

JIN-YOUNG KIM

JONGOH LEE

HEEJAE CHOI

REVITALIZATION OF KOREAN NEW RELIGIONS IN THE 1970S

Jin-Young Kim

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Department of Global Culture and Contents,
Seoul, Korea.

Email: staci21@naver.com

Jongoh Lee

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Department of Global Culture and Contents,
Seoul, Korea.

Email: santon@hufs.ac.kr

Heejae Choi

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Department of French Education, Seoul, Korea.

Email: hjchoi@hufs.ac.kr

Abstract: The concept of secularism underpinning modern Western society insists on weakening the influence of religion by viewing the world through the lens of science and reason rather than through religious beliefs, traditions, and political authority. However, Korea has adopted a different perspective on this matter. A number of Korean new religions were in decline and they seemed to be facing imminent death during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), the Rhee Syngman government (1948-1960), and the Park Chung-hee government (1961-1979), which were periods of peak political suppression and control. The 1970s saw a dramatic shift in religious circles, when new religions founded in the 19th century but oppressed until then revitalized and spread rapidly. Why could Korea in the 1970s not adopt the smooth relationship between religion and modernity prevalent in the West? Instead, why did new religions based on tradition develop and flourish? This study aims to answer these questions by comparing the theories on secularization and post-secularization of the West with the philosophy of Confucianism of the late Joseon Era and reveal the foundation of Korean new religions from a theoretical perspective.

Key words: Korean New Religion, Secularization, Post-secularism, 1970s, The Modern Era, The Rhee Syngman government, The Park Chung-hee government, Pseudo-religion

1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that modernization in Western European countries has caused significant changes across all facets of society, despite differences in the relative speed or degree of those changes. Religion, too, is subject to shifts resulting from modernization. Indeed, modernity, as a concept in contrast with the sacred or religiosity, has been seen to function as an indicator of the decline, or even the end, of religion. In particular, prevailing theories and assertions that predicted the decline of religion dominated the field of sociology of religion in the 20th century (Fordahl 2017). These generally followed the definition of secularization advanced by Bryan Wilson (1966) – namely, ‘the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance’ (Wilson 1966, 14) – and held that as modernization progressed, religion was losing relevance in all spheres of life (Northmore-Ball and Evans 2016, 32). In other words, there was a widespread perception among religion researchers that religion had weakened as the Modern Era flowed from the Enlightenment, allowing people to view the world through the lens of science and reason rather than religion, tradition and authority (Caputo et al. 2015; Taylor 2007).

However, the relationship between the religious and the secular in modern Western societies is different from that in modern East Asia, and particularly from the situation in Korea. In the late 18th and early 19th century, Korea was in the late stages of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), manifesting a culture based on Neo-Confucianism in addition to showing the beginnings of modernization. However, this modernization was the result of coercion by foreign powers such as Japan, Russia, the United States, Britain and France rather than a product of voluntary and self-serving efforts. As such, Korea developed a chaotic cultural milieu, under severe duress from outside forces. The chaos of this evolving Korean social structure, caused by modernization, however, ironically led to the birth of new and influential religions instead of the decline of religion.

However, these new Korean religions seemed to contract under the oppression and control of various political powers; indeed, they seemed to be on a path to extinction throughout the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945), Korean War (1950–1953), Rhee Syngman administration (1948–1960) and Park Chung-hee administration (1961–1979). The Japanese oppressed new religions in fear of their similarities to nationalist movements. In contrast, the Rhee Syngman administration provided preferential treatment to Christianity to maintain its power, making it markedly difficult for the new religions to gain momentum or public approbation. The Park Chung-hee administration, which focused on industrialization and urbanization under the banner of modernizing Korea, perceived the

new religions to be obstacles to modernization, damning them as pseudo or false religions. However, a dramatic reversal began to take place in the religious sphere in the 1970s; the Korean new religions, born at the end of 19th century and almost immediately oppressed, were reborn and soon experienced rapid growth (J. Lee 2000b; K. Ro 2002; D. Kwon 2013).

Given this explosion of interest in new religions, the obvious question is why the inverse relationship between Western religions and modernity did not apply in Korea in the 1970s. Why did Korean new religions based on tradition flourish in the face of modernization while Western religion declined under similar modernizing pressures? This paper aims to shed light on this phenomenon. To this end, this paper aims to comparatively analyze the secularization of Western Europe and post-secularization theories with relation to Confucianism as the national religion of Korea during the late Joseon Dynasty. This process is expected to elucidate from a theoretical perspective some aspects of context from which the Korean new religions were born. Subsequently, this paper seeks to empirically present from a socio-political perspective the reasons why the new religions revived and flourished, discussing how the industrialization of Korea in the 1970s increased the culture's dependence on religion, rather than decreasing its influence.

2. Korean Neo-Confucianism and Post-Secularization

In pre-modern societies, established religions often provide legitimacy to existing social orders; the value of religion is not confined to the spiritual realm, but instead provides rationalization for all social institutions, including the social class order (Berger 1969). Confucianism was the dominant religion during the Joseon Dynasty, and its Neo-Confucian branch was adopted as an ideological tool at the founding of the dynasty. It subsequently became the guiding principle for Joseon society as a whole. When examining the previous Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), there is a strong perception among academics that the national religion of Buddhism led to severe societal confusion. Thus, the introduction of Neo-Confucianism, which rejects the supernatural world and represents nationalism, appears to have been a truly natural phenomenon (H. Do 2015; C. Choi 2002). Seung-Hwan Lee (2005) argued that one key characteristic of Neo-Confucianism, public rationality, encompasses 'the ability of collective reasoning by members of political bodies to reach agreement on basic definitions and the common good of political bodies through open and rational debate' (Lee 2005, 6). Public rationality refers to a universal public reason that gives rational order and meaning to the entire universe, including the political and human world, rather than relying on individual reason. Moreover, Ro (2002) stated that Neo-Confucianists have rejected all attempts to project supernatural or

transcendent aspects into the human realm when constructing the basic principles of human nature (Ro 2002, 33). Meanwhile, Nam Chul Pu (2000a) has asserted that the majority of Neo-Confucianists did not recognise divine figures that could either bless humans or call down disasters upon them, and criticized the self-serving nature of faith in its quest for ascribing the roots of both blessings and evil (Pu 2001, 10). In general, the common attitude of these scholars is that Neo-Confucianism uprooted a very strong supernaturalist orientation in favor of a more rational perspective.

In this sense, Confucianism, unlike other religions that believe in the afterlife, takes a similar trajectory to philosophical ideologies based on reason and rationality. This rationalistic worldview of Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism thus coincides with the secularization theories applied to modern Western Europe in some senses. Although the Joseon Dynasty may still be considered a pre-modern society, it would not be difficult to identify commonalities with the secularization experienced by Western society in the guiding principles of the times. Historically, many Western religious sociologists have assumed that as a society develops, the use of reason or rationality as the basis for understanding the world replaces religion and faith. Secularization theories attempt to explain the conflict between reason and religion, holding that as society becomes more modernized, individuals and public institutions become increasingly dependent on rationality rather than faith to organize everyday life (O'Brien and Noy 2015). Bryan Wilson (1966) has argued that rationalization manifests as a form of social control, leading to bureaucratization of social interactions and pluralization of the religion itself, thereby creating unbelief and atheism at the individual level.

As detailed, secularization theories are based on the hypothesis that secularization can be understood as the decline of religiosity, and that this decline will eventually lead to the privatization of religion. But such attempts to explain the location and role of religion through a dual model that contrasts the secular and the religious, or reason/rationality and faith, have had to be revised and supplemented to maintain their relevance (Ferrari 2012; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2008). This is because most secularization theories have been posited as universal social principles through an Enlightenment-centric analysis of European history, which some scholars consider a 'mistake' (Grinell and Strandberg 2012, 70). Reduction of church attendance and the decline of public belief in the supernatural are often cited as direct signs of religion losing its influence on society (Bruce 2011a; Hout and Fisher 2002; Dobbelaere 1999; Wilson 1975). Within this perspective, there is a very exaggerated perception of past religiosity, holding that religion governed all areas of society as a dominant discourse before rationality or reason took over as the center of the society (Stark 1999, 260). Stark (1999) has argued that the majority of prominent medieval religious historians — Collin Morris, Sean Duffy, C.

John Sommerville and so on — admit that this ‘Age of Faith’ never truly existed and that a ‘pious past’ is nothing but unfounded nostalgia (Stark 1999, 255). Bruce (1997b) advanced similar thoughts centering around the argument that perceiving pre-modern medieval European society as a Golden Age of religiosity is based on subjective judgment.

The empirical indicators of the decline of the religious population in Europe and North America seem to indicate the consistent decline of religion in these cultures. However, declining participation in religion does not automatically indicate a direct relinquishment of religion stemming from secularization. Sarah Wilkins-LaFlamme (2015) found that although there is an increase in individuals identifying as ‘religious nones’ and fewer people are actively engaged with institutional religion in modern Western society, there remains a complex interest in religious and spiritual beliefs among these religious nones (Wilkins-LaFlamme 2015, 478). Notably, apart from direct religious participation, people continue to seek methods to help them find deeper meanings in their own experiences and lives. The loss of religion’s social functions and the emergence of individualistic tendencies do not necessarily mean that religion is losing influence and relevance to Western society, politics, culture and individual conduct. As religion still maintains a place within society as a whole (Habermas 2008, 19), there is only weak evidence to support an inevitable global secularization as posited by Marxists and modernization theorists (Almond and Powell 1978; Mills 2008). As Grace Davie (2000) has argued, individuals maintain their own personal spirituality, and this phenomenon may well continue into the foreseeable future.

While the most prominent religion of the West is Christianity, religious diversity is a key characteristic of Korean culture (A. Kim 2002b). A 2015 study found that, of the 43.1% of Korean respondents who reported belonging to a religious denomination, 19.7% belonged to a Protestant Christian denomination, 15.5% to a Buddhist denomination, and 7.9% to a Catholic denomination (CIA World Factbook 2015). However, there are hundreds of indigenous religions in Korea, and other studies have found their believers to total some 7 million (Blonner 2017, 123-124). Despite these differences in reported statistics, it is clear that modern Korean society supports a diverse range of religions. Although there are no clear statistics on the types of religion or the number of believers during the Joseon Dynasty, we may presume that this diversity also applied at the time. From the perspective of the dynasty’s founders, establishing Neo-Confucianism as the Joseon state religion was a way to support the dynasty’s systemic ideology and political thought. However, despite their use of Neo-Confucianism as a political tool, the elites, consisting of the royal family and sadaebu, were still largely adherents of Buddhism, the state religion of the previous era, and Daoism and various folk religions were still widespread (H. Do 2015; N. Pu 2007b; C. Choi 2002; S. Gwon 2000). Not only did these religions remain active during the Joseon Dynasty (S.

Gwon 2000), but after the introduction of Roman Catholicism in 1784, various Christian sects also joined the late Joseon religious milieu (N. Pu 2007b). In light of this proliferation of religious options during a time of rampant modernization within Korea, the secularization theories stating that the adoption of reason or rationality will lead to the decline, and ultimately the demise, of religion, can be said to partially apply to the Korean experience.

3. Emergence and Development of Korean New Religions

In the late Joseon Dynasty, the yangban, or aristocratic class, representing less than 10% of the entire population, was strictly segregated from the common people within the social hierarchy, exercising the power to abuse and oppress the common people with virtually no limits (S. Kim 1993; Y. Kim 1986). The common class began to nurture desires to overcome social segregation, impoverishment and tax burdens; they began to advance their social status by collective resistance on one end, and improving their economic status on the other. In 1784, Lee Seung Hoon returned from Beijing, China, after being baptized there, which marked the introduction of Roman Catholicism to Korean Confucian scholars and commoners alike (N. Pu 2007b). This injection of external religion into Korean society happened as the dynasty was experiencing key challenges. Internally, the Joseon dynasty suffered from inefficient bureaucracy, pervasive corruption, acute poverty and oppressive officialdom; externally, there existed a sense of crisis that its cultural identity would be lost to the influence of Western imperialist countries attempting to maximise their own economic gains, with Catholicism and Western learning at the forefront of this invasion. Amidst the feverish disorder of the late Joseon, the belief that all human beings were equal under the sky spread among the common people; this popular belief was further strengthened by the inflow of Western concepts of modernity. Many Koreans began to yearn for a new value system that could help them escape their miserable reality, a typical social reaction to such 'dire socio-political circumstances' and 'protracted hard times' (A. Kim 2001a).

In 1860, Choe Je-u began a new philosophical movement called Donghak or Eastern Learning, as the Eastern, Korean counterpart to Seohak or Western Learning. He developed it into a social reform movement that was both anti-dynastic and anti-hierarchical (Y. Jung 2016; M. Park 2014; Y. Kim 2014). He argued that as the most precious being among all things in the universe, every human being has a 'God' within them, so that he or she is an equal being to all others, without segregation into nobility or the lowly. His ideology placed human beings at the center of all value at a time when most people were devalued by the prevailing cultural hegemony. His attempts to uplift the nation and comfort those

who suffered under the current hierarchical system received an enthusiastic welcome from many of the common people, especially poor farmers. With Donghak at its core, the first new religion of Korea, Cheondogyo, was founded in 1905 (Blonner 2017; M. Park 2014; S. Ko 2012).

In contrast, Kang Jeungsan approached the problems of the times from a more religious perspective. His philosophy differentiated itself from Donghak, which resisted both Western imperialism and the corrupt Joseon Dynasty. He did not directly recommend freeing the common people or saving the public through reforming the dynasty, but instead attempted to partially or wholly reconstruct the prevailing belief system, which had been dismantled by the late Joseon Dynasty (N. Ko 2003). However, in practice, Jeungsan's attitude regarding the feverish disorder of the times did not differ substantially from that of Choe Je-u; he maintained a critical perspective towards the corrupt structures of Neo-Confucianism and strived to protect the people from the urgent 'disease', seeking a 'Messianic salvation' that would yield a perfect world without any evil (Mitsuo 1989, 136; Heo 2017, 98). After his death, countless new religions based on his example were founded and rapidly spread throughout Korean society.

Aside from Choe Je-u and Kang Jeungsan, many new religions were born under new religious leaders at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Joseon Dynasty was overthrown and the Japanese colonial era dawned. The following is a brief inventory of the quintessential new religions of the time. Kim Hang (1826-1898) founded Yeonggamudogyo (靈歌舞蹈教) in 1879, while Namhak (南學) was founded by Kim Chi In (1855-1895) in 1889 (Y. Yang 2015). In 1909, Na Chul (1864-1916) founded Daejonggyo, which venerated Dangun, the progenitor of Korea; Lee Seung Yeo (1874-1934) began to preach Geumgangdaedo, which combined Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, in 1910. In 1916, Bak Jung-bin (1891-1943) founded Won Buddhism based on Buddhism (J. Lee 2012a, 118). Moreover, many denominations in the Christian tradition entered Korea around this time; these could be regarded as 'new' religions from the Korean perspective. However, Christianity was not based on a Korean context and is therefore not typically classified as a Korean new religion; thus, these denominations have been excluded from this study.

Korean new religions are characterized by an admixture of various religions extant at the time, particularly those which were restricted and oppressed under the Confucian regime that emphasized rationality (Blonner 2017; Baker 2007; Mitsuo 1989). As mentioned earlier, in the late Joseon Dynasty, the authority of the rationalism-centric Confucianism began to come under fire while folk beliefs such as Buddhism, Daoism and shamanism were being embraced by the people. Even though a new religion is typically born when existing religions are unable to fulfill religious roles in a society, the new religion cannot completely block out the social influence of existing religions. From this perspective, Choe Je-

u's Donghak developed into a new system of beliefs, influenced by the four traditional religions of Korea: Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and folk religion. Furthermore, it absorbed some assumptions of Christian theology despite the general antipathy towards Western learning (Baker 2007). Kang Jeungsan's ideology—later developed into Jeungsangyo—can also be regarded as a mixture of various Korean ideologies, with Daoist elements predominating.

Korean new religions embraced both the present—that is, the changing social conditions in the late Joseon Dynasty—and the past, in their embrace of tradition and acceptance across society, manifesting themselves in the form of a future aspect: Gaebyeok or the Great Opening, signifying the reorganization of the cosmic order. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke have argued that the fall of religious monopolies in Europe and North America resulted from religions competing over converts, and asserted that such competition stimulated the growth of various religions (Stark 1999; Finke and Stark 1988). The decline of the Confucian authority as a religion, per their argument, should have led to competition between Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and folk religion in Korea at the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. However, Korea's new religions merged many aspects of different religions to birth a prolific variety of new denominations, leading to the growth and diversification of the Korean religion market.

With the end of World War II in 1945, Korea was liberated and the Korean new religions, which had largely gone underground, had hopes of surfacing. However, although the U.S. military government in Korea (1945–1948) and the subsequent Rhee Syngman administration made surface gestures of guaranteeing the freedom of religion, they instead attempted to reorganise Korean religious society to focus on Christianity, and especially Protestant Christianity. The U.S. military government handed Christians control over Korean religious policies, allowing them to sell the land and buildings of expropriated Japanese Shinto sects to Korean Christian churches at fire-sale prices (K. Yoon 2016). Christian influence spread rapidly; even though Christians only accounted for 2-3% of the population at the time, Thanksgiving and Christmas were designated as national holidays, and beginning in March 1947, Christians were awarded the privilege of spreading the Christian gospel across the country via Sunday radio broadcasts (D. Kwon 2013). Ultimately, Christianity was able to obtain a virtual monopoly during the period of U.S. military rule, dominating Korea's religious milieu and enjoying unofficial status as a 'central religion' or even a 'state religion' during this time (S. Park 2016, 11; D. Kang 1993, 37). It was only natural for the Korean new religions, emphasizing nationalism as they did, to be at a competitive disadvantage at this time thanks to the heavily Christian-preferenced policies of the U.S. military government.

After successfully taking over the regime, Rhee Syngman provided preferential foreign exchange benefits to foreign missionary funds as a part of a broader set of preferential policies aimed at promulgating Christianity; these included providing financial support for religious organizations such as the YMCA when building their assembly buildings; allowing only Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism as military religions; publishing Christmas seals and approving the establishment and operations of Protestant broadcasting stations to support Protestant activities (Song and Kim 2014). As a result, throughout the Rhee Syngman administration, Christianity began to expand its power through intimate relationships with political elites; on the other hand, both the traditional and new Korean religions became artifacts to be cleaned up via the modernization process, undergoing dissolution, atrophy, fragmentation, seclusion and even closure.

4. Revitalization of Korean New Religions

Park Chung-hee's military regime, which took power in a 1961 coup, promoted rapid industrialization and urbanization under the banner of anti-corruption, anti-communism, and economic development activity (Y. Yoon 2012; I. Kang 1997). Specifically, Park's industrialization policies facilitated Korea's rapid economic growth and Western-style modernization; however, behind the scenes, Korea's civil society dwindled, and the authoritarian political system was legitimized. Moreover, as expressed by Song and Kim (2014), the government was seen as a 'de-facto religious figure' (Song and Kim 2014, 347). The Korean people gradually began to resist the Park administration's totalitarianism.

The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the 1970s weakened the values, norms and authority that had sustained Korean society in the past, beginning to dismantle the traditional bonds based on regions and relatives. In this process, the incestuous relationship between power and economy—in other words, influential political figures and businessmen—became increasingly pronounced, and corruption was institutionalized.

The Park administration bestowed privileges on the Buddhists, who were alienated during the Rhee administration, reducing the gap between the two religions. The administration allowed Buddhism to be a military religion in 1968, an honor previously only allowed for Christianity; Buddhism was also represented in the 1974 national funeral of Yuk Young-Soo, Park's wife, alongside Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism, and Buddha's birthday was designated as a national holiday in 1975. With the granting of these privileges, Korean religion gradually reformed to include three major players: Buddhism, Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism. The Park administration gave various privileges to these dominant religions, helping them expand their influence; at the same

time, it deprived non-mainstream religions of religiosity by stamping them as 'superstitious' and branding their differences as 'divisive', and through strict control (Song and Kim 2014, 347).

The prevailing discourse that Korean new religions should be excluded from the religious market was based on the incestuous relationship between religion and political power, and particularly between Protestant Christianity and the Rhee administration. Under the Rhee administration, Protestant Christianity took the lead in the politicization of religion by intervening in state affairs and commanding absolute authority in the religious markets; by the end of Rhee's reign, the confluence of Protestant Christianity and state power fueled the corruption of state power (S. Park 2016, 21). The cosy relationship between Korean Protestantism and power continued into the Park administration. When Park's coup took place, founded on the goal of defeating the corruption and incompetence of the government prior to 1961, Korean Protestants quickly voiced their support for the effort (K. Yoon 2016, 42). They bolstered Park's capitalist industrialization policies by focusing the blessing of God onto the generation of material abundance in support of the government's growth ideologies, rather than focusing on the less materialistic spiritual aspects of Christianity (Song and Kim 2014). Protestantism, in conjunction with capitalist logic, soon warped into a temporal and uneven faith, and even among Protestants, those disappointed with the growing inequality in Korea began to flock to new religions with Christian overtones (S. Park 2016).

It is commonly held that religion needs to be distanced from the public sphere—otherwise, it could potentially conflict with other religions (Silvio Ferrari 2012). As such, universal and neutral principles are critical in preventing the dangers of inter-religion conflict and securing the equality of all religions. Defying this principle, however, Protestants focused on obtaining authoritarian status in the Korean religious milieu by allying with political powers for decades, spanning the rules of the U.S. military government, Rhee administration and Park administration. Yoon Kyung-Ro (2016) has argued that the growth of Protestantism in Korea is merely a 'secular success' rather than an expansion of Christian faith based on the pure spirit of Christian gospel (Kyung-Ro 2016, 29). As such, it may be natural that Koreans have developed negative attitudes towards Christianity, and especially towards Protestantism, beyond this secular success. The alliance between Korean Protestants and political powers is based on their growth-centric attitudes, and in line with the tendency of some Protestant churches to be egocentric and disrespectful towards other religions or other religious groups (C. Kim 2016). The aggressive, and often hostile, evangelical activities by Protestants against other religious groups in Korea have led many Koreans to turn their backs on Protestantism (P. Min 2014).

Some influential Korean Protestant churches count church offerings or tithes as a measure of devotees' loyalty to the church, increasing the burden of offering and weakening members' loyalty (H. Kim 2005). In particular, they emphasize or force religious participation, especially at Sunday worship services; however, other religious traditions in Korea are relatively free of formal norms. This material or immanent formalism of Korean Protestant churches emphasizes a life of faith centered around the church, which in turn predicated its existence on the external growth of the church. Just as the authority of Buddhism in the Goryeo Dynasty and of Neo-Confucianism in the Joseon Dynasty were challenged as negative perceptions grew among the populace, so the authority of Korean Christianity as the dominant religion began to be challenged in 1970s as the people grew dissatisfied with what the religion had to offer.

Mainstream traditional Korean religions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, experienced consistent internal conflict dating to the mid-1950s, which continued in the Park administration (I. Kang 1997). The Park administration attempted to control the entire religious community through manipulating the balance of power between Protestants, Catholics and Buddhists as the dominant religions, while outwardly providing preferential treatment for Buddhism. The Park administration unilaterally supported the Jogye Order, one of Buddhist orders, in organizing its preferential treatment of Buddhism in the 1960s; however, in the 1970s, when the dictatorship began to take shape, it took a neutral stance and allowed other Buddhist orders to operate. This led to competition among the Buddhist sects seeking support and, overall, to broad support of the government by the entire Buddhist community. Notably, the community began to support Park as the presidential candidate in elections and defended government policies in Buddhist ceremonies (Song and Kim 2014). Buddhism, much like Christianity, sought cohesion and solidarity with political powers.

Even those who do not regularly participate in religious activities often still maintain cultural and familial ties with religion (Zuckerman 2008; Demerath 2000). In other words, they have a favorable view of religion as a concept, and participate in many activities with religious significance under specific beliefs; this indicates that non-religious people often retain a traditional sense of faith, but distance themselves from organized religion, in line with assertions by Hout and Fisher (2002). This pattern is reflected in the situation in Korea in the late 1960s. The alienated classes, including workers, farmers and the urban poor, expanded in large numbers throughout the industrialization and urbanization process, and were subjected to harsh economic and social inequality with nowhere to turn for succor. Even the existing religions, which were supposed to provide a resting place for the soul, displayed rigid and chronically pathological behaviors in their alliances with the dominant political powers, and failed to embrace people with diverse

religious needs. In this context, the time was ripe for the Korean new religions, founded on Korean soil in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but subsequently forgotten for many reasons, to become active again. These new religions began to expand their influence by highlighting the contradictions and inequalities of the existing society, and criticizing the limitations of existing religions that failed to dynamically respond to such degradations (K. Ro 2002; J. Lee 2000b).

Through an analysis of existing studies, Baker and Smith (2009) proposed that young, educated people with liberal political identities have a high probability of becoming non-religious. However, the Korean new religions of the 1970s not only seeped into the alienated class with its low education and low income, but also into the elite class, centering around college students. Wilfried Spohn (2003) criticized the common modernization paradigm, which asserts that ethnic communities and religion as a key component of traditional societies inevitably meet their demise through a bundle of core processes such as nation-state formation, social differentiation, individualization, capitalist development, political democratization and secularization. Spohn argued that this Western modernity was only one type of modernity experienced by various civilizations around the world. In line with his argument, the Western modernization theories which were popular in Korea in the 1960s came to be criticized in the 1970s (K. Ro 2002; J. Lee 2000b). College students who protested for the liberation of the oppressed and the liberation of the Korean people in the 1970s began to flock to new religions that presented solutions to class conflicts and weakened nationalist traditions.

Upon reflecting that modernization does not equal westernization, an interest in tradition exploded within the university community, strengthening academics' love and dedication towards folk culture, including mask dances and farming music. For example, mask dances were originally an art form in which clowns criticized the aristocrat class; liberal students in the 1970s expressed their anger and criticism of Park's military regime through mask dances. The rediscovery of folklore and folk culture by students was a fresh attempt at reinventing Korean culture, indicating that folklore could be revived for political purposes (Mitsuo 1989). In this context, it may have been natural for Korean new religions to draw renewed attention, as these sects strongly maintained their original similarities to nationalist movements. University communities saw the formation of student clubs relating to Korean new religions. Some young elites attempted to find spiritual comfort in Korean new religions, turning away from Western-inflected modernization and the influx of Western culture.

The time spanning the late 1960s to the early 1980s marked an unprecedented period in the history of Korean religion, during which the religious population unexpectedly grew (Y. Yoon 2012). The number of Korean new religions founded or stemming from existing religions was 31

before the liberation, 14 in the 1950s, 26 in the 1960s, 19 in the 1970s, 33 in the 1980s, and 1 in the 1990s. The establishment of a new religion or splintering of a new sect was strongest in the late 1960s and early 1980s (D. Kwon 2013, 122).

In 1970s Korea, religion served as a social space that facilitated the resurrection of tradition and furthered democratization, rather than conflicting with modernization (I. Kang 1997). In other words, as the new religions frequently shared their impetus for being with the roots of industrialization, industrialization did not reduce the influence of religion in the Korean context, but instead gave rise to a large populace that desired religion, and increased social confidence in it. Grinell and Strandberg (2012) have argued that aesthetic, symbolic and religious experiences need to be recognized as non-reducible aspects of the human condition, since religious experience and meaning cannot be judged by reason or science. The revival and growth of new religions in 1970s Korean society can be understood in this context.

5. Conclusion

Westernization—that is, reason, rationality and modernity—took Asia by storm in the late 19th century, extending into the whole of the 20th century. In particular, rapid changes in Asian religions were witnessed after World War II, and traditional folk religions were expected to quickly give way to modernity (Stark 1999). For example, Japan's Shinto faith was expected to meet its demise (Nelson 1992), and the Chinese religious traditions in Singapore were predicted to soon disappear (Kiong and Kong 2000). This never happened. Instead, as Kiong and Kong (2000) argue, modernity developed its own 'sacred' conditions, which may appear independent of 'religion' in the conventional context. Traditional religious practices retain their meaning in new environments through transformation and modification, and sometimes create 'conceptualizations of space in time' to respond to changing environments when maintaining these meanings is impossible (Kiong and Kong 2000, 40-1). Therefore, explaining the rise and fall, or the birth and death, of religions as trans-temporal or trans-spatial concepts through Western modernity theories presents inherent limitations.

From this perspective, despite the plans of the founders of the Joseon Dynasty, who attempted to install Neo-Confucianism as the ruling ideology, anti-Confucian elements persisted; there were inevitable large gaps between the founding principles of Neo-Confucianism and the norms that governed the everyday lives of the common people. The strong, rationalistic worldview espoused by Neo-Confucianism was unable to satisfy the natural human desires for happiness and salvation, breeding discontent among the people. Moreover, in the process of transitioning

into the late Joseon period, the elite class attempted to forcefully apply Neo-Confucianist rationality to all spheres of society to strengthen their rule, hastening public dissatisfaction. If religion is the ultimate method to understand the meaning of life, suffering, unjust conditions and other problems—that is, to clarify these problems and present various methods to resolve them through insights into salvation (N. Kim 2016)—it was inevitable that the authority of Neo-Confucianism as a religion would become suspect and experience decline.

On the other hand, at the end of the 19th century, the Joseon Dynasty first experienced Western rationality through the influx of Western nations seeking wealth and power in Asia. However, the principle of rationality was used to conceal the cultural invasion, rendering it impossible for the people of Joseon to actively accept this school of thought. The Christian missionaries who accompanied such Western rationality made the mistake of believing that there was no religion under Joseon rule, and that Koreans did not need to suffer from the religious principles of self-control and sacrifice, which presented no benefits in the present life (H. Kim 2003). When introduced, the Western mode of thinking, including Christianity—in other words, modernity—was collectively referred to as *Seohak* (Western Learning), and was approached warily by many Koreans. From the Western perspective, Korea in the 19th and 20th centuries ironically experienced the birth of powerful new religions instead of witnessing the decline or demise of religion; as these new faiths were responses to Western systems of thought, they maintained their nationalist character and remained strong despite the forces arrayed against them.

After the downfall of Joseon Dynasty to Japanese imperialism, it became natural to explain Korean religion through its relationship with political power. The Japanese imperialists attempted to infiltrate Korea and distribute their own believers to enhance their power and legitimacy. The Japanese also attempted to balance the power between religions by tolerating Christianity and Buddhism at a limited level; ultimately, this was a political strategy to control religion. In this process, the new religions became subject to oppression and crackdowns, particularly given their nationalistic character, which voiced support for Korean independence. After the collapse of Japanese colonial rule, the U.S. military government and the Rhee administration tried to transform Korea into a Christian kingdom (Christendom); throughout this process, Christianity, and especially Protestantism, grew in external prominence thanks to countless privileges obtained through cohesion with political powers. Throughout this time, they advanced discourses relating to idol worship or superstition around other religions in attempts to restrict or destroy them. The Park Chung-hee military government divided the rapidly growing Christianity into Protestant and Roman Catholic branches, and introduced a third religious axis, Buddhism, to maintain balance between

the religions and obtain control over religion; the Korean new religions, which survived only in name under the U.S. military government and Rhee administration, were restricted under the epithets of 'pseudo-religion' or 'false religion' (J. Lee 2000b, 12).

However, despite political policies of controlling and restricting Korean new religions, the Park administration, driving industrialization as its first policy priority, began to inadvertently provide the background for the revival and growth of new religions. As a part of Western modernization, industrialization and urbanization processes touted reason and rationality, backed up by the pursuit of materialism and capitalism. Park's development-driven dictatorship provided the grounds for both young intellectuals and disenfranchised workers, farmers and the urban poor to reflect on the ideals of Western modernity. Marginalized groups, driven to the fringes of the society amidst industrialization, demanded something to soothe their souls. Intellectuals, centering around young college students, began to rediscover the Korean new religions that had their roots in overlooked traditions, driven from view through both attrition and force. Meanwhile, the poor, uneducated people on society's periphery also began to turn to Korean new religions, which provided the familiarity offered by tradition and acted as an alternative to existing mainstream religions, which had begun to lose their spiritual authority through their cohesion with political powers. Modernity, as a hostile force promoting Western religions, led to the birth and revival of religion in Korea in the late 19th century and through the 1970s, when modernity was peaking. This is largely due to the fact that the relationship between Western religion and modernity is based on a single dominant religion of Christianity, whereas Korea has long been a multi-religious society; in Korea, modernity stimulated religion to adapt to or change in a new environment, and led to the substitution of existing religions with new ones when the existing religions abandoned their proper functions.

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