

# Confucian-Christian Dialogue Revisited( I )

— A Contemporary Korean and Comparative Inquiry —\*

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This paper examines "Confucian-Christian dialogue," one of the significant topics in the advancing area of comparative religion and interreligious dialogue. Its dual purpose is to raise certain questions about Western scholarship on the topic and my own comparative reflections on the phenomenon of Confucian-Christian interaction in Korea and its crosscultural implications for interreligious dialogue. One major reason for my interest in this topic is that Confucianism continues to remain a living tradition of moral-spiritual, educational and social inspiration in East Asian. Confucianism has also been interacting with Christianity in Korea; therefore, modern

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\* 본 논문에 게재되지 않은 후반부는 다음호(종교와 문화 제5집)에 게재될 예정임.

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Confucianism in East Asia is not only significant in itself, but also embodies certain implications for the growing topic of interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, during the past several decades, Christianity grew into an influential and popular religion especially in South Korea. We also cannot ignore the central role of Vatican II and the World Council of Churches in making the issue of “ecumenical movement” and “interfaith dialogue” a globally legitimate one. In other words, all of these facts compel us to consider Confucianism in contemporary Korea as a significant paradigm for interreligious dialogue in the twenty-first century.

My approach to this topic is bilateral and hermeneutical. In the first section of the paper, I critically examine some of the major theoretical and methodological issues debated in the Western scholarship on the topic. This can help us to see if there is enough justification for the basic goal of the dialogue. I shall argue that there are certain limits of the current models of Confucian-Christian dialogue especially in dealing with the practical and experiential dimensions of the dialogue. Moreover, these models do not seem to address the practical and experiential dimensions of the dialogue that are evident in Confucian-Christian interaction among contemporary East Asians. The second section will support these two arguments by presenting 1) certain paradigms of Confucian-Christian interaction among Korean Christians; 2) my own crosscultural reflections; and 3) their apparent implication for the current Western scholarship on interreligious dialogue as well as on Confucian-Christian dialogue.

The paper concludes by considering relevant questions and issues. For example, How does the Korean paradigm of Confucian-Christian interaction relate to Confucian-Christian dialogue? What can Christian circles in the West learn from it? What about the current issue of “Confucian identity” and “Confucian religiosity”? Do these questions have any direct or indirect effect on the pedagogy and

methodology of religious studies and comparative religion/ theology?

## I. Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Confucian-Christian Dialogue

In general, the comparative study of Confucianism <sup>1)</sup>has contributed to articulating fundamental similarities and differences between the two traditions as well as their theoretical significance for Confucian-Christian dialogue. But we have yet to understand the practical-experiential dimension of the dialogue and its implications for comparative religion as a whole.

The main focus of this section is not particularly to search out logical flaws in the current Western scholarship on Confucian-Christian dialogue,<sup>2)</sup> but rather to present my reflections on the basic assumptions and related matters of the current methodological models of the dialogue. We need to ask some critical questions regarding whether the current models of Confucian-Christian dialogue warrant any clear conclusions, especially concerning the basic practical elements of Confucian-Christian interaction among Koreans and other East Asians. Part of my interest is the ongoing challenge to comparativist accounts of religious truth claims, which are informed in my case by a crosscultural understanding of religion and culture.

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1) This is done from various perspectives of philosophy, religion, and theology. The current literature on Chinese Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism includes Ching 1976 and 1986; Tu Wei-ming 1989 and 1985; de Bary, 1991, 1989, and 1991; and others. For the Korean tradition, see Chung 1995, Kalton 1988, and Ro 1989.

2) The relevant literature on this topic includes the following works: Berthrong, 1994; Julia Ching 1976; Küng and Ching 1989; Kim Heup Young 1996; Peter K.H. Lee 1992; Oh 1993; etc. For Korean sources on Confucian-Christian dialogue, see Yun Sng-bm 1975; Kim Ha-t'ai 1985; etc.

In the epilogue to *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, Hans Küng, a leading scholar in ecumenical theology, correctly asserted that “dual religious citizenship” is a challenging question for any serious interreligious dialogue dealing with “the truth of every religion” (1989:273). Partly as a result of his dialogue with Julia Ching, a leading scholar in Confucian studies and comparative religion, Küng also made an insightful point that it is possible for a Chinese (or another East Asian, I add) to remain “entirely Christian” and “entirely Confucian” in both ethical and cultural contexts at the same time, provided that “this does not contradict the fundamental Christian ethos of the gospel” (276-77; emphasis added). Any East Asian person may take “the concerns, conceptions, and practices of other religions seriously (to the extent that they do not contradict his or her Christian faith)” (279). In this regard, Küng calls him/her an “ecumenical Christian.” Küng’s conclusion is: “Christian inculturation, not dual religious citizenship, must be the watchword!” and “What is at issue is the inculturation of the spirit of Jesus Christ for the whole of humanity” (282; Küng’s emphasis).

In general, Küng’s model for Confucian-Christian dialogue is based on his comparative understanding of Confucius and the historical Jesus, and its theological position is certainly not an exclusivist or evangelical one, as far as Küng is committed to ecumenical theology and interreligious dialogue. In particular, he is open to not just the moral-spiritual commonality of the two traditions but also the possibility that Confucians can be Christians at the same time. However, there is some problem with this model for the dialogue. First, Küng argues that it is impossible for a faithful Christian to be a religious Confucian at the same time, even if Confucian culture and ethics can be compatible with Christianity. As a theologian and ecumenical scholar, he insists that “dual citizenship in faith” must be avoided. In my view, Korean and other Asian Confucians might

disagree with K ng. From the Confucian side of the dialogue, one can point out that a Confucian will take Christianity seriously to the extent that "the concerns, conceptions, and practices" of Christian faith do not contradict his/her Confucian values and culture. K ng's ultimate position makes the Christian side of the dialogue normative, especially in the context of emphasizing a Christocentric model for the dialogue. In other words, this problem comes from his persistent conviction that Christ ought to be the universal norm for all other religious traditions including Confucianism.

In his major work on religious pluralism and Confucian-Christian dialogue, Berthrong (1994) urged a dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity on the basis of "dual transcendence" (or God-world relations). He acknowledges that this model was influenced by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne in the form of what is now called process thought. In regard to the growing world of religious diversity and interaction, the notion dual transcendence is said to be meaningful because of the fact that the idea, experience, or expression of transcendence is expressed in according to various languages, religions, worldviews, spiritual practices, values, and so on.<sup>3)</sup> This model of the dialogue is also based on the ongoing issue of "dual religious citizenship" and "multiple participation." The theological task for addressing the question of dual transcendence, according to Berthrong, should be "committed to a pluralistic vision of reality," so as to handle "the

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3) As we know, this variety includes the following major well-known examples: "God" (with different names, meanings and symbols for Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other theistic Western and Eastern believers); Hindu Moksha; Buddhist Nirvana, Dharma, and Enlightenment; Daoist/Confucian Dao and sagehood; Daoist wu-wei (Non-action); and Confucian Lord-on-High (shang-ti), Heaven (t'ien) or Heaven's Mandate (t'ien-ming). Moreover, all of these examples are more or less concerned with the world of immanence involving various conditions of humanity, rationality, and society.

question of multiple participation as manifested in dialogue between Confucians and Christians" (1994:24). Berthrong (1994:126) therefore proposes a dialogue between process theology and the "New Confucianism" of contemporary Confucian scholars such as Mou Tsung-san, Tu Wei-ming, and others. As he stated, "the process theology movement allows for a Christian appreciation of the Confucian insistence on the unity of transcendence and immanence" (1994:47; emphasis added).

Berthrong's model for Confucian-Christian dialogue can help us to overcome the exclusivist and one-sided interpretations of the conventional Christian theological notion of God or transcendence. It is a possible way to debate the bilateral issue of transcendence and immanence in the Confucian-Christian dialogue. However, on the practical level of religious participation and experience, To what extent can ordinary Korean Confucian Christians, for example, understand or assimilate Berthrong's sophisticated philosophical/theological model for the dialogue? In my own view, it does not seem to pertain closely to the concrete paradigms of Confucian-Christian interaction in Korea that will be presented in the next section.

In an article on Confucian-Christian dialogue, Kang-nam Oh pointed out that a dialogue centering on the Confucian ideal of *sng* (sagehood) and the Christian experience of *metanoia* (conversion/repentance) would be a "productive" one (1993:315-16). For him, the essence of Korean Confucianism is the concept of *snghak* or sage learning. Utilizing William T. de Bary's interpretation of Neo-Confucianism as well as Hans Küng's theology of Jesus,<sup>4)</sup> Oh understandably concluded that Confucian sagehood and Christian *metanoia* provide "a workable paradigm" for the dialogue of "meaningful and mutual transformation" (313). In other words, the

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4) This Greek term literally means the "change of mind."

Christian way of metanoia can accommodate the moral-spiritual Confucian ideal of sagehood.

This model for the dialogue is also a possible one, because it rightly emphasizes what seems to be the moral-spiritual core of the two traditions, relating to the Confucian way of sagehood and the Christian way of metanoia. However, as we will see further in the following sections, it is textually and theoretically oriented and therefore does not do enough justice to what I see as the practical-experiential paradigms of Confucian-Christian interaction among contemporary East Asian Christians of Confucian background and values. For example, except Confucian scholars, ordinary Koreans, inside and outside Korea, do not necessarily pay much attention to the classical texts and discourses on the Confucian and Neo-Confucian learning of sagehood.

Kim Heup Young, in his systematic theological study of Confucian-Christian dialogue (1996), articulated the comparative topic of self-realization in developing what he calls a "genuine" model of the dialogue. Focusing on Wang Yang-ming's Neo-Confucian philosophy of self-cultivation and Karl Barth's theology of sanctification, it utilizes especially Tu We-ming's interpretation of the Confucian way of self-cultivation as well as the broader context of Barth's theology of dogmatics and ethics. Kim compared Wang's key teaching of *liang-chih* (the innate knowledge or primordial awareness) and *pen-t'i* (the original mind-heart) with the Calvinist-Barthian theology of sanctification. In his view, the realization of true humanity is manifested in the historical Jesus (for Barth) and in the Confucian *liang-chih* (as viewed by Wang), and Wang's "confuciology of self-cultivation" and Barth's "theology of sanctification" embody a definite point of convergence. Kim's main conclusions are: 1) "learning to be (fully) human" is a starting question for mutual Confucian-Christian dialogue; 2) Korean

Reformed Churches may be a significant locus for this dialogue; and 3) this point of convergence should be the basis for “a Christian theology of Confucianism.”

On the whole, Kim's study can help comparative religionists and theologians to see that the topic of humanity and self-cultivation is an appropriate issue for Confucian-Christian dialogue. Like Berthrong's model, it effectively avoids the evangelical and one-sided dimensions of Christian theology, emphasizing the bilateral topic of self-cultivation. However, there are some critical questions about Kim's methodological basis of systematic theology and its philosophical assumptions for the dialogue. For example, how well does his study represent the commonality of Confucianism and Christianity. Specifically, to what extent does Barthian theology justify pan-Christian faith and life, and Wang's Neo-Confucianism represent classical Confucianism and contemporary Confucianism? How do we explain the conflict, compatibility, or synthesis between Christian “theism” and Confucian “humanism”? What about rituals and values, both of which pertain to Confucian self-cultivation and Christian sanctification? Although Kim's study proposes a possible systematic-philosophical model, it does not do enough justice to the perspectives of ordinary Korean Confucians, Christians, and Confucian-Christians. What does he mean by “a Christian theology of Confucianism”? Is it a Confucian theology? If so, does this mean that the dialogue requires some theoretical “syncretism” of the two traditions?

As a scholar of comparative religion and a practising Confucian-Christian, I note that part of our basic burden is the issue of how interfaith dialogue should be addressed as objectively and subjectively as possible. In fact, this issue is also due to the fact that the field has developed various principles, forms, levels, and models of the dialogue, as is debated extensively in the current



Western scholarship.<sup>5)</sup> Is the dialogue a real thing for average Confucians, Christians, and Confucian-Christians, or is it merely a wishful ideal imagined by our intellectual curiosity about the comparative study of the two religions? We can talk about the dialogue between East Asian Confucian scholars/intellectuals and Western biblical scholars/theologians/ clergy people. Another example might be the dialogue between an ordinary East Asian Confucian and an average Western Christian or that between a Korean Confucian and a Korean Christian, or even a personal dialogue within an East Asian individual who maintains both traditions. The challenging issue is therefore to formulate the most appropriate paradigm that would be fruitful for the mutually practical purpose of the dialogue.

On the whole, the current scholarship on Confucian-Christian dialogue tends to take the insider/outsider dichotomies for granted, while underestimating or neglecting the practical-experiential paradigms of Confucian-Christian interaction. In the next two

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5) For example, one key question is: Who or What are the dialogical partners? In general, the notion dialogue is said to mean "exchange" of not just religious ideas and belief systems, but also religious practices and experiences. Another relevant issue is, What contexts of the dialogical encounter: theological, philosophical, textual, or ethical-social? It is also said that interreligious dialogue can be done at a number of levels: academic-scholarly, institutional, personal, inner-spiritual, experimental, experiential, etc. There are also the different kinds of "theological dialogue" (e.g., ecumenical, missiological, evangelical, theocentric, christocentric, dialogical, etc.), some of which do not necessarily involve the exchange of religious practice and experience. Furthermore, the current Western scholarship is also sophisticated about various philosophical grounds of dialogue: ontological, existential, phenomenological, hermeneutical, etc. It includes the following works listed in References: Bosch 1991; Braaten 1992; Cobb 1982 and 1984; Driver 1981; Dupuis 1991; Griffin and Huston Smith 1989; Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies 1973; Hick 1989; Hick and Knitter 1987; Jeanrond and Rike 1991; Knitter 1985; Krieger 1991; Lindbeck 1984; Neville 1991a and 1980; Oxtoby 1983; Parrinder 1987; Samartha 1981 and 1991; W.C. Smith 1993, 1981, and 1979; and Tracy 1990 and 1987.

sections, I shall discuss these two points and their related issues on the basis of my comparative analysis of the Korean case of Confucian-Christian interaction and its cross-cultural implications for the Confucian-Christian dialogue.

## II. Patterns of Confucian-Christian Interaction in Korea

Confucianism is a living tradition in Korea as well as in its overseas communities.<sup>6)</sup> It is therefore pertinent to comparative religion as well as Confucian-Christian dialogue. Furthermore, Christianity rapidly grew into a popular and influential religion in South Korea. Unlike China and Japan which share the similar Confucian heritage, this country maintains a strong, dynamic Christian community with many diverse churches and denominations. As Clark (1986) pointed out, Korean Christianity is no longer a foreign import, for it has already transformed itself into an indigenous tradition. However, the historical and cultural encounter between Confucianism and Christianity is not over yet, and certain Korean paradigms of Christian life and their assimilation with Confucian values are significant for Confucian-Christian dialogue.

Confucianism flows with many related, dynamic currents of South Korean society, a religiously pluralistic and competitive country, where Christianity and Buddhism are two dominant religions. Nonetheless, there are certain ambiguity and discrepancy about "Confucian identity" or "religious"(chonggyo-jk in Korean) Confucian

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6) As I discussed elsewhere in terms of continuity, change, and synthesis (Chung 1998c, 1995b, 1996, 1994a, and 1994b), Confucianism in contemporary Korea relate to moral education, family rituals and values, social ethics, Korean identity, organizational structures and activities, and political-economic culture.

identity. For this reason, an ambiguously small portion of the national religious population, ranging from 2.8% to 20.5%, is identified as Confucian in the context of religious identity or membership.<sup>7)</sup> In other words, the average Korean (or East Asian) individual does not necessarily identify himself/herself as a Confucian in the formal religious context. Many Koreans would not see Confucianism as an organized religion like Christianity or Buddhism, mainly because they tend to believe that chonggyo (religion) necessarily includes an established congregation (like Christian church and Buddhist temple), specific membership, organized priesthood, regular religious services. But this does not imply in any sense that Confucianism is extinct or irrelevant in this country.

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7) One source of information is the 1989 national census conducted by Ministry of Education and Culture:

Religion	Followers	Percentage	Sects	Churches
Buddhists	19,000,000	38	23	29,800
Protestants	10,310,000	20.6	87	8,890
Catholics	2,420,000	5	290	
Confucians	10,290,167	20.5		

This census was possible through the survey materials provided by all religious organizations; accordingly, the total religious population in South Korea was 49,000,000 in 1989, but this number significantly exceeds the entire Korean population of 42,000,000 in the same year. In other words, there is obviously the question of objectivity and accuracy, and one can question the way in which public surveys are being conducted. According to another nation-wide population and residence census conducted in 1985, we have the following "religious population" in South Korea (17,200,000 or 42.6% of the whole population):

Religion	Number of Followers	Percentage
Buddhists	8,060,000	46.9
Protestants	6,480,000	37.7
Catholics	1,865,000	10.8
Confucians	483,000	2.8
Wn Buddhism		0.5
Ch'ndogyo		0.2
Others		1.1

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Source: Ingu chut'aek ch'ong chosa, 1985 (Population and Housing census, 1985) (Seoul: National Statistical Office, 1985).

Although Confucianism is a socially diffused and institutionally unorganized tradition, many Christians would share the Confucian values system.<sup>8)</sup> In other words, Confucian-Christian identity is not abstract, but an existential reality of religion and culture.

Nevertheless, one of the critical questions debated so far has been about Confucianism as religion.<sup>9)</sup> As we know, Confucianism is different from other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and even Buddhism; as we know, this is mainly because the Confucian tradition focuses on this-worldly goals, human-centered ideas and values, and culture-oriented methods. In other words, we should not eliminate it from the religious context.<sup>10)</sup> Like other religious traditions, Confucianism embodies a large component of ethico-spiritual teachings and practices; this topic has been a popular area of research in Confucianism and comparative studies.<sup>11)</sup> Moreover, as I discussed elsewhere (Chung 1994a and 1994b), the religious dimension of Confucianism in contemporary Korea indicate some formal categories, and we can also discuss the moral-spiritual

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8) Yun Yee-hum of Seoul National University, in his methodological and sociological studies of contemporary Korean religions (1985 and 1989), rightly criticized the conventional statistical understanding of religious identification and membership in Korea. For him, "self-identified" Korean Christians would be "practical members" of the Confucian community because the statistical Korean surveys based on "self-identification" are not appropriate to measure the reality of Korean and East Asian religions. In other words, many Christians in contemporary Korea would simultaneously be Confucians in a practical moral-social context at the same time.

9) As we know, the English word "religion" itself has several problems of characterization, as recent works in comparative religion have pointed out from various angles. Understandably, the global notion of "religion" carries various meanings and implications which are conditioned by different histories, worldviews, cultures, societies, and languages.

10) The comparative religionist and spiritual practitioner, Huston Smith, asserted that even if we define "religion in a narrower sense, as a concern to align humanity with the transcendental ground of its existence, Confucianism is still a religion, albeit a muted one" (1991:183).

11) See recent Western works cited in notes 1 and 2.

Confucian dimension of Korean identity (Chung 1998c and 1995b).

In contemporary Korea the Confucian-Christian interaction is apparent on the common level of conflict-yet-synthesis in both religious and cultural contexts. In Chosŏn Korea as well, the Christian condemnation of Confucian ancestral rites (*ch'alye* and *chesa*) as "idol worship" was one of the most serious cultural problems, which had hindered the potentially fruitful encounter between the two religions from the 18th century to the early 20th century. But it is no longer viewed as an unresolvable problem in contemporary Korean society. The observance of ancestral rites still remains one of the most compelling issues for many Koreans inside and outside South Korea who endeavour to maintain their Confucian-based family traditions. The significance of family ethics supports the common East Asian notion of ancestry as well. It embodies a kind of ethico-spiritual belief in maintaining family solidarity and continuity.<sup>12)</sup> For the Confucians who have no organized and fixed religious affiliation, it represents a significant element of Confucian morality and religiosity.<sup>13)</sup> The Korean family tradition of ancestral rites is viewed as a symbolic moral-spiritual source of family sanctity and cultural identity. In addition to many "nonbelievers" and Korean Buddhists, many Korean Catholics are committed to it.<sup>14)</sup> In other

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12) I developed these points elsewhere (Chung 1994b and 1995).

13) One central aspect of being "Confucian" raises the issue of family and family rituals. In this regard, the Confucian virtue of filial duty requires proper respect for not only living parents but also dead ancestors. More to the point, the arena of the family still maintains an essential life of its own, with moral and social implications.

14) According to *Chonggyo isik kwa sinang saenghwal* (Religious awareness and spiritual life), a new survey study conducted and published by the Korean Catholic Newspapers, 88 percent of Korean Catholics claim to be engaged in the family tradition of ancestral rites: 54.8% follow the Confucian way (possibly simplified), and 33.2% follow modified Confucian-Catholic rites. The latter case is especially significant and interesting because it shows the Catholic Church's ongoing endeavour to assimilate a number of Confucian ritualistic-moral elements and to legitimize them in

words, Korean Catholics integrate Confucian ancestral rituals and their moral implication with Christian faith and teachings, revealing a general tendency of assimilating the former as part of their cultural heritage. This is certainly a good example of the ethico-religious integration of the two traditions in Korea.

On the other hand, however, Protestant churches and ministers in South Korea, especially the evangelical and conservative ones, often criticize (if not condemn) ancestral rites as a "superstitious" custom or a form of "idol worship" that cannot be tolerated by the central Christian dogmas. Of course, there are average Protestants who remain faithful to what their churches and ministers say only negatively about Confucian ancestral rites, Buddhist rituals and prayers, Taoist-influenced fortune-telling and geomancy, and shamanistic healing rituals in terms of "wicked" acts for "deserving damnation" and "going to hell." This exclusivist and dogmatic criticism of Confucian ancestral rites is a good example that illustrates some conflict between two religions. On the other hand, Confucians and non-Christian Koreans would criticize the Protestant Church for demanding exclusive faith and dogmatic membership and for rejecting other previous religious affiliations/commitments.

In retrospect, the historical encounter between Christianity and Confucianism had occurred since the former was introduced to Chosŏn Korea in the eighteen century. Some of the early Korean Christians endeavoured to understand Christianity from the Confucian standpoint. For example, Yi Pyŏng (1754-1766) accommodated his Christian faith and doctrines into Confucian humanism and its

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the broad Christian context. These elements include white-paper ancestral tablets, portraits of ancestors, a ritual table, burning incense, offering of food and drink, etc., which have to be used together with Christian elements such as the cross, beginning and end prayers, and several scriptural readings. For Korean sources on this topic (written by Catholic priest-scholars), see Kim Chong-su 1994 and Ch'oe Ki-bok 1988 and 1986.

moral-spiritual values. Even during this stage of the encounter, he and other Korean Neo-Confucians) integrated Confucianism and Christianity through the mutual dialogue on personal and interpersonal levels.<sup>15)</sup> Yun Sng-bm (1916-1980), a former pastor of a Korean Methodist church and a comparative theologian, is another noticeable representative of the Confucian-Christian encounter in modern Korea, who made an indispensable contribution to the development of "Korean theology" and Confucian-Christian dialogue. In his *Kidokkyo-wa Han'gk sasang* (Christianity and Korean Thought; 1964), for example, Yun rightly criticized the old claims of Christian superiority and exclusivity, which had been proclaimed by the foreign Protestant missionaries. For him, one major problem of the Korean Protestant Church seems to be the colonial influence of Western Christianity on the theological and ethical confusion of the Korean churches and pastors.<sup>16)</sup> He concluded that Christianity in Korea should grow in the Korean cultural and ethical context. The current scholarship on the Bible and Asian theology presents other kinds of new perspectives in various religious and cultural contexts.<sup>17)</sup>

It is important to note here that Koreans and other East Asians generally see the Confucian heritage as not having any of the

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15) Good Korean sources on Yi Pyk and early Christianity in Korea include Yi Sng-bae (1979) and Kim Ok-hee (1990).

16) Introducing his theology as "a Christian Confucianism," Reverent Yun asserted that "Korean theology must be liberated from the state of being a theological Western colony...a theological Babylonian captivity" (1975:1). We can also recall his *Korean and comparative theology* (1972) to reinterpret Christian dogmas and ethics, especially employing Yi Yulgok's Neo-Confucian philosophy of *sng* (sincerity).

17) The major patterns of "Asian theology" relate to several topics such as liberation theology, Asian women's theology, reinterpretation of the Bible in the non-biblical world, the Bible in religiously pluralistic Asia, and Korean *mingjung* theology. See, for examples, Aloysius Pieris's *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (1995); Jung Young Lee's *The Theology of Change: A Christian Concept in an Eastern Perspective* (1979); Hyun Kyung Chung's *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (1994); and Pu-lan Kwok's *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (1995), etc.

theistic, confessional, and pastoral categories associated with Western religions especially Christianity. In this regard, a key issue of Confucian-Christian interaction (together with Buddhists, other believers, and non-believers) in South Korea centers on the fundamental truth claims of Christianity. As we know, a growing consensus among many comparative religionists and theologians is that, given the currently expanding world of religious diversity and cultural exchange, various Christian institutions and theologians should overcome making absolute or exclusive truth claims and cannot avoid being tolerant to different kinds of religious-spiritual beliefs and practices in any interfaith/interreligious dialogue. For Confucians, transcendence, for example, has generally been expressed in terms of Heaven (ch'n in Korean or t'ien in Chinese) or Heaven's Mandate/Will (ch'nmyng; t'ien-ming), which is not a personal deity like God worshipped in biblical/prophetic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam. However, this does not mean that Confucians is simply atheistic or not concerned with the divine/transcendent reality at all, because most Confucians are usually open to other forms of religion including theistic beliefs and practices.

What is lacking in Confucianism seems to be personal faith in, and personal devotion to, an absolute, monotheistic being like Judeo-Christian-Islamic God or a human-divine saviour/ redeemer such as Jesus Christ. Here I should note that this lacking element of Confucianism is precisely what has been complemented by Christianity for many decades in Korea and other Confucian societies in East Asia. Nonetheless, we have to be careful about interpreting the whole Confucian notion of transcendence in relation to Christian theism or monotheism. In her comparative study of Confucianism and Christianity (1976:10), Ching correctly pointed in this regard that Confucian optimism is "a faith in the order of Heaven, immanent yet transcendent." The humanistic, moral and spiritual aspects of



Confucianism can also be expressed in terms of what Tu Wei-ming calls “the Confucian anthropocosmic worldview” with an “ethicoreligious symbolism” of humanity.<sup>18)</sup> In other words, this Confucian worldview is open to transcendence with its own spiritual and religious dimension. Heaven is thought to be the ultimate reality of truth and goodness which is manifested in human nature (sng/hsing), providing an imperative model for virtuous human life and experience. This is not an ordinary belief or idea, but rather a form of faith that emphasizes a moral-spiritual way of self-cultivation and self-transcendence.<sup>19)</sup> The essence of this Confucian faith does not aim at an other-worldly goal of salvation toward a paradise or kingdom independent of the world here and now. As Korean Confucians themselves know, it does not assist them to depend on God, any divine saviour, or any ascetic path for receiving salvation or liberation.

Confucians perceive the true mind-and-heart as something that ought to maintain a fruitful integration of rationality, morality, and spirituality. Many Koreans—including a significant number of Christians—share and respect Confucian values and practice such as the virtuous essence of human nature (indk/jen-te), moral-spiritual mind (tosim/tao-hsin), self-cultivation (susin/hsiu-shen),

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18) See his *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (1989). Tu discussed this topic according to the Doctrine of the Mean, one of the Four Books.

19) The global notion of “faith” (or “religious faith”) is still open to further debate, as it is subject to various religions, languages, worldviews, and cultures. Here I note that the English word faith originates from the Latin *fidere*, which literally means a human attitude of “trust,” which may or may not transcend our reason and emotions completely. In the broader and comparative context of religion, Confucians have a sense of faith in the Confucian moral-spiritual teachings and values. As I argued elsewhere (Chung 1995a and 1998a), this would fit into, for example, W. C. Smith’s comparative thesis that faith is “the fundamental human category” and essentially means and engages “the new and rich and enriching sense of *fides humana*, the faith...the final truth of humankind” (1979:5-6).

filial piety (hyo/hsiao), reciprocal propriety (ye/li), respect to the elderly (kyngno/ching-lao), and so on.<sup>20)</sup> This is generally true despite the fact that they do not necessarily talk about ancient Confucian sages and worthies such as Confucius, Mencius, and later Neo-Confucians; nor do they make specific reference to sophisticated philosophical discourses. The daily language and social patterns reflect certain Confucian values with the manifold levels of expressing morality (todk) and proper manners (yei).<sup>21)</sup>

Korean Christians of Confucians values inside and outside South Korea—whether or not they consider Confucianism as a religion—would experience or acknowledge no serious, irresolvable friction between the (mono)theistic and related elements of Christianity and the moral-religious elements of Confucianism. To add a personal note, this trend seems quite common among many of the Koreans I know inside and outside South Korea, who maintain one or another form of Confucian-Christian identity. Without betraying their Christian identity at the core of their mind-and-hearts, they follow central Christian doctrines, on the one hand, and Confucian moral values and social customs, on the other hand. In fact, it is not surprising to find a significant number of educated Koreans whose moral-spiritual lives are influenced by various teachings of wisdom, including Confucian self-cultivation, Shakyamuni Buddha's Dharma,

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20) Confucian beliefs and values are said remain commonly accepted by contemporary Koreans. A recent Korean source on this topic is a seminal study of Korean religiosity and religious ideas which is carried out by Prof. Km Jangt'ae, a contemporary Confucian scholar at Seoul National University, and his colleges at SNU's Department of Religious Studies. See Yun 1996 and 1995 in References.

21) As I have discussed before (Chung 1998c and 1995b), it is in this context that Confucian values continue to be an essential part of Korean identity. Most Koreans consider themselves socially engaged and psychologically accepted in a network of groups. In other words, the holistic Confucian notion of interconnecting the self, family, and society serves as an important model for the Korean value system.

Lao Tzu's teaching on the Tao, and Jesus' sermon on the Mount.<sup>22)</sup> A recent survey case study of Korean Christians (Mullinax 1994)<sup>23)</sup> generally supports the harmonious coexistence and assimilation of Confucianism and Christianity even among overseas Korean Christians. Specifically, the overwhelming majority of them see Confucianism and Christianity as compatible in terms of emphasizing "the virtuous way of life," "work ethic," and other related values, agreeing that Confucian moral values influence their daily lives. Moreover, many of them have no serious conflict between Christian faith and the family Confucian tradition of ancestral rites.<sup>24)</sup>

So what about the meaning and implication of these facts for Confucian-Christian dialogue? First, a dual ethico-religious identity seems to be maintained, as Confucianism and Christianity are taken to be equally important. Second, Korean Christians have a common tendency to accommodate traditional Confucian ethos and customs into their Christian ways of life. Third, they are deeply and positively rooted in their Confucian moral and social heritage at the same time. This paradigm of Korean Confucian-Christian integration has been possible for several reasons. If we look at the general history of religions in Korea (like that in China or Japan), the

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22) Here we can talk about religious diversity and pluralism even at home. It is not uncommon that for average Korean families with three to five mature children, there is often a good deal of religious diversity and religious interaction, pertaining to Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism, and others religions.

23) This conference paper was based on a survey conducted among Korean Christians in the New York area. Four hundreds questionnaires were distributed, and 312 returned.

24) According to Mullinax, 92% of them acknowledged no conflict between the two traditions because they mutually emphasize "work ethic" and the "virtuous way of life"; 64% of them said that the Confucian value system remains important for educational excellence, work ethic, and family values and Korean morality; 43% agreed that one can be a "better Christian with Confucian values"; and 40-50% have no conflict even in maintaining the family tradition of ancestral rites at home. Among the most important Confucian values are filial piety to parents and respect for the elders.

traditional notion of religion or religious identity was neither absolutely exclusive or militantly evangelical; therefore, there are still tolerant attitudes toward the mutual interaction and understanding of religious beliefs, ideas, teachings, practices, and worldviews.<sup>25)</sup> More important, Confucianism still remains a diffused tradition of intermingled with daily Korean values and culture. Confucianism is not an organized and congregational religion like Christianity; and yet, the theistic, confessional, and congregational dimensions of Christianity have been appealing to many Koreans including self-identified Confucians. Although these Christian elements are unique, they have been integrated into Confucianism, as far as the Confucian tradition was, and still is, open to the theistic and other related aspects of religion. This is partly why Christianity has been growing among many Koreans including those of Confucian background and values.

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25) The inclusive phenomenon of religious diversity and interaction and cultural integration (including Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, shamanism, and folk religion) was possible throughout the entire unfolding of Korean religions. Here I note that this and other related topics are discussed in two recent seminal works on Korean religiosity and religious ideas, studied by Prof. Yun Hee Hum of Seoul National University and his colleges at SNU's Department of Religious Studies. See Yun 1996 and 1995 in References.

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