

Protestant Churches and *Wolnamin*: An Explanation of Protestant Conservatism in South Korea

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This work is supported by Hanshin University Research Grants 2004.

Abstract

Conservatism in the South Korean Protestant Church has been a long-standing phenomenon. After becoming more active in politics after the 1990s, the Protestant conservative forces have come to represent the right wing in South Korea since 2000. The primary focus of this paper is on that of how *wolnamin* (Protestant groups of North Korean origin) contributed to the political and social conservatism of the Protestant Church in Korea, looking at the case of the Presbyterian Church. *Wolnamin* were able to garner power and lasting influence because of the following factors: 1) the large size of the *wolnamin* group; 2) their ability to reorganize successfully in the church and South Korean society; (3) their ability to rise to the center of the religious power structure by utilizing conflicts and divisions-schisms within the South Korean Protestant Church; 4) their ability to reconnect with foreign missionaries in South Korea and receive abundant financial support from churches in the U.S.; 5) that the “non-regional presbytery” system and churches for *wolnam* Protestants guaranteed a share of religious power beyond their capacity; and 6) that they maintained strong solidarity at the denominational as well as the trans-denominational level. As a result, they rose to power in the 1950s and continued to maintain it for a long time. They showed some signs of crises after the 1960s; however, they were able to maintain their vitality until recently, with partial revitalization after the 1980s. In particular, the continued strength of the *wolnam* group contributed to Protestantism representing conservative

forces in South Korea after 2000.

Keywords: Korean Protestantism, Presbyterian, Methodist, Protestant conservatism, *wolnam* Protestants, North Korean Protestants, non-regional presbytery, *wolnamin* church, North Korean church

Introduction

In recent years, the political and social conservatism of the Protestant Church has drawn much attention from Korean society and academia. In particular, the mass political gatherings at major public squares in Seoul led by the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) since the inauguration of the Roh Moo-hyun administration in early 2003 have given rise to the Protestant Church as the forerunner of the Korean right-wing forces. The emergence of the conservative Protestant Church as an active political power representing the right wing of Korean society is clearly a novel phenomenon. The political and social conservatism of the Korean Protestant Church is, however, itself a very old phenomenon and in that aspect a familiar phenomenon. It is hardly questionable that the conservative power within the Korean Protestant Church has never lost its status as the ruling majority or as the ecclesiastical authority since liberation from Japanese colonial rule. While focusing on the tenacious durability of conservatism in the Protestant Church as well as its strength, this paper will place emphasis on and bring into relief a factor whose importance has been relatively overlooked: the presence and role of *wolnamin* (“a person or people who crossed to the South,” especially during the period between liberation and the end of the Korean War) in the Protestant Church in South Korea.

This paper will set forth two facts as a logical starting point: Those who came south from the North during the eight-year period between liberation and the end of the Korean War make up the most extreme conservative **forces** of the last half century, and those from the Northwest region of Korean peninsula (Pyeongan and Hamgyeong regions) represent the most politically conservative **forces** within the Protestant Church in South Korea. These *wolnam* Protestant not only fought against socialists alongside the Joseon Democratic Party and Christian Social Democratic Party in North Korea, but also continued to display extreme political conservatism even after coming south after the socialist takeover of North Korea (Kang 1992, 107-131; 1993,

90-128). With these two historical facts as the premise, the hypothesis of this article can be summarized as follows: Because the *wolnam* Protestants represent one of the most extreme conservative powers in South Korean church and society, the more prolonged and prominent their influence was in the South Korean Protestant Church after liberation, the more enduring and more powerful will be the political and social conservatism of the Protestant Church. Due to limited space, the analytical scope of the article will be limited to the Presbyterian Church whose members constitute a majority in the South Korean **Protestant population**.

Reorganization of *Wolnamin* in South Korea

[수정하신 제목으로 가면 이 절의 내용이 ‘남한 개신교의 재조직화’로 오해될 수 있을 것 같습니다.]

Consistent with the general tendency of the *wolnamin* to show a strong spirit of solidarity with one another, the Protestant *wolnamin* have existed as a very cohesive group in South Korean society. The Protestant *wolnamin* clergy swiftly organized “churches for *wolnamin*,” or “churches for North Korean refugees.” Established mostly in large cities, these churches soon became an alternative community for the uprooted, demonstrating an extraordinary capacity to attract Christians from the North. With the help of the U.S. military government, Rev. Han Gyeong-jik and Rev. Kim Jae-jun requisitioned some forty Tenrykyo buildings in Seoul. The current Youngnak Presbyterian Church, Seongnam Church, Kyungdong Presbyterian Church, Luke Church, and John Church were then built on the former Tenrykyo locations. In particular, Youngnak Church, the representative church of the *wolnamin*, became the largest church in Korea before the Korean War with a remarkable growth in its congregation (Min 1976, 37-40; Youngnak Church 1983, 46-47, 351).

The project to build churches for *wolnamin* progressed rapidly when some twenty Presbyterian ministers who came to Seoul from Pyeongan and Hwanghae regions established the **North Korean Refugee Presbyterian Commissioners (NKRPC)** [문현을 뒤져 당시 쓰이던 영문 명칭을 찾아냈습니다] in Youngnak Church on 15 August 1947. The church building project was made possible with a loan Rev. Han Gyeong-jik, president of **NKRPC**, received from the Northern Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Rev. Han Gyeong-jik traveled to the U.S. and

secured a loan for 150,000 dollars, a sum originally allocated for missionary work in North Korea, to build churches and schools in South Korea for *wolnamin* on the condition that the loan be paid back when conditions become feasible for missionary work in North Korea (NKRPC 1984, 13-14). With the loan, the number of *wolnamin* churches increased drastically. At the time of the Second Meeting of NKRPC in August 1948, there were only two churches already established and four churches under planting in the process of being founded; however, when the Third Meeting was held two months later, there were 19 churches altogether, including the six mentioned above. From then, within one year, some 29 churches were newly established in Seoul and Incheon alone. At the 5th Meeting held in October 1949, the Council of North Korean Missions was established with its sphere of missionary work centered on Pyeongan and Hwanghae regions, and 27 elders were inducted to the Council after extending its membership to elders. Meanwhile, NKRPC decided to appeal to the Board of Foreign Mission of the Northern Presbyterian Church for 220,000 dollars in aid and pushed forward efforts to restore Soongsil University and Pyeongyang Theological Seminary, build dormitories for students from North Korea and a Christian museum, and send two students a year to study in America (The number was later raised to ten a year in 1952). NKRPC had not only rebuilt Daegwang High School and other schools such as Sungsil, Sungui, and Bosseong before the outbreak of Korean War, but also acquired Singwang Girls' Middle School and had began the reconstruction of Sinseong School. In April 1950, just before the outbreak of Korean War, several thousand *wolnamin* held the First Convention of North Korean Christians in Youngnak Church. A group to assist Christian refugees from North Korea was organized after the outbreak of the Korean War for the purpose of visiting some forty *wolnamin* churches in South Korea, and nine branch offices were founded following their visits. Several resolutions were passed at the First General Assembly of the NKRPC, held in April 1952, to establish a center for women and children at each branch, build five student dormitories, four middle and high schools, and fifteen churches. For funding, they decided to appeal to the Board of Foreign Mission of the Northern Presbyterian Church. According to the bylaws, membership was given to those who had worked as an elder or a minister at a Presbyterian church either in China or North Korea, or to those originally from the Northwest region of Korea who were ordained minister or elder in the Presbyterian Church in South Korea. The purpose of the NKRPC was to provide religious guidance, education, and support to *wolnamin* Presbyterians and to cooperate in restoring the church in North Korea (NKRPC 1984,

15, 17, 31, 42-43). Ten organic and inclusive subsidiary branches and nine regional organizations, the high number of churches and members (180 to 190 ministers and elders) surpassing any other South Korean presbytery, diverse educational organs including seminary, social welfare facilities, and enormous and enthusiastic financial support from the Board of Foreign Mission of the Northern Presbyterian Church gave the NKRPC power and authority as a kind of “General Assembly of North Korean exiles.” Moreover, a significant portion of some 600 students who were enrolled in the Pyeongyang Theological Seminary continued their studies in South Korea. In April 1947, these students made up about one-third of 306 students in the Joseon Theological Seminary based in Seoul (Kim G. 1992, 312). From a long-term point of view, it seemed very unlikely that the organization’s influence would wane.

Later, some Presbyterians from the Hamgyeong region organized their own group, named the Gwanbuk (Northeast) Christian Association. However, little is known about the organization and its activities. Joseon Theological Seminary, Kyungdong Church, Seongnam Church, and John Church, where ministers from Hamgyeong region were dominant, probably acted as catalysts in its inauguration. Its existence is evinced by the recorded fact that the NKRPC decided to merge with the Gwanbuk Christian Association in January 1950. The size of the organization can be estimated based on the proposal to send thirty people from the NKRPC and ten from the Gwanbuk Christian Association to participate in a North Korean Christian delegation to North Korea in November of the same year. The integration of the two organizations was never realized, due not only to the unexpected outbreak of war, but also largely to the opposition between the leaders from the Northwest and the Northeast region around the issues of Rev. Kim Jae-jun and the Joseon Theological Seminary.

The Wolnamin’s Incorporation into the South Korean Church and Their Approach to Religious Power

Division between Yejang and Gijang Groups and between Gwanbuk and Seobuk in Early 1950s

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, there were two sources of conflict that unfolded almost at the same time in the Presbyterian Church in South Korea in which wolnamin were deeply

implicated. The conflict led to the organization of two new Presbyterian denominations (or religious orders): Presbyterian Church of Republic of Korea (PROK, Gijang order or Joseon Theological Seminary Group) and Kosin order. And in this process, the conservative Presbyterians from Northwest region were able to seize the center of religious power in South Korea. Because the Kosin order failed to attract Presbyterian church leaders from North Korea, except for only a few *wolnamin* who led the founding of Goryeo Theological Seminary and the Kosin order, it became a religious order known to have strong ties with Gyeongsangnam-do province. In this regard, the second schism, one between *Yejang and Gijang groups*, needs to be brought into focus. The *Yejang and Gijang* conflict is intimately linked to the *wolnamin*'s incorporation into the South Korean Presbyterian Church. *Wolnamin* Presbyterians were incorporated into South Korean Church on two occasions, in 1947 and 1952.

On April 1947, the Second Southern Division General Assembly passed resolutions to open the session for the 33rd General Assembly to succeed the 31st General Assembly of 1942 “as a large number of clergy and congregation in North have come South and the concern for our remaining brethren in North mounts with the dimming hope of unification and worsening persecution of Christians in North Korea.” The Assembly also voted to allow “several hundred” clergymen from the North into the South Korean presbyteries contingent upon recommendations from three ministers from their respective presbyteries (Kim Y. 1956, 53-54). When Youngnak Church joined Gyeonggi Presbytery in November of the same year, clergymen and churches from North Korea also subsequently joined presbyteries in South Korea. It was around this time that the NKRPC above mentioned was founded, and since the churches founded by the members of the NKRPC were usually located in areas with a heavy concentration of North Koreans who had come down to Seoul and Incheon, the *wolnamin* churches founded before the outbreak of the Korean War probably belonged under the Gyeonggi Presbytery. The clergy of Northwest origin rose to power within the Gyeonggi Presbytery—the nation’s largest and key presbytery as well as a stronghold of the Joseon Theological Seminary (Jasin) Group—to become a counterbalance to the Seoul-wing of the Gyeonggi Presbytery (Kim Y. 956, 272, 285). Using its position as springboard, the group began taking an offensive posture towards the religious progressive force, Josin Group.

As is widely known, the clash between religious progressives and conservatives that resulted in Josin Group’s secession started with a petition by 51 students enrolled in the Joseon

Theological Seminary. Submitted to the 33rd General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church in April 1947, this petition denounced the liberal theology of Rev. Kim Jae-jun (Kim Y. 1956, 216-222). In November of the same year, some 60 seminary students who withdrew from the Joseon Theological Seminary after the incident formed a group called the Fellowship of Faith, in which people from North Korea and the Jeolla region each constituted half of the group-each, along with only two people from Gyeongsang region (Jeong 1984, 81). On this occasion, some conservative forces within the General Assembly began attacking the Josin Group centered on Rev. Kim Jae-jun, while Yi In-sik, Yi Hwan-su, Hwang Eun-gyun and others from the Northwest group (made up of key members of NKRPC) within the Gyeonggi Presbytery, in collaboration with other conservative forces of the presbytery, launched a “campaign to establish a Presbyterian theological seminary” with the goal of reviving the Pyeongyang Theological Seminary. In a public gesture, Rev. Bak Hyeong-ryong, a member of NKRPC, resigned from his post as the headmaster of Goryeo Theological Seminary and traveled, from winter 1947 until spring of the following year, around Seoul and Jeolla region to stress the need to establish a conservative theological seminary, severely criticizing Rev. Kim Jae-jun’s line of theology (Kim Y. 1956, 88-89). A committee, organized mainly by the members of Gyeonggi Presbytery in March 1948 to resolve this theological dispute (PROK 1992, 366), independently founded the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in June of the same year and invited Rev. Bak Hyeong-ryong as its first principal. Through the 35th General Assembly held in April 1949, the Presbyterian Theological Seminary was placed under direct management of the General Assembly. Despite violent opposition from Josin Group, the 36th General Assembly,¹ held in Busan in May of 1951 because of the outbreak of Korean War, passed a resolution to build a new theological seminary of the General Assembly, cancelling-revoking its recognition of the Joseon Theological Seminary and Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The faculty of the new theological seminary (the General Assembly Seminary) under the General Assembly’s management, which had been founded in Daegu in September of the same year, was the same as that of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary and consisted entirely of people from North Korea (Kim Y. 1956, 228-253).

Consequently, not only did *wolnamin* come to dominate the largest and key presbytery in the Presbyterian Church in South Korea, but it also came to control the theological seminary, one

¹ The moderator (president) of the General Assembly at the time, Rev. Kwon Yeon-ho, who was originally from Gyeongsangbuk-do province, was a member of the NKRPC. He had worked mostly in Pyeonganbuk-do province and Manchuria before coming over to South Korea.

of the key organs of religious power and the nucleus of ideological production. The Korean War also helped to boost the ascendancy of the clergy of Northwest origin over Josin Group and Gyeonggi Presbytery. After the recapture of Seoul, the so-called Dogang (“river-crossing”) faction, [including most ministers](#) from the [Northwest](#) group, utilized the extreme anti-communist atmosphere of the time effectively for the purpose of gaining religious power by implicating the so-called Jaegyeong (“stayed in Seoul”) faction—whose members included the key figures of Josin Group (such as Kim Jae-jun, Jo Hyang-rok, Jeong Dae-wi, and so on) and the Seoul wing of the Gyeonggi Presbytery (Yu Ho-jun, Choe Geo-duk, Kim Jong-dae, and so on)—of committing treachery (Jang 1983, 211-212, 275-280). Therefore, with the secession of the Josin Group, *wolnamin*’s influence in Gyeonggi Presbytery became even more absolute. Although there was only one [moderator](#) of North Korean origin among the five [moderators](#) of the Gyeonggi Presbytery between 1945 and 1953, all seven [moderators](#) of the presbytery between 1953 and 1963 were members of the [NKRPC](#).

The 37th General Assembly of Korean Presbyterian Church in April of 1952 was another occasion in which North Korean believers became institutionally subsumed into the South Korean [Church](#). Through the enactment of the “emergency measure law,” the 37th General Assembly recognized the relocation of the North Korean presbyteries to the South and decided to accept into the South Korean [Church](#) some tens of thousands of laity members and some four hundred clergy who had come down from the North after the recapture of Seoul (28 September 1950). As clearly pointed out by Rev. Kim Yang-seon (1956, 254-255), the measure was also part of the preliminary maneuvering to organize a powerful conservative camp to remove liberal theology. One of the most controversial issues of [the Assembly](#) had to do with how to determine the number and rights of the representatives of the North Korean presbyteries since the power relations between progressives and conservatives, as well as between members of South Korean origin and those of North Korean origin, would be deeply affected by the decision. The tentative proposal for the “emergency measure law” drafted just before the General Assembly proposed that the total number of representatives for the *wolnamin* be limited to ten presbyteries and 22 persons and that the ministers ordained in South Korea be excluded from consideration and limit their capacity as speakers at the General Assembly; however, it was followed by a strong opposition from *wolnam* Protestants.

The Pyeongyang Presbytery, the largest of the North Korean presbyteries, decided to

defer its participation in the General Assembly and passed a resolution to advise on organizing a coalition of presbyteries of five North Korean provinces. At the same time, representatives from North Korean presbyteries decided to participate in the General Assembly with the same rights for and number of representatives as in the 31st General Assembly, the last one before liberation, and made a request to the General Assembly for their inclusion (Kim Y. 1956, 255-256). Despite opposition from those who feared the expansion of *wolnamin*'s influence, the requests of the clergy who came from North Korea, including the rights (full membership with administrative power) and number (10 presbyteries and 75 persons)² of representatives were eventually granted (Kim Y. 1956, 258-259).

It is from this historical context that the original system of “**non-regional presbytery**” (*mujkiyeok nohoe*) variously known by the prefixes “exiled presbytery,” “refugee presbytery,” and “North Korean presbytery,” came to be. With the inauguration of a non-regional presbytery system, the northwest Presbyterians, who had long enjoyed **the status of dominant group**, which was-has been built on their **overwhelming number of believers and churches** from before the division of the peninsula, were able to maintain a similar degree of religious **power**. **By the 1952-1953 period, Wolnam Presbyterians accounted for 40 percent (in terms of representatives) of the authority in the General Assembly.** Considering that the proportion of *wolnamin* in the South Korean Presbyterian Church at the time was about 25 percent, as well as the deeply rooted characteristics of the Korean Protestant Church that created regional-based sectarian theology and a permanent structure of regional hostility led by its artificial partition of areas for evangelism, it is no exaggeration to conclude **that those wielding a40 percent share of the General Assembly representatives also held the religious power.** Moreover, towards the end of the Korean War, there was a boom in the construction of new churches. By August 1956, there were over 300 newly built Presbyterian churches in Seoul, over 100 churches in both Busan and Daegu, and over 1,200 churches nationwide. It is said that the boom was led by *wolnamin* (Kim Y. 1956, 100-101). By registering under the non-regional presbyteries these churches newly built by clergy of North Korean origin, it provided these non-regional presbyteries with not only a strong material foundation, but also guaranteed institutional durability. Furthermore, as these churches accepted

² The ten presbyteries consisted of Anju, Yongcheon, Pyeongdong, Pyeongyang, Pyeongbuk, Pyeongseo, Hamnam, Hwanghae, Hwangnam, and Hwangdong. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the three presbyteries of Hamgyeong region have been combined into one, and all four presbyteries in Manchuria were abolished, plainly reflecting the pattern of division within the Presbyterian Church between the northwest faction and Gwanbuk faction.

more congregations of South Korean origin in the process of expansion, non-regional presbyteries secured an even greater scope of influence.

As if to reflect the reality, in the General Assembly in 1953, the first session since the complete induction of *wolnamin* into the South Korean Presbyterian Church, Revs. Myeong Sin-Hong and Han Gyeong-jik, both members of the NKRPC and of Pyeongannam-do province, were elected respectively as **moderator and vice-moderator** of the General Assembly, while Rev. Yi Seung-gil, originally from Hwanghae-do province, became the director of the Judicial Board and ended the dispute that lasted for seven years by discharging Rev. Kim Jae-jun of the Josin Group from his post as minister. A similar trend is found in the regional distribution in the chronicle of **moderators** of the General Assembly. From 1946 to 1949, when the Southern Division General Assembly was organized, all three **moderators** of the General Assembly were of Gyeongsang origin and their location of ministry was also South Korea. However, from the 1950s when the members of the NKRPC began to rise in prominence, to 1958, the year before the split between the Hapdong and Tonghap orders, of the eight **moderators** of the General Assembly, three were members of the NKRPC and one had a ministry in China before returning to Korea after liberation. As for the remaining **moderators**, one was from the Gyeonggi region, two from the Gyeongsang region, and one from the Jeolla region.

The Tonghap-Hapdong Division and the Internal Division of Northwest Faction toward the End of 1950s

After undergoing **division in** the latter-half of 1940s and once again in early 1950s, the Presbyterian Church in South Korea was divided into three **denominations (or religious orders)**. Those from the Gwanbuk area among those from North Korea gathered under Gijang order, those from the northwest under Yejang order, and almost no one joined Kosin order. Toward the end of 1950s, Yejang, the largest of the three orders, undergoes a great division. It was a division of Tonghap and Hapdong **groups within Yejang order**, which accordingly, led to another division among the *wolnamin* Presbyterians. Looking at only the *wolnamin* members, if the division in the early 1950s was clearly along the regional line between the Northwest and Northeast and, in terms of number, between the absolute majority and minority factions, this time it occurred, for

the clergy at least, within the northwest group, between those from Hwanghae region and those from Pyeongan region, and the two factions were on a parity in terms of their numbers.

The clergy from Hwanghae region joined the Hapdong order in overwhelming numbers. Of the 139 ministers belonging to the Hwanghae Presbytery, 124 (89.2 percent) joined the Hapdong order, 12 Tonghap order, and 3 Holiness Church (See the list in Hwanghae Presbytery 1971, 301-308). In an official statement issued by the Hapdong Group at the time of division, it shows the distribution of representation by presbytery that participated in the General Assembly as convened by the Tonghap Group. Looking at only presbyteries from North Korea, no representatives from Hwangnam, Hwanghae, and Hambuk attended; the majority of Hwangdong, Pyeongyang, Pyeongdong, and Yongcheon presbyteries were no shows; and only the representatives of Pyeongseo, Pyeongbuk, and Anju presbyteries were all present (Kim D. 1985, 32). According to “Explaining the Tradition of Religious Order” issued by Rev. Kang Sin-myeong of the Tonghap order, however, the only North Korean presbyteries that supported the Hapdong order were Hwanghae and Hamgyeong (*Gidok gongbo*, 25 November 1963). Despite the contrary claims, it seems certain that there was remarkable support for the Hapdong order among the clergy from Hwanghae-do.

It is widely known that the [faction](#)’s preference or support for the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was the determining factor in the choice to support either the Hapdong order or the Tonghap order. However, despite the controversy surrounding [the so-called “WCC’s pro-Communist position”](#) and the resulting clamor, there were no meaningful differences in the religious and political positions between the two opposing factions that had once joined forces against the Gijang order. Moreover, since the Northwest group’s conservatism is a widely acknowledged fact even within the Yejang order, we need to look for other causes to adequately explain the relatively consistent choices made by the clergy from Hwanghae region and some inconsistency in the behavior of the clergy from Pyeongan region.

One possible explanation, however imperfect, suggests that the schisms may have to do with the differences in the time when each clergyman left North Korea for South Korea. According to Taek Jeong-Eon (1987, 10-12), when the [Chosun Christian Federation](#) was formed in spring of 1946 in North Korea, the majority of the clergy of Hamgyeong region joined while the clergy of Hwanghae and Pyeongan regions were divided into “mouthpiece faction”

(*eoyongpa*), “rejection faction” (*geobupa*), and the more realistic “inevitable faction” (*bulgapipa*) and those of the “rejection faction” were [the earliest group](#) who headed for South Korea. From 1949, the clergy who had not joined the [Federation](#) lost their presbytery membership and were prohibited from serving as ministers, so almost all of the clergy in North Korea had joined the [Federation](#) by 1950. Therefore, when other clergymen came down to South Korea after the outbreak of war, those who had come before gave them a cold reception. On the other hand, Protestants in Pyeongan region, who had already been extremely politicized, clashed violently with the Communists from early on, and the politically active ones among the Protestant leaders in the region had already left for South Korea by the time the [Federation](#) was formed and commanded significant religious [power](#) in South Korea even before the Korean War. Moreover, the systematization of the [Federation](#) first began in Hwanghae region and then in Hamgyeong, and lastly Pyeongan because of a strong opposition from Pyeongan region (Jang 1983, 59). All things considered, the clergy in Pyeongan region had relatively more opportunities and possibilities than the clergy in Hwanghae to leave for South Korea without the dishonor of joining the [Federation](#) prior to 1949, when joining the [Federation](#) became inevitable.

That a significant number of the clergy from Hwanghae who set out for South Korea after the outbreak of war got a cold reception by the clergy from Pyeongan who had left for South Korea before the war and had rose in prominence as a religious authority with the organization of the [NKRPC](#) strongly illustrates the potential for the former group to be marginalized within the northwest group. Considering this, the majority of the clergy who joined the Hapdong order were probably those from Hwanghae who came to South Korea after the outbreak of war, while a small portion consisted of the clergy from Pyeongan who also came to the South after the outbreak of war. A much smaller portion from Hamgyeong were anti-Gijang. On the other hand, the clergy who joined the Tonghap order were mostly those from Pyeongan who left for South Korea immediately after liberation and some from Hwanghae. The fact that all the presbyteries in the Seoul and Gyeonggi area, where the early *wolanmin* powers were dominant, joined the Tonghap order also supports this reasoning.

[The Wolnamin in Transition](#)

The Crisis and Survival of Non-regional Presbyteries

With the Tonghap-Hapdong division in Yejang order, combined with the division along the Pyeongan-Hwanghae line among the *wolnam* Presbyterians, it became almost inevitable that the influence of *wolnam* Presbyterians shrank. The rights of the non-regional presbyteries were reconfirmed with the decision of the 42nd General Assembly of Korean Presbyterian Church held in 1957 to maintain the state of emergency until the non-regional presbyteries voluntarily merged with regional ones (*Christian*, 21 August 1961). Even though the North Korean Ministers Association was organized in January 1960, following the suspension of the NKRCP after the Korean War, it became difficult for the Tonghap to maintain even the non-regional Hwanghae presbyteries, and for the Hapdong the non-regional Pyeongan presbyteries after the division in the religious order. Such circumstances had some discernible impact on the General Assemblies of both Tonghap and Hapdong orders in 1963, just after the division. In the case of the Tonghap order, of the 32 presbyteries, the number of North Korean presbyteries was reduced to nine (Hwangdong, Hwanghae, Pyeongseo, Pyeongyang, Anju, Pyeongdong, Pyeongbuk, Yongcheon, and Hamnam). After the division, one Hwanghae presbytery was lost, and the proportion of its representatives was only 11.8 percent, that is, 21 out of 195 (excluding missionary representatives).³ As for the Hapdong order, of the 29 presbyteries, the number of North Korean presbyteries shrank to six (Hwanghae, Hwangnam, Hwangdong, Pyeongyang, Pyeongbuk, and Hamnam), losing four presbyteries in Pyongyang region. Its representatives made up 9.5 percent of the whole, that is, 16 out of 168 (See the Society of Korean Christian Historical Records Collection 1964, 124-125, 157).

Beginning in the latter 1960s, a movement led by church leaders of South Korean origin to abolish the non-regional presbytery system itself was in full swing. It was no doubt an effort to check the religious power of those from North Korea. The General Assembly of Tonghap order, partially accepting the demand to abolish the non-regional presbytery system, began to undertake efforts to revise its constitution in 1968 (during the 53rd General Assembly), while organizing an advisory committee after deciding, in the 54th General Assembly the following year, to advise the non-regional presbyteries in Busan and Seoul area to voluntarily join regional presbyteries

³ Following the abolishment of Hwangnam Presbytery, Hwangdong Presbytery was closed after 1963, followed by Hwanghae Presbytery in 1972, which resulted in a complete disappearance of Hwanghae presbyteries in the Tonghap order.

(*Christian Shinmun*, 22 November 1969).

According to the new constitution proclaimed in the 1971 General Assembly, 15 churches, 15 ministers, and 2,000 baptized Christians were required to form a presbytery (An Kwang-Kuk 1972, 16). As a result, existing presbyteries rapidly dissolves or merged, and the following year, the number shrank from 34 to 28, and 4 out of the 6 dissolved or merged presbyteries were North Korean. More specifically, Pyeongyang, Pyeongseo, and Anju merged and became Pyeongyang Presbytery, Pyeongbuk and Pyeongdong combined to become the Pyeongdong Presbytery, and the Hwanghae Presbytery was dissolved. For reference, the numbers for church members in North Korean presbyteries in the Tonghap order are listed in Table 1 below. The table shows that, between the end of 1960s and early 1970s, the proportion of North Korean presbyteries within the Tonghap order has been reduced to 5.5 to 6.8 percent in terms of congregation size, 4.4 to 5.2 percent in the number of churches, and 10.3 to 13.1 percent in the number of ministers.

Table 1. Changes in the Total Number of Church Members in Non-regional Presbyteries in the Tonghap Order between the End of 1960s and Early 1070s

* number of church members (number of churches / number of ministers)

	Total # for the Order	Total for North Korean Presbyteries	Hwanghae	Pyeongyang	Pyeongseo	Anju	Pyeongdong	Pyeongbuk	Yongcheo n	Hamnam
End of 1969	464,470 (2,281/1,204)	31,470 (100/124)	850 (5/5)	12,613 (29/28)	2,167 (8/14)	2,863 (14/11)	3,350 (8/20)	2,509 (6/9)	2,771 (12/16)	4,347 (18/21)
End of 1971	584,090 (2,486/1,263)	31,922 (130/166)	949 (5/5)	5,282 (32/52)	3,548 (10/20)	3,128 (17/21)	2,424 (16/16)	3,254 (9/13)	6,571 (23/21)	6,766 (18/18)
September 1972	525,698 (2,455/1,173)	34,412 (123/133)			11,958 (59/65)		9,117 (23/27)		6,571 (23/23)	6,766 (18/18)

* Source: For the statistics at the end of 1969 and the end of 1971, see KNCC (1970, 512-513; 1972, 267), respectively, and for 1972 statistics, refer to An (1972, 17).

The post-1960s movement to abolish non-regional presbyteries stirred energetic counteraction from the non-regional presbyteries. It was the non-regional presbyteries' persistent opposition to

the dissolution of churches that led to the concessionary decision in the early 1970s to dissolve or merge only those presbyteries that had not met the criteria mentioned above. For example, the Congress of North Korean Clergy held in November 1969, using as their model the Northwest Conference organized by the northwest group within the Hapdong order, decided to organize a League of Presbyteries of Five North Korean Provinces (*Christian Shinmun*, 22 November 1969), while the Pyeongbuk Presbytery in its meeting in March 1970 decided to forge ahead even if the General Assembly adopted the dissolution of North Korean presbyteries (*Christian Shinmun*, 28 March 1970). As the movement grew, the Friendly League of North Korean Clergy in Seoul was established in July 1972, led by the Association of North Korean Clergy in Seoul of the Tonghap order, the Association of the Clergy of Pyeongyang Presbytery of the Hapdong order, as well as the Northwest Conference. It was developed into the Seoul North Korean Clerical Alliance with 400 members in October. The two sides came together in solidarity and became one unified organization 13 years after the division (*Hanguk gidok gongbo*, 1 July; 5 August; 21 October, and 4 November 1972). The Seoul North Korean Clerical Alliance held a prayer meeting at Yongnak Church, with some 600 members out of 800 in attendance, and discussed the mission strategy for North Korea and the very sensitive issue of the reunification of the Hapdong-Tonghap orders (*Hanguk gidok gongbo*, 13 January 1973). Turning the age-old rivalry between the Hapdong and Tonghap orders to their advantage, the North Korean clergy from both sides built a joint front, based on which they pressured the leaders of the respective orders by hinting their possible secession from the orders, thereby effectively incapacitating the movement to abolish non-regional presbyteries.

In Hapdong order's case, its movement to dissolve the non-regional presbyteries in the 1960s resulted instead in a temporary consolidation of the non-regional presbyteries. The 52nd General Assembly in 1967 silenced further attack on non-regional presbyteries by deciding to not discuss the issues of presbyteries in exile, whether or not they voluntarily joined regional presbyteries or waited for reunification of the peninsula (National Elder's Association 1976, 30-31). Moreover, the 53rd General Assembly, held in 1968, adopted the "conference system" and decided to form five conferences, including North Korean region. Consequently, in June 1969, seven North Korean presbyteries made an alliance and officially formed the Northwest Conference (Hwanghae Prebytery 1971, 177-178). The number of conferences subsequently increased to six with the addition of the Jeolla Conference; however with internal division within

the Jeolla Conference and opposition from the Seoul area, the conference system was abolished at the 57th General Assembly in 1972, only three years after it was introduced (Kim D. 1985, 65). Although the attempts to abolish non-regional presbyteries or integrate them into existing regional presbyteries persisted even after the 1970s, the only meaningful outcome of the 30-year effort to abolish non-regional presbyteries is that the existing resolution remains intact (the resolution of the 52nd General Assembly in 1967), while non-regional presbyteries try their best to join regional presbyteries (the 68th General Assembly in 1983), and no regional presbyteries can join non-regional presbyteries (the 88th General Assembly in 2003) (See *Records on the General Assembly Resolutions, 2002*).

In fact, the number of non-regional presbyteries increased even more after the 1970s. The number of non-regional presbyteries increased to ten towards the end of 1970s with the addition of Yongcheon and Hambuk Presbyteries and the Pyeongyang Presbytery's division into east and west in 1979, and seven more were added since [the 1980s](#), bringing the total number of non-regional presbyteries under the [Council of Northwest Presbyteries](#) to 17 as of May 2004. Looking at only the figures for the non-regional presbyteries, there were six (20.7 percent) out of 29 Hapdong order presbyteries of in 1963, and there has been almost no change in terms of proportion from then until the present day, with 17 non-regional presbyteries (18.3 percent) out of 93 Hapdong order presbyteries. From the 1990s forward, there has been a repeated attempt [almost](#) every year at the General Assembly, led by the non-regional presbyteries, to restore the conference system. Since the end of the 1970s, the position of the North Korean clergy in the Hapdong order appears to have become more consolidated amidst the internal division between the Yeongnam and Honam regions that arose within the order.

Both the congregation and influence of the non-regional presbyteries in the Tonghap order expanded even more after the 1970s. Unlike the Hapdong order, the number of non-regional presbyteries has remained unchanged since it was reduced to four in the early 1970s. As shown above, the non-regional presbyteries constituted 5.5 to 6.8 percent in the number of [church membership](#), 4.4 to 5.2 percent in churches, and 10.3 to 13.1 in ministers between end of 1960s and early 1970s. The four non-regional presbyteries had 124,357 (8.9 percent) church members, 344 (8.4 percent) churches, and 666 [ministers \(10.5 percent\)](#) in December 1984 (Christian Literature Press 1986, 666); and the number increased to 151,958 for church members (9.3 percent), 369 churches (8.2 percent), and 905 [ministers \(12.1 percent\)](#) in December 1988

(Christian Literature Press 1989, 140). There was a remarkable growth in the proportion of both the number of church members and churches, even as the proportion of ministers remained more or less the same.

Considering that the proportion of the North Korean-born population versus the entire South Korean population has been sharply declining, (as shown in the population and housing census report), reaching less than 1 percent in the 1990s,⁴ it is remarkable that not only the proportion of North Korean presbyteries, congregations, churches, and clergy, as well as the influence of North Korean clergy in South Korea, continued to remain at high levels, but also that they are on the rise. What is even more remarkable is that the numbers have not accounted for the North Korean ministers who have joined regional presbyteries. Granted that not all members of non-regional presbyteries are from North Korea and that many of the churches, in the process of expansion, have absorbed many South Korean congregations, we may conclude that the numbers are the result of the magic of the extraordinary system called “non-regional presbyteries.”

The Gradual Restructuring of Regional Opposition: The Cases of The Hapdong and Gijang Orders

Towards the end of the 1970s, there was yet another division within the Hapdong order. This division was facilitated by confrontation between the Yeongnam (the majority) and Honam (the minority) groups. Consequently, the Northwest group underwent yet another division. A majority of North Korean clergy belonged to the Yeongnam majority, but quite a few also supported the Honam minority. As mentioned above, one-half of the Fellowship of Faith, a group that had been organized by 60 seminary students who withdrew from the Joseon Theological Seminary in 1947, were comprised of people from the Honam region, with people from North Korea comprising the other half. The NAE, in whose inauguration the Fellowship of Faith played a central role, had become a non-mainstream power in the Hapdong order. Particularly, since the 1971 General Assembly, in which the Yeongnam power emerged as the dominant religious authority (Kim D.

⁴ In 1990, the number of people in the “other” category, foreign-born and North Korean-born residents, was 590,863, constituting 1.38 percent of the total population (42,708,447). The proportion of North Korean-born population was 0.92 percent (403,515 out of 43,835,532) in 1995, and 0.77 percent (355,156 out of 45,985,289) in 2000. Refer to the relevant year at the website of Korean National Statistical Office (KOSIS: Population Census) at

1985, 66), the power struggle between Yeongnam and Honam began to manifest salient regionalist characteristics⁵ and eventually led to another large-scale division towards the end of 1970s.

The implications in the 1979 division in the Hapdong order are various and, in some respects, contradictory. First, the situation shows that the regionalism between Yeongnam and Honam prevalent in South Korean society has also had a powerful impact on the Protestant Church, and that the dominant structure of the regional split within the Protestant Church is shifting from a south-north to east-west opposition. Second, the division within the Hapdong order proves, rather paradoxically, what a powerful presence the North Korean Presbyterians had in the South Korea church. As part of the state-led economic development process, regionalism and regional differentiation between Yeongnam and Honam began to form in the mid-1960s; however, it was the powerful presence of the North Korean group within the Presbyterian Church, acting as a kind of restraint, that delayed these conflicts from coming to the fore by almost ten years.

Additionally, when some clergy members of North Korean origin, who had joined the non-mainstream group during the division, returned to the mainstream group, they consolidated their influence in the Hapdong order once again. Not only did the non-regional presbyteries retain their status, but their number increased sharply after the division in the order. As seen above, the number of non-regional presbyteries increased by only four in the 20-year period between 1963 and 1983 after the Tonghap-Hapdong division; however, in the subsequent 20-year period, from 1984 forward, seven more non-regional presbyteries formed (In the case of Tonghap order, without additional division in the order, five non-regional presbyteries have been abolished during the past forty years). On the other hand, because of the secession of the *wolnamin*, which had joined the non-mainstream groups at the time of division in the order, the non-regional presbytery system itself either collapsed or remained only in name within the orders founded by such non-mainstream groups as the [Yejang Reformed \(RPCK\)](#) or [Hapdong Orthodoxy \(PGAK\)](#)

<http://kosis.nso.go.kr>.

⁵ Designated by the Honam clergy as the key figure of Yeongnam power, Rev. Yi Yeong-su is said to have made a plea for Yeongnam's continued support at a meeting of Yeongnam representatives in February 1976 (Kim D. 1985, 70). Around the venue for the 1979 General Assembly at which the two sides were split, there was a large amount of fliers and pamphlets that read: "There's no person of integrity to lead the General Assembly among Jeolla people, who are scheming to divide the General Assembly," or "The disgrace of losing to Jeolla is a disgrace to Yeongnam people" (*Christian Shinmun*, 6 October 1979).

[orders](#). The presence of the North Korean group, which belongs to neither Yeongnam nor Honam, but could possibly tilt the balance of power between the two [groups](#), fanned competition between the two sides to gain their alliance, and it was the North Korean group that benefited the most in the process.

Lastly, it is important to note that the Yeongnam-Honam conflict came to the fore as a “peculiar phenomenon” in the Hapdong order. What, then, is the main factor that led to the eye-opening expansion of Yeongnam group’s influence within the Hapdong order? To ascertain this, it is necessary to turn our attention to the special circumstances in which the Hapdong order found itself after the split from Tonghap and the nature of the [mission](#) strategy exacted by the circumstance. The most serious challenge faced by Hapdong order after its split from Tonghap was that of financial pressure. Except for the small-scale temporary financial assistance from the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) and other foreign missionary groups linked to the group, all main missionary groups based in Korea supported Tonghap, and discontinued all forms of aid to Hapdong. The operation of organizations that could boost [social](#) credibility, such as schools and hospitals, was impossible; but even more crucially, raising funds to operate the General Assembly and presbyteries, in particular the operational expenses for the theological seminary, was the most pressing issue. The financial difficulties of small churches in farming areas also often surfaced as a pressing issue. The official measures for these issues included that of “100 million won fund-raising” and the “tithe offering system,” as well as forming sisterhood between fledgling churches in rural areas with churches in big cities. But an equally important strategy was the building of cohesive relationships with the state, as well as with the capitalist industrialists.

In June 1961, the board of directors of Hapdong order’s Presbyterian [Theological Seminary](#) selected 26 committee members for establishing financial independence in operating the seminary, and formed a committee for finance and operation of Presbyterian [Theological Seminary](#) among the entrepreneur elders in the Daegu and Busan area. Moreover, in July 1963, the National Society of Christian Entrepreneurs was organized with only people from the Hapdong order, and most members of the society were also members in the committee for finance and operation of Presbyterian [Theological Seminary](#). In 1971, when the mainstream and non-mainstream were beginning to form within the Hapdong order, the chair of the board of directors for the seminary was Elder Baek Nam-jo of Gyeongnam and the [vice-chair](#) Elder Kim

In-deuk of Gyeongnam. In other words, entrepreneurs from Yeongnam now dominated the seminary, the main organ that produced religious ideologies. With Elders Baek Nam-jo and Kim In-deuk as the medium, a close relationship began to form between Hapdong and the state. Using introductory loans to expand the seminary operated by the General Assembly, Elder Baek Nam-jo launched a campaign to support the amendment to the nation's Constitution to allow a third presidential term. He targeted the 54th General Assembly of 1969, and succeeded in persuading the General Assembly to issue a declaration in support for the Constitutional revision (Kim D. 1985, 66). As the president (1974-1979) of the [Christian Businessmen's Committee of Korea \(CBMCK\)](#), Elder Kim In-deuk of Byucksan Group, which grew rapidly came under suspicion of having been in collusion with Kim Jong-pil and Pak Chung-hee in the early 1970s, led a national breakfast prayer meeting, a breakfast prayer meeting for the Prime Minister, and a prayer for the nation as a response the incident in Indochina. He also organized a Conference of Korean Christian Leaders, an alliance of conservative religious order leaders, and campaigned against the withdrawal of U.S. military in South Korea.⁶ In short, as a way out of the crises, the leaders of Hapdong order, faced with both financial and [social credibility](#) crises after its split from Tonghap, brought wealthy entrepreneurs in Yeongnam to the core of its [power structure](#), and used them as a medium to consolidate Hapdong's ties with the state. In this process, the influence of Yeongnam group in Hapdong gradually grew.

In contrast to the end of the 1970s, when Hapdong began to be increasingly identified with Yeongnam after a massive exit of Honam leaders during the internal division, it was the Honam group that gradually consolidated its power within Gijang order in the early 1950s when *wolnamin* from Hamgyeong region led the opposition against [Yejang Group](#).⁷ In 1962, of the total members of Gijang who had been baptized, Jeolla residents made up 36.1 percent and Gyeongsang 12.3 percent. Of the entire Gijang congregation, Jeolla constituted 46.5 percent in 1969 (23.7 percent of entire Protestant population), 43.1 percent in 1972 (21.5 percent of entire Protestant population), and 38.7 percent in 1985 (14.8 percent of the entire Protestant population).

⁶ [Seoul Economic Daily](#) (1991, 277-283); O Gyeong-hwan (1988, 107). With the help of his younger brother Kim In-dong, Kim In-deuk also formed close ties with other powerful figures in the Pak Chung-hee regime, such as Kim Gye-won and Kim Jong-gyu. Because of his particularly close ties with Kim Jong-pil, Kim In-deuk was investigated by the government intelligence organization under suspicion of conspiring to place Kim Jong-pil in the presidency (Kim J. 1990, 169).

⁷ With the division between Yejang and Gijang, one-fourth of the South Korean Presbyterian Church joined the Gijang order, and the division in the Jeolla area continued (Brown 1984, 217). This shows that, from the beginning, the Gijang order had been organized primarily by those from Hamgyeong and Jeolla regions.

in 1984), showing a slow downward slope overall while still constituting the highest proportion of believers in the Korean Protestant Church. In the same period between 1969 and 1985, the proportion of Gyeongsang members within the Gijang order declined sharply from 13.6 percent to 7.7 percent. The series of statistical numbers clearly illustrate the contrast difference between Yeongnam and Honam regions in the Gijang order. Similarly, according to the places of origin distribution for the past moderators of Gijang, of the 24 (there were actually 26, but 2 were cases with unknown places origin) moderators since the order's inauguration in 1954 until 1979, nine were from North Korea (6 Hamgyeong, 1 Hwanghae, 1 Pyeongan, 1 Manchuria), 8 from Jeolla, 4 from Chungcheong, 2 from Gyeongsang, and 1 from Gyeonggi. The figures once again show the overwhelming dominance of those of Jeolla origin; however, the nine moderators of North Korean origin were mostly active in connection with the theological seminary, KNCC-related organizations, the Christian student movement, industrial mission, and so on. In other words, they were the so-called “Gikwan moksa” (institution-based ministers) whose interaction with the church congregation was very limited. Therefore, contrary to the Hapdong order, the Gijang order, with the “South Koreanization” of its religious power, was building an internal structure that would show more affinity to the Honam group were the conflict between Youngnam and Honam to worsen.

The Inauguration of the Christian Council of Korea and the Revitalization of North Korea Missions in the Post-1990s Period

As seen above, the clergy from North Korea have rose to prominence as a church authority in the early 1950s. Between the 1960s and 1980s, the North Koreans in the Presbyterian Church faced many challenges—the persistent attack on non-regional presbyteries, which was the base of power for the North Korean clergy, and the clash and division between Yeongnam and Honam due to Yeongnam group’s dominance in the Hapdong order. Yet, they seemed to have met the challenges well and defended their vested interests with non-regional presbyteries and *wolnamin* churches as their key support base. Then, what is to be expected after the 1990s?

First, we might consider the relationship between the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) and the *wolnamin*, since the CCK is one of the most important sources of changes in the Korean Protestant Church in the 1990s. In February 1988, the National Council of Churches of Korea

(KNCC) issued a historic declaration “The Declaration on National Reunification and Peace” that sums up the past ten years of reunification efforts and suggests a new direction for the Christian-led reunification movement. However, the Tonghap order, the largest order in the KNCC, decided in the General Assembly held later in the year to withhold its support for the declaration for one year, and the groups that lobbied for the decision were non-regional presbyteries and the presbyteries with strong North Korean influence (Kim S. 1989, 76-78). However, the backlash of the progressive KNCC’s declaration on reunification had grave consequences. It has to do with the subsequent movement to organize a new organization in opposition to the KNCC. In early January 1989, just several months after the Tonghap’s General Assembly, a meeting of Protestant elders was held at the home of Rev. Han Gyeong-jik, a God-father figure of the North Korean clergy. At the meeting, the elders unanimously concluded that “the pro-Communist KNCC cannot represent Korean Protestant Church.” It is noteworthy that, among the ten (eight ministers and two elders), at the meeting, nine were from North Korea and all were members of most key Protestant [denominations](#), including Tonghap and the progressive Gijang. Following the agreement of the elders in January, a larger meeting was held in Yuseong in February, and it was in this meeting where the preparation committee for the organization of CCK was formed. Of the 14 [Protestant leaders](#) who attended the meeting, eight were of North Korean origin, and both the head and the secretary of the preparation committee were of North Korean origin from the Tonghap order. In April of the same year, Youngnak Church, the symbol of the “*wolnamin* church,” hosted the “[Initiation General Assembly](#).” At the time of CCK’s founding towards the end of December, 36 orders and six organizations joined CCK (Kim S. 2002, 86), which far surpassed KNCC’s six-order membership. The North Korean clergy played a decisive role in the early formation of the CCK, the biggest and conservative Protestant group representing Korean Protestant Church. In a similar vein, it is noteworthy that since the inauguration of CCK in 1989, with [the exception](#) of the first, presidents from the second to fifth (1992 to 1997) have been all of North Korean origin. Moreover, since Rev. Kil Ja-yeon became the president of the CCK in December 2002, the CCK [led consecutive](#) large-scale political rallies with tens and hundreds of thousands Protestants, instantly rising to prominence as a group representing the Korean right wing. Originally from Pyeongannam-do prounvince, Rev. Kil is minister of a mega-church of Eastern Pyeongyang presbytery and has served as the [moderator](#) of the Hapdong [order’ General Assembly](#).

On the other hand, the North Korean mission, along with the [overseas](#) mission, which began in 1990s, has become a new way out of the chronic stagnation that has gripped the Korean Protestant Church since the end of 1980s, and also has been a new source of vitality for increasingly marginalized and aging North Korean Christians. The revitalization or reorganization of the alliance of non-regional presbyteries towards the end of 1980s can be understood in the same context. The only activities of the Council of North Korean Presbyteries, organized towards the end of 1970s with-in the Tonghap order, had been the two annual events: a prayer for remembrance of Korean War and reunification held in June, and a candlelight service at the Cross Tower, which is held in December. However, beginning from the mid 1990s, the Council became visibly more active with its campaign to aid North Koreans, [began](#) a North Korean Presbyteries missions [rally in](#) 1998, and continued with the launching of the North Korean Regional Conference in 2002. The non-regional presbyteries of the Hapdong order, with the organization of the [Council of Northwest Presbyteries in the late 1980s](#), is currently leading the North Korean missions' effort within the order and has rose to prominence as the most cohesive group among the presbyteries in the Hapdong order.

Conclusion

This paper has focused primarily on the persistence and resilient strength of Korean Protestant conservatism, and more specifically on how those who came to South Korea from the North contributed to the political and social conservatism of the Protestant Church in Korea, looking at the case of the Presbyterian denomination. In particular, the paper presented the hypothetical proposition, based on the premise that the *wolnamin* group was one of the most conservative powers in Korean society and the church, that as the influence of North Korean clergy and congregation in post-liberation South Korea Protestant church becomes more prolonged and more resilient, the political and social conservatism of the Protestant Church will continue to gain strength. Has the proposition been proved?

Conclusively, the Protestant groups of North Korean origins can be said to have been successful in seizing the power and influence to attain their long-term interests within the South Korean church. As for what gave rise to such power, we can first point to the fact that the size of

the group itself was colossal. Second, after crossing over to South, they were able to successfully reorganize within the South Korean society and church, enabled by their incredible cohesion. Many *wonlamin* churches were built around major cities, and with their churches, schools, dormitories, and social welfare facilities, they were able to command a magnificent appearance similar to that of a “General Assembly in exile.” Third, just after liberation, when the South Korean Christian community became seriously divided on issues such as reckoning pro-Japanese groups and theological orientation, the clergy from North Korea, by virtue of their relative promptness in choosing sides, were able to not only increase their influence but also become part of the center of religious **power structure** by helping the group they supported to emerge as the victor in the conflict. **The division into the Kosin and Josin groups** is one such example, and the division within Hapdong order towards the end of 1970s, which evidenced strong regionalism between Yeongnam and Honam regions, paradoxically, resulted in consolidating the North Korean clergy’s influence. Fourth, the *wolnamin* group was able to successfully rebuild its relationships with American missionaries in South Korea and became the primary beneficiary of the abundant financial assistance from the American churches. Rev. Han Gyeong-jik and the **North Korean Refugee Presbyterian Commissioners (NKRPC)**, who both played a key role in laying the bridge between the American churches and the *wolnamin* community, made decisive contributions in consolidating the religious **power** of the *wolnamin* clergy in South Korea.

Fifth, the non-regional (exiled) **presbytery system**, along with the numerous churches for the *wolnamin* community, guaranteed the *wolnamin* clergy a stable share of religious **power** that transcended their actual capacity. Sixth, the *wolnamin* clergy and the community were able to display an incredible degree of solidarity within and when necessary, transcending the **denominational boundaries**. Such a degree of solidarity was used as an effective weapon against the individual orders or factions that challenged the ecclesiastical authority of those from North Korea; it also helped create the conservative Christian alliance organization called the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), which surpassed the boundary of individual order, towards the end of 1980s.

With the passage of time, however, the *wolnamin* presence at the center of South Korean society has been on the wane and its influence declining. North Korean Christian congregations in South Korea also face the aging of their population and a subsequent decline in numbers. In addition, there have other factors that threatened the influence of *wolnamin*. In the Presbyterian

denominations, for example, there were the internal divisions within the North Korean community, such as between people from northwest area and northeast (Gijang-Yejang division) and between Pyeongan and Hwanghae (Tonhap-Hapdong division); there were persistent attempts from the South Korean Christian groups to abolish non-regional presbyteries, the emergence of a new regional division between Yeongnam and Honam, and so on. Nevertheless, the image of the North Korean Protestant community in South Korea was far from that of a community that would soon perish with the passing of time. In fact, as seen above, the North Korea clergy has maintained religious power in the Presbyterian Church for a significant period after the 1950s. There were some signs of decline and crisis for the group after the 1960s; however, they have been able to maintain a considerable vitality until recently and also have shown visible revitalization in some areas after the 1980s.

At the end of 1980s, some members of the group were able to give rise to the CCK through their solidarity that transcended the boundary of individual order; and with their leadership in the early days of the CCK, it developed into a representative Protestant organization in South Korea. Rather than clashing with the conservatism of the North Korean clergy community in South Korea, the post-Cold War condition and the move towards inter-Korean reconciliation have fanned their aggressive North Korean missions. We can say that key mechanisms behind the dynamism of the North Korean refugee clergy community in South Korea in the last half a century have been the non-regional presbytery system and the *wolnamin* churches. With these mechanisms at its base, the North Korean clergy community was able to fan the conservatism in the South Korean Protestant Church.

Due to limited space, the article has focused only the Presbyterian Church; however, the phenomena discussed in the paper do not only occur there. The Korean Methodist Church, which developed along with the Presbyterian denomination into one of the largest denominations in Korean Protestantism, underwent a very similar process as the Presbyterian Church in the last half a century. Immediately after liberation, churches established by Methodists from North Korea began to appear throughout Seoul, and by the end of Korean War, there were some 70 Methodist clergy from North Korea and several hundred seminary students from Seonghwa Theological Seminary in Pyeongyang in South Korean Methodist Church. Similar to fellow North Korean Presbyterians, the leaders of Methodist Church from North Korea gained religious power through their involvement in the internal conflict within South Korean Methodist Church.

Amidst intense clashes between the majority faction and the pro-Japanese religious authority “Bokheungpa” (Restoration group) and the minority challenger “Jaegeonpa” (Reconstruction group), the Methodists from North Korea promptly joined the Reconstruction group, and the clash ended when the situation reversed with the Reconstruction group gaining dominance. By making a decisive contribution in the drastic reorganization of the power structure in the Methodist [Church](#) in the first five years after the liberation, the *wolnamin* had already gathered considerable clout in the South Korean Methodist Church during the Korean War. The *wolnamin* emerged as a key influential group in Reconstruction group from 1950 to 1958, during the 8-year tenure of Rev. Ryu Hyeng-gi, a leading figure in the North Korean Methodist community, and the leader of the Methodist church in Korea thanks to the full support and aid from American Methodist [churches](#) and missionaries. Rev. Yu’s role, which made possible the rise of *wolnamin*’s status as a key power through aid from American churches, is similar to that of Rev. Han Gyeng-jik of the Presbyterian Church.

In the mid-1950s, there was serious internal conflict within the Methodist [Church](#) between ministers from South Korea and from North Korea, caused by some ministers of South Korean origin who opposed the monopoly of religious authority by ministers from North Korea. From the end of the 1950s and mid-1960s, there was a rivalry between the Seonghwa Theological Seminary Group (Seonghwa group) of North Korean origins and the Hoheonpa (Pro-constitution group) of Chungcheong region in South Korea. It was during this time that the so-called “circle politics” began to surface, characterized by giving power and privilege based on reciprocity among people of the same faction. The circle politics, based strictly on people’s places of origin, continued to exist in the dualistic structure of Seonghwa group and Pro-constiution group until the mid-1960s; however, after the mid-1960s, the structure of the conflict became three-pronged with the addition of the Jeongdong group, which consisted of people from the Seoul and Gyeonggi areas, to the contest. [The Seobu](#) (an area in North Korea) [Annual Conference](#), which had been restored through the 1951 General Assembly, no longer existed as a legal system when it was effectively abolished in the 1958 General Assembly. This is the aspect that sets the Presbyterian case decisively apart from the Methodist one. Nevertheless, of the three oppositional factions, the Seonghwa group survived.

Although they lacked any legal force, the so-called “circles” were the actual driving force that dominated the Methodist [Church](#) in South Korea after the 1960s, and it was within the

framework of circle politics that *wolnamin* were guaranteed their continued religious authority. Moreover, it is noteworthy that with the consecutive inauguration of Kim Seon-do and Kim Hong-do as [presidents of Bishop's Council](#)—the two brothers who spearheaded the conservatization of the Methodist [Church](#) with their support base in large-scale Methodist churches, [the Seobu Annual Conference](#), echoing the “North Korean missions,” was reintroduced in 1990s, some forty years after it was abolished.

The Protestant churches in South Korea, with the KNCC at the center, which came to symbolize progressive powers in South Korean society from the 1970s and 1980s, became the representative conservative force in 2000s, after expanding the hegemony of conservative forces in the 1990s with the CCK at the center. Behind such a drastic shift in the image of the Protestant churches in South Korea, there is the eccentric phenomenon of continued influence of the *wolnamin* group, which is characterized by its extreme conservatism.

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