

Inter-religious Clash and Dynamic Faith in Contemporary Korea

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1. The Characteristics of Today's Religious Situation in Korea

23 Koreans were kidnapped by Talibans in Afghanistan on July 19 of this year. They were Korean Protestants who went there to volunteer for medical aid but became a target of the Islamic fundamentalist armed forces. The incident concluded with two killed and the other hostages being released in 42 days. The Korean government warned them on several occasions of the dangers of going to Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Korean Protestants ignored the warnings and the rescue work cost the Korean government and its citizens much, both mentally and financially. Thus, the returned hostages and Korean Protestants in general were severely criticized in Korea. Why on earth did they devote themselves to missionary work risking their lives? Where does such fervor of the Korean Protestants come from?

Of course, the Korean protestant missionaries did not only go to Afghanistan. According to a report by the Korea World Mission Association,¹⁾ 14,000 members of the Korean protestant missionaries were delegated to more than 170 foreign countries in 2005. Korea is second to the United States in terms of the numbers of Christian missionaries sent abroad and it is said that Korean missionaries serve most actively in the back regions that are hard for missionary work. It was just 120 years ago that Protestantism was transmitted to Korea. Now, however, there is Yoido Full Gospel Church which is the biggest church with 800,000 members, and the biggest Presbyterian church and the biggest Methodist church in the world. Korea seems to be the center of world Protestantism.

Korean Catholic churches have been also growing very rapidly these days. The number of Catholics has increased by no less than 74% during this decade. Catholicism

¹⁾ In fact, this organization has come to be the headquarter of Korean Protestant mission abroad. (<http://kwma.org>)

was transmitted to Korea about 220 years ago and severely persecuted in earlier times. There emerged many martyrs and, strictly speaking, Korean Catholicism was the religion of the oppressed. But Catholicism is no longer a religion of the weak now. The pope visited Korea two times in 1984 and held a holy ceremony to have 103 martyrs canonized as Catholic saints all at once. Korea has become one of the very influential countries in Catholicism where the President was a Catholic and there are two residing cardinals of the Roman Church.

Of course, it is misleading to say that only Christianity achieved rapid growth. Traditional religions are also transforming themselves fast and they are still very influential today. It is Buddhism that takes the main position among traditional religions in contemporary Korea. But it remains limited in its revival of lay Buddhist religious life, ever since it was restricted to the remote mountain temples during the Confucianism-dominated Chosen Dynasty. Moreover, Buddhists had much difficulty in expanding their religious influence because Japanese influenced married monks and celibate monks who succeeded Korean traditional Buddhism had been in a bitter struggle against each other for a long time, even after liberation from the Japanese colonial regime. However, there was a big opportunity for the popularization of Buddhism as Buddhist broadcasting systems became more numerous and 'urban Buddhist missionary centers' emerged starting from 1980s. These days thousands of people participate in early morning Buddhist worship and pray to the Buddha at urban Buddhist missionary centers in larger cities like Seoul and Pusan. Some people bows deeply to the Buddha 1,000 times, even in very cold winter weather, and their faith gives off a strong positive energy to the neighborhood.

On the other hand, very few people identify themselves as Confucians. Nonetheless, large numbers of people return home to visit their ancestral graves or hold Confucian memorial services for ancestors during folk holidays such as the Lunar New Year or the Full Moon Harvest Day. So many people return to their hometowns that traffic is congested throughout the country. Confucianism is still influential in Koreans' daily life. Folk religions like Shamanism and new religions are also considerably more powerful than they appear in national statistics.

For example, Shamanism is often regarded as superstition and ostracized by society. Thus we can find many shamanistic shrines where shamans worship images of General Spirit and Child Spirit placed on both sides of the Buddha and use the Buddhist emblem (卍) as their insignia. In fact, Shamanism still often survives under the guise of Buddhism. Most daily newspapers have sections of fortune tellers' predictions for the day and fate consulting through the telephone or the internet which has become a big business today.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Japanese new religion which is very active in terms of propaganda, identifies itself as reformed Buddhism too. Even the new folk religions, namely *Won* Buddhism and *Suungyo*, derived from Eastern Learning, observe the Buddha's Birthday and try to look like a Buddhist sect. The members of these new religions might be counted as Buddhists in statistics but in fact they are the adherents of new religions. The new religions are larger in terms of the number of their members than what the statistics suggest.

When we visit contemporary Korean new religions like *Daesoonjinrihoe*, currently the representative order of *Jeungsangyo*, we can witness another of their powerful aspects in terms of the physical size of their headquarters and religious activities. In addition, the real 'felt effect' of new religions in Korea is greater when seen from the outside, because they are often reported through the media despite the small number of their members, however it may be cited either in a good or a bad sense.

In short, various religions actively function in the Korean society today and their social dynamics is very well recognized. Naturally, it follows that such strong energy causes change with accompanying ardent enthusiasm. Where does the fervent faith as a cause of such big innovations come from?

Above all, we can find a fundamental clue in the present Korean religious situation. Let us begin with the Population Census released by the Korea National Statistics Office, which is a basic and objective material. The population census has been executed three times every ten years since 1985. The statistics of 'religious population' abstracted from the Census can be acknowledged as the most reliable religious population survey because it is based on a direct data collection and on the

total population, compared with previous statistics released by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism or Gallup that are based on the reports from religious bodies or sample surveys.

Year	1985	1995	2005
Religious population	17,203,296	22,597,824	24,970,766
Total population	40,419,652	44,553,710	47,041,434
Percentage	42.6%	50.7%	53.1%

Table 1. Religious population in Korea (by Korea National Statistics Office)

According to Table 1, religious population consists of more than half of the total population in present Korea. And they are quite rapidly (31.4% during 10 years from 1985, 10.5% during 10 years from 1995) increasing every 10 year. There is another big distinction from other East Asian countries like China and Japan, when we consider the distribution of Korean religious population.

Buddhism	10,726,463	(43.0%)
Protestantism	8,616,438	(34.5%)
Catholicism	5,146,147	(20.6%)
<i>Won</i> Buddhism	129,907	(0.5%)
Confucianism	104,575	(0.4%)
<i>Cheondogyo</i>	45,835	(0.2%)
<i>Jeungsangyo</i>	34,550	(0.1%)
<i>Daejonggyo</i>	3,766	(%)
Etc.	163,085	(0.6%)
Total	24,970,766	(100%)

Table 2. The Distribution of Korean religious population

('Population Census' by Korea National Statistics Office, 2005)²⁾

Above all, Table 2 shows us the fact that there are various religions in Korea today. It is a multi-religious society where many religions coexist. However, such a religious diversity can be similarly experienced in China and Japan. What is really significant in the religious situation of contemporary Korea is that there are not only various traditional Eastern religions but also Western Christianity which is of considerable importance and consists of a multi-religious phenomenon. The total Christian population of the Protestants and Catholics has been a little larger than the Buddhist population since 1985, when the 'Population Census' began. And such a tendency continues to expand from then onwards.

In other words, the most outstanding characteristics of the religious situation in contemporary Korea can be said to be the following: First, the religious population is large and is currently increasing rapidly. Second, in a situation of a multi-religious coexistence no particular religion takes precedence over another, but Western religions are challenging and gradually overwhelming Eastern religions.

In this paper I argue that these two features are closely related to each other. That is, compared with other countries, in Korea religions are growing rapidly and with unusual enthusiasm and this has emerged from the unprecedented inter-religious clash that developed between Eastern and Western religions.

²⁾ In addition, the numbers of religious bodies and professionals are as below.

Numbers	Juridical person	Body	Professional
Buddhism	106	22,072	41,362
Protestantism	170	60,785	124,310
Catholicism	1	2,386	13,704
Confucianism	1	730	31,833
<i>Won</i> Buddhism	1	548	11,190
<i>Cheondogyo</i>	1	212	5,670
<i>Daejonggyo</i>	1	109	358
Etc.	44	4,9222	280,685
Total	324	91,833	509,112

Table 3. The Organization of Korean religions
(Ministry of Culture and Tourism, *Report of Cultural Policies*, Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2006)

In order to examine this clash hypothesis from a comparative perspective, I have analyzed new religious movements namely, Eastern Learning (*Tonghak*), *Jeungsangyo* and the Unification Church and phenomenon of the Pentecostal Protestantism focusing on Yoido Full Gospel Church. These can be said to be the dominant religions in Korean religious innovation of modern times.

2. Inter-religious Clash between the East and the West

The development of Korean religious history is quite separate from secular and political history of the dynasties. 'The Age of native belief systems' in mainly shamanistic patterns was the prototype of the Korean religion. Then new ages of religions emerged through the two climactic clashes: The first originated when Eastern religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were introduced with the influx of Chinese character culture in about the 1st century B.C. and this opened into 'the Age of traditional religions' after being transformed through a clash with native belief systems. The second is derived from the event when Western Christianity was introduced with the influx of Western culture in the 19th century and brought about 'the Age of multi-religions,' clashing with all the existing traditional religions and competing with them. There was another very fundamental transformation in the 2,000 year long historical configuration of traditional religions in the latter half of the 19th century once again. This challenged the spiritual matrix that was formed after the Eastern religions along with Chinese culture came and clashed with the Korean native belief systems mainly related to Shamanism.

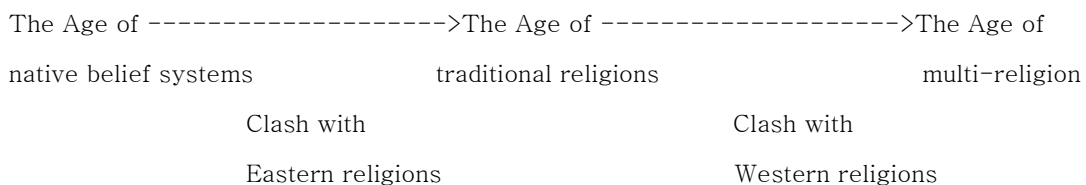


Figure 1. Flow of Korean religious history

That is, Korean religion has overthrown from its prototypical phase autochthonism and Eastern provincialism one after another through clashes with Eastern religions and

Western religions bringing about innovations. Then, it has become globalized in a cross-cultural dimension that included both religions of the East and the West. It might be said that religions of the East and the West have continued to establish a condition for sparking clashes on the foundation of autochthonous religions in the Korean society. It is the very inter-religious clash between the East and the West that makes Korea one of the most dynamic countries in a religious sense today.

It does not mean a simple clash of religions that a newly introduced religion collides with existing religions. Rather, it involves the clash of world views related to those religions and as a result the people cannot insist on their previous absolute belief systems in their everyday life once their world views have changed. This causes a shakedown of norms and symbolism itself as the fundamental plausibility structures become confused and precarious. It is natural that in such a society instability increase. Existing religions continue to be challenged by newly introduced religions and no religion can keep still in such situation of competition. Many people will be converted to newly introduced religions and even the unconverted have to do something in order to defend themselves. This means the increase of mobility in diverse dimensions at all levels of the society as well as the mobility of religions themselves. More religious communities will experience the sacred through a greater variety of belief systems and rituals and as a result such experiences create richer sources of power to make the whole society more dynamic.

In particular, the dynamics of the contemporary Korean religion can be said to derive from the influx of Western Christianity and thereby the clash with traditional religions in the latter half of the 19th century. Western religions transmitted with Western culture collided with the previous Korean traditional religions that were in harmony with the native belief systems through 2,000 years of indigenization. The clash provoked the crustal disturbances of Korean religious configuration that resulted in the formation of the multi-religious climate of today.

A Western missionary witnessed how the traditional religions were made up of a harmonious religio-pluralistic and layered culture before Christianity was introduced.

George H. Jones (1867–1919), a Methodist missionary who came to Korea in the early 20th century, noted that,

“(W)hile theoretically the Korean recognizes the separate character of the three cults of Confucianism, Buddhism and Shamanism, practically they lie in his mind as a confused, undigested mass of teaching and belief, hopelessly intermixed and chaotic. He believes in all three. He personally takes his own education from Confucius; he sends his wife to Buddha to pray for offspring, and in the ills of life he willingly pays toll to Shamanite Mu-dang and Pansu. The average Korean is thus a follower of all three systems, in the hope that by their united help he may reach a happy destiny.”³⁾

It was too natural for Koreans themselves to notice the uniqueness that was handed down by tradition. Jones, as a foreigner to Korea, was able to spot the mutually "overlapped" and deeply "interpenetrated" aspects of various Eastern religious traditions in the daily lives of Koreans. Another missionary, Homer B. Hulbert (1863–1949), reported similar findings.

“... in every Korean mind there is a jumble of the whole; that there is no antagonism between the different cults, no matter how they may logically refute each other, but that they have all been shaken down together through the centuries until they form a sort of religious composite, from which each man selects his favorite ingredients without ever ignoring the rest... As a general thing, we may say that the all-round Korean will be a Confucianist when in society, a Buddhist when he philosophizes and a spirit-worshipper when he is in trouble... the underlying religion of the Korean, the foundation upon which all else is mere superstructure, is his original spirit worship.”⁴⁾

In other words, the native belief systems and the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism transplanted from China got along with each other, assigning a

³⁾ Jones, G. H., "The Spirit Worship of Koreans," *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1901): 39.

⁴⁾ Hulbert, H. B., *The Passing of Korea*, Seoul: Yonsei University, 1969 (Originally, New York, 1906), pp. 403f.

part to everyday Korean life in the 19th century. Such harmony socially established a unified symbolism and maintained a steadfast and very stable religious situation in the Korean society. It was in such quiet circumstances that Western Christianity was transmitted to Korea. It was inevitable that there was a big clash. Koreans of that time suddenly encountered a brand new and unfamiliar style of religion and came to have doubts about the belief systems of their own traditional religions handed down from generation to generation. Precariousness gradually increased more and more, resulting in social instability. It can be said that both traditional religions and new Christianity came to compete with each other and such a competing process expanded the social dynamics with increased mobility. After all, established Confucianism, representative of conservative power, offered strong resistance against the surging Western culture. The government recognized the seriousness of the situation and tried to prohibit Christianity from carrying out its religious activities in vain.

3. The Emergence of New Religions and the Change of Religious Symbolism

The second choice, in the situation where a clash is unavoidable, is trying to absorb and thereby embrace even a part of the shock. It is in this very context that new styles of religions were formed in the Korean society in the 19th century. The first one is Eastern Learning of Suun Choe Che-u (1824-1864) which has become the first autogenous new religion. We can take a look at its core from Choe Che-u's following visionary experience.

One day in April, my mind was unexpectedly cold and my body trembling. Nevertheless, it was hard to express my symptoms. Right at that time, I heard a mysterious voice, which astonished me, and I asked (who he was). The voice said, 'Fear not. People call me *Sangje* (God); Do you not know me?' I asked him why (he manifested himself to me). He said, 'I only send you to this world to teach the principle. Do not doubt.' Then I asked, 'Shall I teach people with the Western Way?' He said, 'No, I have a *yeongbu* (spiritual talisman), the name of which is *Seonyak* (mysterious medicine), and it is shaped like the *Taegeuk* (a Chinese symbol of the ultimate reality including the yin-yang symbol) or the *Kunggung* (an ambivalent, curved, bow-like symbolic figure). Save

people from their disease with this spiritual talisman and teach them to be like me through the *chumun* (formula). Then you will also live long, spreading virtue to the whole world.⁵⁾

Basically, this famous confession of Choe Che-u's spiritual experience reminds us of the stage of possession in Korean shamanism. The curing motives by means of the formula may be fundamentally identified with those of folk shamanistic tradition. The terms, *yeongbu* and *Seonyak* have been used by Taoists, and *Sangje*, *Taegeuk* and *Kunggung* are often found in Confucian texts which include the tradition of *I Ching* (*Book of Change*). Nevertheless, the total structure of this experience may, in a sense, be compared with that of the Christian apostle Paul, when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

In fact, there had been no Koreans who experienced God in such first hand way during the last 2,000 years when the age of traditional religions continued. No one could have such unique charisma to dare to start a monotheistic religion based on the new concept of a personal God. In this sense, the occurrence of Eastern Learning can be said to be definitely notable and significant in the history of Korean religions. Both traditional religions and transmitted Christianity clashed with each other and created a new religion. Thus, Eastern Learning recruited a lot of members in a short time from its outset at a rate incomparable with other religions. *Cheondogyo*, the main order from Eastern Learning, is still considerably influential even in North Korea as well as in South Korea. However, it might be said that Eastern Learning did not try enough to assimilate 'Western Learning,' as suggested by its name (although it was influenced). That is, Choe Che-u created a new religion but still 'served God (*si Cheonju*).'⁶⁾ Accordingly, he did not regard himself as God (*Sangje*) but assimilated the concept of

⁵⁾ "Podeongmun," *Cheondogyo Kyungjeon* (*Cheondogyo* Scriptures).

⁶⁾ This tendency continues in a similar framework with the second leader, Choe Si-hyung's teaching of 'Cultivating God (*yang Cheonju*),' and the third leader, Son Byung-hi's teaching of 'Man is God (*in nae Cheon*).'

the Christian God into the Korean traditional belief of God, maintaining the way of inner cultivation which is a form of Eastern technique of self-reflection.⁷⁾

In this context, it is interesting to examine *Jeungsan* Gang Il-sun's (1871-1909) Jeusangyo which is another new religion rapidly growing even today. We can find Gang Il-sun's unique position toward Western religions that is distinct from Eastern Learning in the following.

One day *Sangje* [Gang Il-sun] said to Kim Hyeong-ryeol, 'Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇), a Westerner, came to the East and tried to establish an earthly paradise. But he failed, because he could not reform the long rooted evil customs easily. Nevertheless, he opened the boundary of the heavenly world and the nether world to let deities come and go beyond their own areas that were kept from trespassing. After death, he also took the Eastern god of civilization to the West and spread enlightenment there. Then gods of the nether world followed the examples of all the heavenly excellent methods and gave them to man's world. All the Western civilization is the imitation of the heavenly matrix.' And he continued to say, 'Too biased for material, the [Western] civilization increased mankind's arrogance and committed sins incessantly and defiled the authority of the divine ways, confusing the heavenly principles and trying to conquer Nature. Thus, the heavenly way and the ordinary way of man's affairs were violated and the sources of the true way were destroyed in confused threefold worlds. As all the primordial gods, buddhas and bodhisattvas gathered and petitioned this cosmic misfortunes to the Ninth Heaven, I descended to the Heavenly Revelation Tower (天啓塔) of great France in the West and traveling around the world (大巡), settled down here, the Eastern Land (東土). Then, spending 30 years in the golden Maitreya Buddha of the Three Story Tower in the *Geumsan* Temple of Mt. *Moak*, I revealed the Way of Salvation and the true meaning of the Greater Way to Choe Che-u but he did not go beyond the Confucian canonical literature. Therefore, I at last came into man's world in 1871, quitting the mandate of heaven and gods' teachings in 1864.⁸⁾

⁷⁾ In this sense, some foreign scholars considered Eastern Learning as 'a religion in a transitional period,' which occurred in the process of traditional religions accepting elements of Western religion. Clark, C. A., *Religions of Old Korea*, New York: Fleming H. Revell, (1929) 1932, pp. 166, 169-170.

⁸⁾ There have been various canons related to *Jeungsangyo*. I have refer to *Jeon gyeong* published by *Daesoonjinrihoe*, currently the largest and representative order of *Jeungsangyo*. "Gyoun" 1.9 *Jeon gyeong*.

This part of *Jeon gyeong*, explaining Gang Il-sun's emergence, is also based on the shamanistic elements evident in the reference to various gods. The inheritances from the Eastern religions is outstandingly manifested in Confucian elements like *Sangje*, the heavenly way, the mandate of heaven and Buddhist aspects like buddhas, bodhisattvas and temple. Nevertheless, Gang Il-sun kept in mind the challenge of the Western Christian culture introduced at that time, in his inferences to the heavenly matrix and the Heavenly Revelation Tower of France with Matteo Ricci's abrupt appearance. It can be understood as an attempt to daringly accommodate the clash with Western Christianity and furthermore to assimilate it. It is interesting that Gang Il-sun indicates Choe Che-u's limit. In short, Gang Il-sun seems to have understood that Choe Che-u himself did not become God, because Choe Che-u could not depart from the Confucian framework. Accordingly, Gang Il-sun's 'human manifestation' meant that he would demonstrate the characteristic points of the Western religions represented by Christian God incarnated in Jesus more thoroughly than Choe Che-u.

Such an accomplishment of the transcendent concept 'to become God' in which man himself possesses divine charisma, as conceived by Gang Il-sun, was the first of its kind in history of Korean religions.⁹⁾ It can be said that this implied a big innovation in Korean religious symbolism. The new symbolic change through a clash between Eastern religions and Western religions led to a strong dynamics. Diverse religious orders derived from *Jeungsangyo* and now *Daesoonjinrihoe* is the largest one of them, putting very powerful missionary activities into practice. Thus, *Daesoonjinrihoe* often comes into conflict with Protestantism from place to place in Korea. However, such a clash

⁹⁾ Of course, there were some heros who would like to identify themselves as "maitreya," but they were just confined to the Eastern concept to become a Buddha in a Buddhist context. They were sharply distinguished from man's transformation into the Ultimate Being, covering all the contexts of the Western religions as well as the Eastern religions. On the other hand, the members of *Jeungsangyo* believe that 'God manifested in man's image' rather than 'man was transformed into the God' in terms of Gang Il-sun's divinity based on the canons. In reality, such a belief shares the Christian concept of Incarnation.

provides a momentum for self-strengthening while also inviting an effort to include elements of rival.

What the existing religions can do first when a strange religion encroaches into a society is to reject it, as the Korean traditional religions like Confucianism did in the early stages. But once the inter-religious clash is inevitable, the existing religions try to lessen the shock and to create themselves anew by accommodating the alien elements. This might be said to be the tendency of Korean new folk religions, such as Eastern Learning and *Jeungsangyo*.

On the other hand, there are occasions when the alien aspects are not accommodated. At times, Western Christianity while colliding with Eastern traditional religions in the Korean society, continues to be an extremely foreign and strong religion. It is natural that the inter-religious clashes cause greater social instability and increase the dynamics to a maximum degree, when a newly introduced religion cannot be assimilated and it overwhelms the existing religions.

We can say that Christian-originated new religions, emerging after the latter half of the 20th century in Korea, show signs of inadaptability. For example, new religions, such as Elder Park Tae-seon's (1917-1990) 'Olive Tree Movement' and Rev. Moon Sun-myung's (1920-) 'Unification Church,' were very different from the previous Eastern Learning and *Jeungsangyo*. While the latter tried to include Western Christianity on the foundation of traditional religions, the former by contrast added interpretations of traditional religions like shamanistic rituals of healing and Confucian thoughts of yin-yang to the main ideas of Western Christianity. For instance, let us see the Unification Church case in the following.

How can we know the divine nature of the invisible God? One way to fathom His deity is by observing the universe which He created. Thus, St. Paul said: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:20)"... Let us begin by pointing out the common elements which are found universally throughout the natural world. Every entity possesses dual characteristics of yang (masculinity) and yin (femininity) and comes into existence

only when these characteristics have formed reciprocal relationships, both within the entity and between it and other entities.¹⁰⁾

This is the first part of the *Divine Principle* which is the most important canon of the Unification church. In order to know the divine nature of God, we should follow St. Paul's example but we can explain what is known about God through Eastern symbolism of yin and yang. Accepting the position of stronger Christianity after the clash with Western religion, the Unification Church still needs the legacy of the traditional religions in terms of its ability to accommodate. It is thought to be that the Unification Church became a strong and charismatic religion as a result of such exquisite assimilation of the Korean traditional religions rather than the simple accommodation of Western Christianity. That is, the Unification Church advanced into the United States and appealed to the American young people after the Vietnam War. This happened because the Unification Church was not a pure Christian sect but a Christian(?) group reinterpreted from an Eastern perspective.

In addition to these, many Christian-originated new religions have appeared. Most of them accepted Christianity but continued to maintain some elements of Korean traditional religions. In fact, these Christian-originated new religions are mostly Christian sects in terms of their belief and practices, although they are regarded as 'new religions' in that they socially promote public criticism or sharply differ from mainline Christianity. According to the sociological church-sect theory, sects are oriented to the mainline religions while cults (new religions) are thought to be alien, though they are similar in that both are socially rejected. Such distinction between cult and sect has become very ambiguous these days. For example, the Unification Church seems to be a Christian sect from the standpoint of the traditional religions while at the same time it looks like a cult from the viewpoint of mainline Christianity.

4. Korean Protestantism and Religious Fervor

¹⁰⁾ *Divine Principle*, 1.1.1.1

Sometimes, there are cases where traditional religions can not defend themselves, because the rival religion is too strong and too aggressive in a clash. When traditional religions were overwhelmed by a new rival, the challenge is more seriously felt than that experienced by the Christian-originated new religions and thus the members of the traditional religions could not help being converted to Christianity. As we saw in the 'Population Census' mentioned above, Western Christianity has been introduced from the outside and has overwhelmed Eastern traditional religions in contemporary Korea since the 1980s. However, it is significant to note that Christian churches, stuck to the purely Western prototype, are not expanding much in Korea today. In other words, Christian churches following only the Western styles of cold theology and practice without any clash with Eastern traditional religions have not particularly appealed to Koreans and they are not dynamic either. It can be said that almost all Korean Christian churches characterized by an intense fervor of faith today have included elements of the traditional religions in their own way through clashes with these religions.

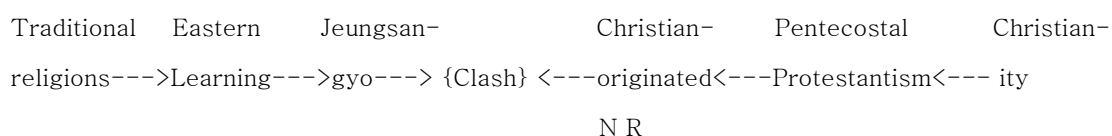


Figure 2. East-West Inter-religious Clash in contemporary Korea

As mentioned above, most Korean churches demonstrate more enthusiastic faith than those of any other country in the world. It might be inferred that Korean Christianity is characterized by elements derived from traditional religious phenomena, compared with that of other countries. For example, the famous Korean 'Dawn Prayer Meeting' is said to have originated from Rev. Gil Seon-ju's (a leader of the early Korean Protestantism) practices of Taoist meditation early in the morning before his conversion to Christianity. 'Public Scripture Reading Ritual,' where the Bible is loudly read in gatherings, reminds us of such old Confucian and Buddhist customs of reading canons. '*Simbang* (visit),' which means to visit members' families, is not very new when we remember that shamans went to his/her members' home and read canons or performed rituals.

However, the denomination known to possess the strongest fervor in Korean Christianity today is definitely Pentecostal Protestantism. Of course, the growth of Pentecostal Protestantism focusing on emotional experiences instead of theoretical theology is also universal in many countries like the United States. But 12 of the 15 mega churches in Korea of which the members number more than 10,000 exhibit Pentecostal features.¹¹⁾ Thus, some even claim the 'Pentecostalization of all the churches' in Korea. The current representative of the Korean Pentecostal churches is certainly Rev. David Yonggi Cho's (1936-) Yoido Full Gospel Church which is famous for having the greatest number of members in the world as well as in Korea. And what is particularly important about the Yoido Full Gospel Church is its ability to create its own dynamic power. The church was not simply a result of transplanting from the Western Pentecostal church but was a product of heterogeneity through a clash with traditional religions in Korea. What on earth is the secret of the Yoido Full Gospel Church?

The core of Rev. Cho's faith is the so called 'Threefold Salvation' based on the Bible ("Beloved, I pray that you may *prosper in all things* and *be in health*, just as your *soul prospers*." 3 John 2). It refers to the three kinds of salvation: 'soul's comfort,' 'prosperity in all things' and 'sturdiness,' meaning the threefold blessings of 'salvation for the soul,' 'material prosperity' and 'physical health.'¹²⁾ Rev. Cho emphasizes 'the Baptism of the Holy Spirit' as the sign of the threefold salvation and regards 'speaking in tongues' as the first concrete evidence. Cho's preaching is very 'simple,' 'repetitive' and 'problem-solving,' intentionally excluding theological logic and ethical value judgments that other Christian churches have emphasized. Daringly speaking of

¹¹⁾ Hong, Young Gi, "Encounter with Modernity: The McDonaldization and the Chrismatization of Korean Mega-churches," *International Review of Mission*, 365 (2003): 239-240. In addition, the influence of the Pentecostal Protestantism is much greater than what we have seen, including Neo-Pentecostalism emphasizing exorcism, spiritual healing and this-worldly richness as well as traditional Pentecostalism centering on speaking in tongues, practices of piety, Jesus' second coming and eternal salvation.

¹²⁾ Cho, Yonggi, *Fivefold Gospel and Threefold Blessing*, Seoul: Yeongsin Publishing Co., 1983.

theology, we can say that Cho's is 'answer theology,' namely praying for this-worldly and not other-worldly blessings by imploring God.

His worship service is beyond a fixed pattern and looks like a festival, emphasizing the praying for blessings collectively more than the themes of the preaching itself. It is said to be pouring burning passion into Christianity which gradually has become cold and intellectual. Many members say that they experienced a kind of 'catharsis,' brought on by 'simultaneous praying out loud' followed by speaking in tongues. In the meantime, charismatic healing is declared at the climax of the worship. This is the exorcism of evil spirits and ghosts in the power of God. It is definitely a church belonging to Protestantism. However, in reality it is a magical phenomenon in the tradition of Korean shamanistic ritual [*gut*] that beseeches gods for healing and fortunes. It is the soothing of angry evil spirits and ghosts or exorcising them through resolving grudges [*han puri*]. It is ingeniously reinterpreted in a Christian framework that a shaman possessed with spirits is thrown into ecstasy and expels evil spirits. Thus, some scholars even call Rev. Cho 'a Christian shaman.'¹³⁾ Nevertheless, Rev. Cho himself preaches against Shamanism, but he has paradoxically Christianized the elements of the shamanistic world view and ritual practices skillfully in the name of Jesus, criticizing Shamanism.¹⁴⁾

Despite the tactful achievement, this Christianization of the traditional religious elements does not mean the end of inter-religious clash between East and West. The clash still continues at present. A shaman who goes and prays all-night at *Mt. Samgak* near Seoul says that she is more afraid of fanatic Protestants (regarding shamans as satan or evil spirits and committing violence on shamans) than spirits and ghosts. There are also Protestants who cut off the heads of traditional Korean 'totem' poles (*Jangseung*), which have long been the symbols of tutelary deities of towns according to folk beliefs. There has been fighting between new folk religions supporting the

¹³⁾ Elliot, Charles, *Sword & Spirit*, London: BBC Books and Marshall Pickering, 1989, p. 32, Yoo, Boo Woong, "Response to Korean Shamanism by the Pentecostal Church," *International Review of Mission*, 297 (1986): 74.

¹⁴⁾ Cox, Harvey, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in Twenty-First Century*, Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1995, p. 222.

sanctuary construction of the legendary founder of Korea, *Tan'gun*, and Protestant groups objecting to it. There have also been cases of fanatical Protestants damaging statues of the Buddha with axes or drawing the sign of the cross on their foreheads. It is natural that there have been repercussions. During these clashes, both religions have to put up their strength to fight such battles. Conflicts produce energy and at that moment passionate fervor spring up.

5. Inter-religious Clash and the Prospect of Korean Religion

So far, we have examined the flow of religious change occurring in Korean society since modern times, focusing on the root of the religious dynamics of today. As a result, the conclusions of my examination are:

1. Inter-religious clash often produces competitive situations making existing belief systems and symbolism precarious and this, in turn, causes social instability. Such situations create dynamic religious energy.
2. The more alien and larger the religions clash, the greater its resulting impact. In the case that existing religions are overwhelmed, the clash will have more transformative potential.

In this context, it might be said that Korea, hidden away as a country of "morning calm," has changed into a country of religious fervor from its clashes against Western religions since the beginning of the modern period. In particular, Koreans have come to experience a strong religious innovation unprecedented in any other country, facing the clash of traditional religions with the completely alien and powerful Western Christianity.

Of course, it is another problem whether such a religious fervor can be indeed explained enough just by inter-religious clashes. For example, the above mentioned emergence of Eastern Learning cannot be said only to result from a change of religious symbolism. It does not explain why it began to occur particularly in Kyeongsang (southeastern part of Korea) province in the latter half of the 19th century. By contrast, it is

also hard to say that only other social factors caused the appearance of Eastern Learning. It cannot be explained why it should become Eastern Learning, not any other religion such as reformed Buddhism, transformed Confucianism or even indigenized Christianity. Probably, it might be said that it depended on how the mysterious 'elective affinity' worked between the religious fervor from the clashes and its 'social carrier' (from the standpoint of a Weberian framework).

Now, how will Korean religions change in the future with the continuing inter-religious clashes of Eastern religions and Western religions? Will Christianity more gradually overwhelm the traditional religions and enjoy precedence over them? In Figure 2, we have seen the location of the new charismatic religious modes emerging from the inter-religious clashes of the East and the West on a line like a spectrum with traditional religions and Christianity on opposite ends. As time passes, traditional religions are becoming more deeply 'Christianized.' However, such Christianization can oppositely be referred to as a Korean indigenization of Christianity.

It is no exaggeration to say that the history of Korean religions has been characterized by continual clashes with foreign religions. In the future, will there be more clashes with foreign religions? Who will know? A significant clash with the Islamic tradition may occur, caused by Korean business enterprises venturing further into the Near Eastern countries in the close future?

Nonetheless, the original Korean religious mind is not thought to have been completely disintegrated or critically changed in quality in an irrecoverable degree through clashes with any religion of Siberian Shamanism or the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and even Christianity. Rather, the primordial Korean religious mind has been only contained in new bowls of religions and sublimated in them through encounters with them. In this context, Korean religions in the future are also expected to enjoy a chance of new dynamics, inviting their stimulating curiosity as long as the alien religions challenge them.