and it leads people to engage in various religious practices in present-day South Korea.

Concluding Remarks

Through a comparative analysis of two Korean Presbyterian Church founders' religious accounts and practices, I have tried to articulate the significance of suffering as central to the conversion narratives that help to explain, on the one hand, successive mass conversions of Koreans, and, on the other hand, the sectarian differentiation between the conservative and progressive churches that have emerged in the con-

48 Ryu D.-y., *Han'guk kŭn-hyōndaesa wa Kidokkyo*.

text of post-war South Korea. In regard to the motivation for mass conversions, it may not be an exaggeration to say that for the believers, nothing else was capable of translating Korean suffering as simultaneously universal and unique as the biblical vocabulary in the stories of the Israelites and early Christians. In this context, the church has been able to redirect believers' pain, memories, and aspirations toward a certain direction with conviction. Korean church leaders' authority is granted and respected not only because it is given by God in principle, or because of society's neo-Confucian legacy.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, I stress that it is also because the leaders' conversion narratives demonstrate that they suffered as much as or often more than the war-scarred people, that they are called to be born as a new model Korean in faith.

I began this paper with the notion of religious aspiration in the context of Seoul, while discussing mainly national suffering. This section aims to open further discussion regarding the extent to which these seemingly antagonistic concepts interact in both the Christianization of Seoul and the globalization of Korean Christianity. Following Arjun Appadurai,⁵⁰ I consider aspiration as a future-oriented form of culture that is determined socially, distributed unevenly between the rich and the poor, crucial in giving "voice" to the poor, and, in biblical understanding, is a longing for the providential hand of God. Conversely, suffering is, on the one hand, likely related to enduring "past" misfortunes, sins, curses, evil, etc., while on the other hand, in religious accounts like the Bible, it also appears rather positively as something that can work to prove God's divine healing, a sign of being chosen. The term theodicy reflects centuries-long intellectual endeavors in most religions to answer the existence of evil despite the goodness of God. But my interest is not in such a philosophical and theological discussion. Instead, I view, retrospectively, Korean religious aspiration in conjunction with its global imagination, which may be implied in the following anecdote, which I observed during the 2011 revival of Korean Protestants in Europe.

At a prime moment of his powerful sermon that made a few thousand overseas Koreans shout "Hallelujah" and "Amen" with joyful applause, Rev. Song, the pseudonym of an eminent preacher who is a rising star in Korean Protestantism, suddenly lowered his voice and whispered, "And it was just a few years ago late one night when I came back home from visiting church members (*simbang*) as usual, I suddenly collapsed on the floor... I was in hospital being diagnosed with a cerebral hemorrhage." A short moment of silence

49 Kelly H. Chong, *Deliverance and Submission: Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008.

50 Arjun Appadurai, *ibid.*

was followed by sighs from the audience, and some people sitting around me clicked their tongues -- a typical Korean way of expressing sympathy. Some were ready to use tissues or handkerchiefs, essential necessities one should prepare to absorb tears in this kind of massive Korean revival. He continued, "One side of my brain and body were dead. ... It was a fatigue that destroyed me."

Rev. Song's sermon based on his own life trajectory was not merely a typical narrative of personal suffering and healing. Rather, his sermon was devoted to the theme of "Change the World, with the Heart of Jesus!", the slogan of the 2011 KOSTA Europe,⁵¹ the largest annual revival of Korean Protestants in Europe. In this context, Rev. Song's "collapse" story not only evoked hardworking ethics for the young audience members, but also served to legitimize the "servant" leadership role of Korean Christians in saving Europe, the continent that had sent Robert Jermain Thomas to awaken Korea in the 19th century.⁵² More surprisingly, in addition to Rev. Song, nearly all Korean ministers and missionaries from large and mega-churches in Korea and the Americas, including the successor of Rev. David Paul Cho at the Yoido Full Gospel Church, spoke about their own suffering experiences, ranging from a physical

51 KOSTA is the abbreviation for Korean Students All Nations. It is a trans-denominational revival gathering, first initiated by about 200 study abroad Korean students in the United States in 1986, and spread to other regions and countries. As of today, there is the head-quarter office in Seoul, Korea to arrange and support each country and regional meetings, which are run by voluntary participants from different Korean ethnic churches in the regions. KOSTA Europe began in 1988 and the 2011 meeting was taken place with about 1,500 on February 22-25 in Kirchheim, Germany. .

52 Korean Protestants consider the martyrdom of Robert Jermain Thomas (1839-1866) as a critical seed of Korean Christianity. Thomas handed a Chinese Bible to a Korean soldier shortly before being killed in 1866. He was sailing as a translator on an armed American trading ship, the General Sherman, to Pyongyang. His intention was to spread the Gospel. However, uninvited contact from foreign countries was strongly prohibited at the time. The American crew did not listen to the local Korean guard, but kidnapped a Korean messenger instead. Further, the ship opened fire. The two-day long battle between the American armed traders and Korean guard force ended with the ship burned down. All Americans died, but Thomas jumped into the water with his Bible, tossed it to a Korean soldier who pierced him following an order. There was a house discovered in the area having the Bible pages as wallpaper. And one of the first Protestant churches in Korea was established there, and Korean Christians claim that the Bible wallpapered in the house was originally given by Thomas (see <http://robertjermaintomas.com> for some e-information about Thomas). In 2010, the area where Thomas was martyred has become the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology established by a non-profit South Korean Christian organization, which also founds and runs Yanbian University of Science and Technology in China (see Jin Ho Jōng's *Mōmch'ulsu ōmnūn hanūl ūi yōlchōng*, Seoul: Kyujanggak, 2005) for more Christian accounts about PUST and YUST).

illness like Rev. Song to a financial crisis, to spiritual wars. Note that the Economist has recently reported, “The Protestant church, in particular, seems to have produced a tribe of flashy, mansion-dwelling pastors,” with regard to Korean mega-churches, and in particular to the fact that Rev. Cho was accused of embezzlement of church money (circa \$20 million) by his followers.⁵³ We can unveil multilayered implications in these seemingly peerless depictions; on the one hand the “mansion-dwelling pastors” and suspicions of personal enrichment, and the pastors’ stories of suffering on the other. The bottom line here is that the theme of suffering is still prevalent among Korean religious leaders to legitimize their religious authority to their congregations and audiences, and the same is true of Korean missionaries in the world mission.

I suggest, however, that the theme of suffering, as a form of ritual and a theological foundation, has to do with the churches’ future-oriented culture, namely the religious aspiration of the believers. There are two significant and somewhat incompatible developments in Korean Christianity: Minjung Theology and the Pentecostalization of mainline churches. Both seem to represent and project Korean Protestant aspirations for salvation in different ways, but both are firmly founded on the theme of suffering.

Minjung Theology, likely the equivalent of the Liberation Theology of Latin America,⁵⁴ gained worldwide popularity among theologians as representative of specific Korean theology since its introduction in the 1980s. Minjung Theology stands for Korean “*minjung*,” roughly translated as “the people” or “grass roots,” who are the subject of history and social agents leading political movements for justice and human rights. It employs the story of Exodus to interpret Korean *minjung*’s reality and destiny, and considers Jesus Christ appearing in the Book of Mark as the model Christian who served the people. Thus the emphasis is on Christian practices in faith. Byung Moo Ahn (Ahn Byōng Moo) and Nam Dong Seo (Sō Nam Dong), the pioneering theologians who proposed this theology by interpreting the main concepts of “*minjung* (the people)” and “*han* or *haan* (inner wounds)”⁵⁵ according to the

53 “For God and country,” *The Economist*, October 15, 2011.

54 The Liberation Theology is a political movement of mainly Roman Catholic churches for social justice and equality in Latin America in the 1950s and 60s, and grew into an international movement. See John Burdick, *Legacies of Liberation: The Progressive Catholic Church in Brazil*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004.

55 The conceptualization of *han* or *haan* (恨) has been discussed and developed by some Minjung theologians since its emergence as a key term in the theology (e.g., Jae Hoon Lee, *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds-Han*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994; Chang-Hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm*

Bible, proclaimed the Third Coming through the liberation of the people in this time, and thus provided a theological base and motif for progressive Christians. Minjung Theology therefore allowed the churches to stand at the forefront of social activism for political democratization, social justice, and human rights against the militant regimes of South Korea starting in the 1980s. However, this theology has been far less recognized and supported by the *minjung* themselves and Christians in South Korea than by intellectuals and western scholars, and was thus nearly replaced, though not completely, with Pentecostal movements mainly led by Rev. David Yonggi Cho, who founded the Yoido Full Gospel Church, the world's largest church.

Regarding the massive growth of Korean churches, most intellectual approaches seem to consider it as problematic as the rapid modernization of the country under the military dictatorship. For instance, “Let us live well! (*chal sarabose!*),” the motto of the New Village Movement of the Park Jung Hee militant regime (1961-1979, followed by Generals Chun and Roh regimes till 1993), was indeed an allegory of street beggars' material desire that turned out to be a national aspiration under the Park dictatorship. This secular goal, with its means to economic achievement, brought about heterogeneous consequences in Korean society. Kang Myungkoo, a Korean sociologist, highlights the “developmentalist mentalité” that

serves as a system of ideology and affect that consolidates modes of behavior as well as ways of thinking. Due to this developmentalist mentalité, civil virtues and morals of solidarity and tolerance have been replaced with avaricious desires for material possession and an indiscriminate, competitive, survival mentalité.⁵⁶

In line with this analysis, some scholars have argued that the rapid economic development led to “bigness syndrome” within Korean Christianity, namely that the physical size of the institution was correlated with its success, and to its adherents' desire to

of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness, 2000; Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010, etc. to name a few), but I refer its definition to Nam-Don Suh who defines it as a “feeling of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against one, a feeling of acute pain in one's guts and bowels, making the whole body writhe and squirm, and an obstinate urge to take revenge and to right the wrong—all these combined” (Boo-Woong Yoo, *Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology*, New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

56 Kang Myong-Kyu, “Compressed Modernization and the Formation of a Developmentalist Mentalité” in Kim, Hyung-A and Clark W. Sorensen eds., *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era 1961-1979: Development, Political Thought, Democracy, and Cultural Influence*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2011.

be blessed with economic prosperity and good health, a complete break from their poor past.⁵⁷

In the same vein, both insiders and outsiders have criticized the churches throughout the history of Korean Christianity. During the Japanese colonial period, nationalists and apparently Communists alike were critical of the revival movements due mainly to the revivalists' lack of national consciousness, while in the developmental period since the 1960s, churches oriented toward quantitative growth combined with competitive evangelization were problematized in public discourses. In recent years, Korean mega-churches have been at the center of political right-wing campaigns, creating inter-religious tensions, aggressive missionary activities, anti-education reform, etc. Mega-churches are accused of being major hegemonic institutions aiming to perpetuate privileged status focusing on quantitative expansion.

In contrast to this critical perspective, the leaders and scholars of the mega-churches provide rational explanations and appreciation as to the multifaceted efficacies of mega-churches. In reality, considerably large numbers of foreign church leaders, laypersons and missionaries visit Korea to participate in various training programs. Further, it should be considered that Korean mega-churches have greatly followed “the trend of North American enterprise culture, both in socio-economic development and church theology,” asserts Hong Young-gi,⁵⁸ an ordained pastor and an architect in theorizing Korean mega-churches at the Yoido Full Gospel Church. Using the terms the “McDonaldization” and “Charismatization,” Hong theorizes the ways in which Korean mega-churches have managed to and should “incorporate a charismatic spirit into rationalized systems,” namely, “both effective system and vital spirit,” which is required to turn the quantity-oriented culture toward the quality growth of churches. This market theory that interprets people's churchgoing as a rational choice and justifies the competition among churches is, however, limited in its ability to further explain the complex relationship between the churches and the state in terms of control, sponsorship, collaboration, resistance, etc. Simultaneously, much writing on Korean “fervent” religious practices has rarely escaped from but rather reiterated the Korean shamanism-Pentecostal Protestantism nexus theory, for

57 Kim Byong-suh, “Modernization and the Explosive Growth and Decline of Korean Protestant Religiosity,” In Buswell, Robert E. and Timothy S. Lee eds. *Christianity in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

58 Young-gi Hong, “Encounter with Modernity: The “McDonaldization” and “Charismatization” of Korean Mega-churches”, *International Review of Mission*, **Volume 92, Issue 365**, pages 239-255, April 2003.

example, portraying Koreans as inherently religious and eager to be healed by supernatural power, instead of relying on the state social welfare system in the context of globalization.⁵⁹ This set of analyses tends to take western thoughts on the antagonistic relationship between ongoing urban distress as the problem and religion as its solution for granted. However, I have maintained in this article that the theme of suffering is, in the Korean church tradition, vitally reincarnated in dialectical processes and forms of rituals through which Korean Protestants continue to be born again as sufferers in the name of being chosen for their own sake and for envisioning a reunified national evangelization and the world mission.

59 See Kim Sung Gun, "Korean Protestant Christianity in the Midst of Globalization: Neoliberalism and the Pentecostalization of Korean Churches", *Korea Journal*, Vol. 47 (4), 2007, pp. 147-176.

