



Protestantisms and the Design of South Korea

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Abstract

The blueprint for the Republic of Korea was drawn up in large part by northern Protestants who moved south following the division of the Korean Peninsula. This paper elucidates the profoundly important role they played in nation-building, highlighting the existence of multiple, functionally distinct Protestantisms. Far from constituting a uniform field, Christianity in Korea was shaped by tensions among three different Protestantisms originating in three different locations: the conservative Protestantism of the Northern Presbyterian Church in the United States, the progressivism of Canadian Protestantism, later nurtured by the Germans, and Japanese Protestantism, which entered Korea in the 1920s and left behind a deep imprint despite its relatively limited reach. While the most recognizable form of Protestantism has become inseparable from America itself, a significantly less conservative Protestantism hailing from Hamgyeong-do province and eastern Manchuria served as the core of anti-government dissidence in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet another Protestantism, concealing the word “Japan” from its genealogy in the charged atmosphere of post-liberation Korean society, survived as a powerful rival to and opponent of conservative American Protestantism in presenting a coherent vision of social reform. The existence of such different Protestantisms also reveals the presence of different modernities in postwar South Korea.

Keywords: Protestantisms, social reconstruction, statism, anti-statism, Northern Presbyterian Church, Japanese Protestantism, Non-church Movement, Sasanggye, Hanshin

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Introduction

Hwang Sok-yong's *The Guest* (*Sonnim*), a 2001 novel by one of South Korea's foremost writers, unfolds against the historical backdrop of the Sincheon Incident, an episode of communal violence during the Korean War that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians in the township of Sincheon in the North Korean province of Hwanghae-do. The title of the novel borrows a traditional expression for smallpox as a sustained metaphor for Protestantism and communism. Like a foreign virus that "visits" the body and renders it deathly ill, these "guests," which the book present as ideologies of foreign origin that functioned as the twin vehicles of modernity in Korea, took hold of the communal body and plunged it into paroxysms of hatred, fear, and vengeance. Published after the author's unauthorized visit to North Korea in the 1990s, for which offense he was incarcerated upon his return to South Korea, the novel nevertheless presents a version of the Sincheon Incident that contests the official North Korean account. While that account pins the responsibility for the civilian massacre squarely and exclusively on the US military, *The Guest*, in contrast, maintains that a violent conflict between Protestants and communists was the real truth behind the incident. Koreans in Sincheon, according to Hwang, were slaughtered by other Koreans, not Americans.

Far from being an exceptional sequence of events, the Sincheon Incident as depicted in *The Guest* replicates on a smaller scale the entire history of the divided Korean nation at large for the way it dramatizes the clash of forces that resulted in bloodshed. If we posit on one side of this clash the triad of terms, "The Left-North Korea-Communism," and on the other, "The Right-South Korea-X," what would constitute the third term X of the latter axis? Capitalism or liberal democracy would be the natural choice, and yet South Korea's postwar history of authoritarian rule and planned economy from the time of Syngman Rhee down to Chun Doo-hwan would hardly justify such an insertion. Following Hwang, it is my contention that the term X that should occupy the position opposite communism in the triadic linkage above is neither capitalism nor liberal democracy but Protestantism. If the post-WWII emergence of the Republic of Korea as a

new nation took place upon the foundations laid in the first half of the 20th century under the Japanese colonial rule, one such foundation, undoubtedly, was Protestantism.

This claim that Protestantism was a foundational axis of South Korean society as it exists today needs further qualification, however. The heart of my argument in this paper is that the “guest” called Protestantism that visited the Korean people from afar in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was not one but several, and at least three in fact. Each, dressed in a different garb, entered Korea through a different route, and sought to design Korean society in functionally different ways. Limiting the claim to the domain of social history, I would argue that there was no Korean Protestantism as such, a term that is conventionally encountered in the singular. We should rather ask, who were these “guests,” *in the plural*, and what different roles did each play in modern Korean history?

The first of these guests initially settled in the *seobuk* region, the northwestern provinces of Pyeongan-do and Hwanghae-do. Deeply conservative in character, it traveled south following the division of the peninsula and formed the foundation of the conservative right wing in South Korean society today. In terms of denomination, this group consolidated the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and continued to be heavily influenced by the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). It harbored a fiercely anti-communist ideology and took as its life source the conservative philosophy of pro-Americanism. The second guest made its sojourn in *gwanbuk*, which comprises Hamgyeong-do province and Manchuria’s North Gando region, the latter coinciding roughly with today’s Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture in China. Rooted in the Canadian Protestant Church and supported by the German Protestant Church, this group went on to form the left wing of the Korean Protestant Church and played an important role in the design of South Korean society in a progressive fashion. The third guest was Japanese Protestantism, whose impact on Korean society has been far greater than is conventionally known. Congregationalist in its outlook and led by such figures as Uchimura Kanzō and Kagawa Toyohiko, Japanese Protestantism established the tenet of the “Non-church Movement” (*mukyōkaishugi* in Japanese) (Bak and Kim 2009,

182).¹ Together, these three guests called on the Christian faithful in South Korea to wade in the troubled waters of a society in search of a new political direction, but each tendered a different blueprint for how the new nation should be rebuilt.

American Origins of Northwestern Protestantism and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism

The “black umbrella” (Kang 2001), that Japanese imperial rule cast over the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria, was removed with the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, only to be replaced by an American umbrella at least over the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. As scholars have shown, however, Americanization of Korea did not suddenly begin in 1945, but was already under way during the Japanese colonial era prior to liberation, and as early as the late Joseon dynasty. Christian missionary activities were of paramount importance in this process of early Americanization. With its emphasis on education and medicine, Protestantism was perceived to be the foundation as well as the advance guard of modernization. The great appeal it had among the Korean populace appears all the more striking when contextualized in relation to the neighboring countries of China and Japan. More Bibles were distributed in Korea during the first five years of Protestant missionary work than in China over a fifty-year period; the success of evangelism in Korea over the first two years is said to have rivaled that accomplished in fifteen years in Japan (Yu 2008, 70).

The epicenter of all this vibrant missionary activity was the northwest. After the launch of Protestant evangelism in Korea in 1885, a well-known agreement among the missionaries carved up the country along

1. A high number of Non-church Movement followers continue to exist in Japan today even though it is not easy to calculate the exact membership figures given the Movement’s anti-institutional characteristics. According to Bak and Kim (2009), the number of Christians in Japan who have membership in institutionalized churches may comprise only a fifth of the total of five million people who identify themselves as Christian in surveys. This may be seen as an important evidence of the significant strength of the Non-church Movement.

denominational lines. PCUSA established itself in *seobuk* (Pyeongang-do and Hwanghae-do provinces), while the Southern Methodist Church claimed the *giho* region of Gyeonggi-do and Chungcheong-do provinces. The relationships between these regionally and denominationally defined groups of Korean Protestants were not always harmonious—the conflict between the *giho* group, led by Yun Chi-ho and Syngman Rhee, and the *seobuk* group, led singlehandedly by An Chang-ho, has been of particular interest to historians, though it lies beyond the scope of this paper (S. Kim 2001). Despite their differences, however, both groups nurtured a common desire to import a model of *social reconstruction* applicable to Korea—what Kenneth Wells has termed “self-reconstruction nationalism” (Wells 1990) and Michael Robinson has characterized as “cultural nationalism” (Robinson 1988)²—through their connections to American churches.

Already at the end of Joseon dynasty, through print media such as *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent), Korean Protestants had expressed a belief in moral transformation as a path for reforming the social structure and economy. In the 1920s, the two major Protestant groups that espoused this belief in self-reconstruction nationalism were the Self-cultivation Society (Suyang donguhoe) of the *seobuk* region and the Industrial Promotion Club (Heungeop gurakbu) based in the *giho* region. Much more prominent and energetic between the two organizations was the Self-cultivation Society, the domestic arm of An Chang-ho’s Heungsadan (Wells 1990, 120). Throughout the entire Japanese colonial era, Heungsadan was the most representative organization that concretized the thought of self-reconstruction. Spiritual reconstruction of the “individual,” as elaborated in An Chang-ho’s philosophy of *musil yeokhaeng* (pursuit of truth and leadership through diligent action) and *sillyeok yangseong* (nurturance of one’s power and ability), were to be the basis of reconstructing society at large.

2. Kenneth Wells’ concept of “self-reconstruction nationalism” may be summarized as the ideology of a movement aimed at rebuilding the nation through the spiritual and moral recovery of the nation and the enhancement of its social and cultural capacities, while actualizing Christian values and lifestyle in an autonomous space of religious culture set apart to an extent from the realm of politics (Choe 2017, 138–139). The Korean version of Kenneth Wells’ *New God, New Nation*, translated by Kim In-su, was published in 1997.

An Chang-ho's nationalism thus focused on increasing the Korean nation's capacity overall—where the nation's capacity represented the total aggregate of the abilities of the individuals that make up the nation—rather than immediately transforming the political situation at hand. Furthermore, strengthening of individuals' abilities was to be supported at the most fundamental level by spiritual and moral cultivation. The questionnaires that Heungsadan's new recruits were required to fill out before joining the society allow us to glimpse expressions of this belief. One recruit wrote, "I believe that Heungsadan is not related to any political regime. It should remain, first and foremost, a society devoted to individual cultivation." Or, "Self-cultivation rather than politics should form the foundation [of the organization]" (Jeong 2011, 112). Pointing out the limits of structural reform—i.e., the call to change the world by changing the relations of production or laws and institutions—this group placed its faith in a fundamental overhaul of individuals' spirituality as the path toward social change. Theirs, in other words, was an intellectual movement of spiritual and religious nature.

As is well known, the seeds of left-right conflict that would later erupt in full-scale war in Korea were first sown in the 1920s following the March First Movement. The differences that emerged in the process of conducting anti-colonial struggles against Japan deepened into a deep fault line in the liberation period as the left and right put forward divergent visions of state-building for newly liberated Korea. And as this fault line hardened into a physical border between the two new states of North and South Korea, the different camps were regionally reconfigured through the phenomenon of massive migration across the thirty-eighth parallel, both southward (*wolnam*) and northward (*wolbuk*). The Korean War, in fact, was both a result and culmination of such reconfiguration. Among those who moved south en masse to escape the communist government that came to power in the North were the spiritual and intellectual descendants of An Chang-ho. The source of their philosophical inspiration was An Chang-ho's theory of self-cultivation; one of the centers of An Chang-ho's activities during the colonial era had, in fact, been Pyongyang. An died before liberation but his model of cultivating the nation's strength through education and

enlightenment, initially proposed as a path toward independence from colonial rule, became for his followers an important blueprint for building a new postcolonial nation. Having witnessed such violence as the Sinuiju Student Uprising, “the war before the War” that had been waged in the North between communists and Protestants in the liberation period before the formal outbreak of the Korean War, these *seobuk* Protestants left for South Korea when it became clear that North Korea would not be hospitable to An Chang-ho’s model of social reconstruction. They would translate that model into an actionable political plan in South Korea instead.

Among those who did so was an elite group of intellectuals that emerged in the mid-1950s in association with an influential monthly journal called *Sasanggye* (World of Thought). In my earlier work, I located the basic orientation of the *Sasanggye* group in the 1950s within the *seobuk* genealogy of An Chang-ho’s cultural nationalism (K. Kim 2003, 89–164). This interpretation, which is now the orthodox view in Korean scholarship, is supported in part by an examination of the backgrounds of the members of *Sasanggye*’s editorial board. Of about thirty men who served on the editorial board throughout the 1950s, more than two-thirds, including Jang Jun-ha who founded the journal, were from the North. Moreover, the majority of these northerners were from Pyeongan-do province specifically. The group was also predominantly Christian.

In South Korean scholarship today, there is little disagreement over the importance of *Sasanggye* as the publication that had the greatest impact on the South Korean intellectual world in the post-liberation period. A heightened academic interest in the journal over the last decade or so has led to a flurry of published works, and such research paints an overall picture of *Sasanggye* not only as a general-interest journal that provided print space for the leading intellectuals of the day to voice their opinions, but as a publication that self-consciously took up the function of a think tank for the government of the Republic of Korea in the 1950s and 1960s. In the days immediately following the May 16 Coup of 1961, for example, Park Chung-hee’s military junta used the journal as a reference to come up with a list of candidates who might sit on the all-important planning committee under the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, the new governing body

of the military junta (Hong 1999, 199). This anecdote reveals that it was a widespread view shared even by the military dictator's inner circle that the contributors to *Sasanggye* represented the intellectual crème de la crème of South Korean society.

Headed by Jang Jun-ha, the founder of the journal, the Sasanggye group drew up a blueprint for what Korean society should look like in the future, a design that was at once concretely detailed and systematically expansive.³ The design was laid out most clearly in the journal's editorial statement published in 1955, which identified the following five agenda items: "unification of the nation," "democratic thinking," "development of the economy," "creation of a new culture," and "[cultivation] of national pride." While the first and last items on this agenda refer to the tasks of overcoming the division of the peninsula and eliminating colonial remnants from Korean society, the other three items suggest that the group oriented itself and aspired toward a comprehensive modernization of Korean society as a whole, across the realms of politics (democratization), economics (development and industrialization), and culture (creation of a new culture). Modernization, in other words, was conceptualized broadly to include politics, the economy, society, and culture.

For the Sasanggye group, the equation between modernization and democratization necessitated a third term: anti-communism. Looking back over the course of modern Korean history, we know that anti-communism was anything but a synonym or precondition for democracy, and that the opposite was true more often than not—under successive authoritarian regimes, anti-communism served as a pretext for suppressing political democratization. But for the Sasanggye group, with their northwestern regional background and violently negative experience of encountering the communist state firsthand, communism was an invasive force that had to be

3. The Sasanggye group consisted of relatively young *elite men* in their thirties, but the group was supported by older intellectuals such as Baek Nak-jun. A native of Jeongju in Pyeongan-do, Baek preceded Jang Jun-ha as a student at Sinseong Junior High School. With the help of George S. McCune, who was then the principal of Sinseong, Baek went abroad to study at Princeton Theological Seminary and became the first Korean at Yale University to become a Doctor of Philosophy.

blocked, full-stop. In order to prevent communist penetration, South Korean society had to be democratized. Democratization meant achieving political modernization, and only by means of such modernization could Korean society arm itself against the penetration by communism. In a syllogistic fashion, then, modernization, democratization, and anti-communism became the three terms comprising the Sasanggye group's political blueprint for the fledgling South Korean nation. Throughout the 1950s, in fact, the Sasanggye group voiced their opposition to the authoritarian rule of the Syngman Rhee regime precisely on the grounds that the regime's attack on democracy would result in making Korean society more vulnerable to communism.

The critique of the Park Chung-hee regime published in the pages of *Sasanggye* followed a similar logic. Ji Myeong-gwan, the journal's editor-in-chief in the mid-1960s, recounted in a 2012 interview: “[Our] critique was based on the fact that the state was not pursuing democratic development. [We thought,] ‘That’s not the right path to modernization. That way lies the utter bankruptcy of the government.’ We resisted not because we did not believe in the need for modernization as such but because we felt that the Park Chung-hee regime was not treading the right path to modernization.”⁴

It is absolutely crucial to note that in thus conceptualizing modernization broadly along the line of liberalism, *Sasanggye* intellectuals identified the United States as the ideal nation-state to which South Korea should aspire, and Western liberal democracy of the “American” type as the ideological model of nation-building that the South Korean government should adopt. Their proclivity to embrace American-style liberalism was not unrelated to the fact that the United States had been considered the exemplary Protestant nation since the late Joseon dynasty in Korea. In short, *seobuk* Protestantism designed postwar Korean society along the ideological lines of anti-communism and American liberalism. The northwestern genealogy of core *Sasanggye* members is an essential context for understanding the journal's

4. “Ji Myeong-gwan nokchwirok 3-cha” (Transcript of Ji Myeong-gwan Interviews, Third Round), 2012, Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe (National Institute of Korean History), Gwacheon, South Korea.

consistent outlook on Korean politics and society.

***Gwanbuk* Protestantism: Moderate Socialist Democracy Nurtured by Canadian and German Connections**

Under the aforementioned agreement regarding missionary activity that took place in the 1890s, Hamgyeong-do Province and the North Gando region became the domain of the Canadian Presbyterian Church. Compared to Korean Protestants hailing from the areas claimed by PCUSA—Pyeongan-do and Hwanghae-do, to be specific—Korean Protestants from the *gwanbuk* region established themselves in a more liberal and progressive climate. At the heart of this community was one Rev. Kim Jae-jun, who taught at Eunjin Middle School in Yongjeong (Longjing in Chinese) in Manchuria during the late colonial period. Upon relocating to South Korea, Kim Jae-jun and his students would go on to form the “Hanshin group” and propose a model of social reconstruction that differed in marked ways from that advocated by *seobuk* Protestants.

Established in 1940 by Kim Jae-jun, the Joseon Theological Seminary—whose name was changed in 1951 to the Hanguk Theological Seminary (Hanguk sinhak daehak) and then to Hanshin University in 1980—became the womb for the Hanshin group. Narrowly speaking, Hanshin group refers to the faculty of Hanshin University, namely Kim Jae-jun, who served as the dean, Mun Ik-hwan, Mun Dong-hwan, An Byeong-mu, and Yi U-jeong. The group also includes non-Hanshin faculty members like Kang Won-yong, who maintained a close relationship with Kim Jae-jun and was greatly influenced by him. When we trace the background of these core members of the Hanshin group to their childhood years, we find that with the exception of Yi U-jeong they grew up in Manchuria during the late colonial period and that they all graduated from Eunjin Junior High School in Manchuria between 1936 to 1939. Their teacher at Eunjin was Kim Jae-jun.

It is no surprise then that the clearest articulation of the social reconstruction model espoused by the Hanshin group would be found in a work penned by Kim Jae-jun. The transcript of the lecture that Kim Jae-

jun gave in August of 1945, just days after Korea's liberation from colonial rule, titled "The Protestant Ideology of National Founding," represents such a historical document. Delivered at an assembly hosted by the Seollin hyeongjedan (Brotherhood of Good Samaritans), whose members consisted mostly of his students, the lecture offers a concrete view of the early political design of the Hanshin group in relation to the task of nation-building. The transcript is especially significant for the insights it provides into how the Hanshin group came to position itself at the vanguard of an anti-government coalition from the 1960s onward. Their political stance was a logical consequence of the progressivism outlined in Kim Jae-jun's early thought.

A government that deserves our gratitude is one that guarantees the freedom of religion and worship, freedom of thought, freedom of press, assembly, and publishing, and the freedom of individual conscience. While we are well aware of the alarm that the so-called communist movement is liable to raise as a problem immediately confronting us, we have to give communism its due for giving us a social scientific analysis of the reality of economic institutions and a plan of action for how a better society might be reconstructed. We have the obligation to seriously consider any plan that allows us to see the objective reality by examining it social-scientifically. [...] In other words, given the current reality of Korea, our initial response to any government, communist or not, that guarantees the freedoms enumerated above is one of grateful acceptance.

The speech is remarkable for its openness to embracing communism. To be sure, it predates the full eruption of the conflict between the Christian right and communists in northern Korea in the years immediately following national liberation, a conflict that would lead to horrific episodes of communal violence even before the outbreak of the Korean War proper. Nevertheless, the perspective it offers is unique when we compare it to the position held by *seobuk* Presbyterians who were already thoroughly anti-communist during the Japanese colonial era. After describing the basic foundation for the new national regime, Kim Jae-jun elaborates

concrete policy proposals. As a *social policy*, the lecture considers both the communist Soviet Union and the New Deal-era United States and calls for appropriating desirable aspects from each in a manner suited to the Korean reality. As an *international policy*, it insists that Korea should maintain a position of neutrality within a Cold War order. In addition, Kim emphasizes that foreign capital should be prevented from penetrating Korean economy and that land ownership by foreigners should also be disallowed. Indeed, the speech recommends several policies that may be classified as socialist democratic, including the nationalization of transportation and communication, adoption of a progressive tax code, reinforcement of inheritance tax, prohibition of hereditary transfer of corporate ownership, guarantee of livelihood for all by the state, and guarantee of healthcare and education for laborers and peasants.

As progressive as these policies may seem today in South Korea, it would be a mistake to automatically identify Kim Jae-jun as a leftist. Kim's position, in fact, would have been classified as "moderate" in the revolutionary political climate of the liberation period. For instance, the Provisional Constitution of 1940, the precursor to the first Constitution of the Republic of Korea promulgated in 1948, had already contained economic provisions such as "the establishment of planned economy," "nationalization of large-scale manufacturing industries and mines," and "limiting of private ownership of land." Many Korean leaders who were active during the liberation period, including former members of the Provisional Government, were moderates, and Kim Jae-jun's proposed policies would have received broad support from this group. Moreover, unlike mainstream Protestants, Kim Jae-jun opposed the 1948 establishment of a separate South Korean government. While the experience of the Korean War led Kim to shift somewhat toward the right, his thought still maintained its dissonance with the right and would later become a source of inspiration for ideological progressivism.

The transcript of Kim Jae-jun's speech from the liberation period explains why a figure like Kang Won-yong, who was a disciple of Kim's, would go on to take such a divergent political path from Jang Jun-ha in post-liberation South Korea, despite the strong commonalities marking their

backgrounds. Both were Christian men of the same generation and both had crossed the thirty-eighth parallel to migrate south. In the liberation space, however, Kang Won-yong served as a youth organizer for the centrist camp of Kim Gyu-sik and Yeo Un-hyeong, whereas Jang Jun-ha worked under the right-wing command of Kim Gu and Yi Beom-seok. With Yeo Un-hyeong's assassination in 1947, the middle bloc fell apart, and the establishment of the separate states of the DPRK and ROK that led to the outbreak of the Korean War further polarized the political field, in effect emptying out the middle of the political spectrum. The centrist genealogy that met an abortive death in the political realm proper with the collapse of the Yeo Un-hyeong line in the post-liberation period, however, was carried on by the Hanshin group led by men like Kang Won-yong.

International support beyond the American connection that dominated the Korean Christian world was essential in sustaining the Hanshin group in an increasingly hostile domestic climate. In the 1950s, Hanshin maintained its influence by forging an intimate relationship with the World Council of Churches (WCC), and after 1960s by receiving strong material support from the German Protestant Church. Two figures played an important role in forging these international ties: An Byeong-mu, another student of Kim Jae-jun's from Eunjin days, and Kang Won-yong. An Byeong-mu served as the crucial link between Korean and German churches, especially in the 1970s when the German church provided both the behind-the-scenes material support for the Korean democratization movement and the inspiration for An's articulation of a *Korean-style* theology. The Korea Theological Study Institute (Hanguk sinhak yeonguso), established in 1973, became the center for these efforts.

Kang Won-yong was the other central figure in the Hanshin group's emergence as the heart of the democratization movement in South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. Kang enjoyed a well-established reputation as a Christian leader on the global stage, largely on account of his involvement in the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC, founded in 1948 with a mission to heal the division of international society along East-West and North-South axes, was a Christian organization that called in its constitution for "visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship"

beyond denominational and doctrinal differences. Kang's involvement with the WCC began in 1954, when as a newly matriculated student in New York's Union Seminary he attended the second assembly of WCC held in Evanston, Illinois. At the third assembly of the WCC held in New Delhi in 1961, Kang was elected a member of the organization's standing committee on church and society. The position enabled Kang to make international connections and emerge as a global Christian leader. Kang would go on to become the president of the East Asian Christian Conference in 1963. Domestically, Kang also served as a key member of the National Congress for Recovery of Democracy (Minju hoebok gungmin hoeui) in 1974, the largest *chaeya* organization at the time.

The ecumenical orientation of the WCC, when transposed onto the realm of politics, led the organization to adopt the position of non-alignment at a time when the Cold War was beginning to cleave the globe into ideological blocs. In its mission statement adopted at the inaugural assembly held in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC espoused neutrality in unambiguous terms: "The churches should reject the ideologies of both communism and laissez-faire capitalism, and lead men away from the false assumption that the extremes are the only alternatives available" (Yeohae Ecumenical Forum 2013, 228). The WCC's moderate, integrationist position, however, was denounced in the 1950s by the conservative segment of the Korean church as a species of *pinkoism*. In fact, within the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Yejang), the tensions escalated to such a pitch that the denomination ultimately split into two: those who advocated joining the WCC became the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Tonghap) while the opponents formed the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church in Korea (Hapdong).⁵

Another important way that Kang Won-yong contributed to the democratization movement was through the German connection that he cultivated independently of An Byeong-mu. In 1962, Kang met Eberhard

5. Kim Jae-jun's Hanshin group had already split off from the Presbyterian Church of Korea in 1953 and established a separate denomination called the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (Kijang). The two branches of Yejang, together with Kijang, comprise the three main branches of the Presbyterian Church in Korea today.

Müller, one of the founders of the evangelical academy movement in Germany, and was inspired to establish the Christian Academy in Korea with the support of Müller's organization (the official launch was in 1965). Starting in 1974, the Academy's Social Education Center in Suwon became the site of a highly influential education program called "mid-level group training."

The significance of this program in the history of Korean social movements cannot be overemphasized. For five years until the program was forced to close down in the aftermath of the so-called "Christian Academy Anti-Communist Law Incident" in 1979, "mid-level group training" cultivated community organizers and activists across various sectors of Korean society by running five sub-programs targeting farmers, laborers, women, students, and religious leaders, respectively. The list of activists who went through the program either as trainee or trainer is long and illustrious, and includes names of those who would go on to constitute the core leadership of South Korea's progressive camp after the 1970s: Kim Se-gyun, Shin In-ryeong, Kim Geun-tae, Cheon Yeong-se, Yi U-jae, Han Myeong-suk, and Yun Hu-jeong. Kang Won-yong's Christian Academy was undoubtedly a cradle for progressive thought in which South Korean society was designed in a forward-looking manner.

The democratization movement led by the Hanshin group from the mid-1960s to the 1970s gives us cause to argue against the conventional view that the political middle disappeared completely in South Korea during the liberation period as the ideological terrain became virulently polarized. Rather than becoming extinct altogether, the political middle put down roots that would bear fruit later. Put another way, the roots of South Korean progressive thought in the 1960s and 1970s can be traced back to the middle line that existed as a viable political vision during the liberation period but which appeared to die an abortive death with the assassination of leading figures like Yeo Un-hyeong. In sum, as a historical alternative to the blueprints that became the mainstream in either South or North Korea after the liberation, we can look to the centrist plan of nation-building espoused by the moderates that was transmitted in the form of Protestant activism through the Hanshin group.

Japanese Roots and the Anti-statism of the Protestant Non-church Movement

A third kind of Protestantism, distinct from both *seobuk* and *gwanbuk* varieties came to colonial Korea in 1927 when six Korean Christians returned to Korea from their study in Japan. In July of that year, these six men, all Korean disciples of Uchimura Kanzō, came together to launch a faith-based periodical named *Seongseo Joseon* (Biblical Korea). The group consisted of Kim Gyo-sin, Ham Seok-heon, Yang In-seong, Ryu Seok-dong, Jeong Sang-hun, and Song Du-yong. Kim Gyo-sin and Ham Seok-heon had been classmates at Tokyo Higher Normal School, where they encountered Uchimura Kanzō's writings. The profound influence that Uchimura Kanzō's thought had on Ham Seok-heon in particular is well-known. "For all the losses caused by thirty-six years of enslavement under Japan," Ham would go on to write, "I consider myself to have gotten the better end of the deal for having gained Uchimura Kanzō" (Ham 1983, 217).

In the intellectual history of modern Korea, Uchimura Kanzō occupies a unique and extremely important place. Uchimura belonged to the so-called "Sapporo Band" of Christians, which constituted one of the three centers of Japanese Christianity during the Meiji period. Sapporo Band was based in Sapporo Agricultural School, and Uchimura was in the second class of students to graduate from that school. Even though Uchimura was baptized by a Methodist missionary in 1877, he and the other Christian youths of Sapporo cut ties with the Methodist Church and established an "independent" church the year after (Bak and Kim 2009, 83–85), and went on to found the Non-church Movement in Japan.

As one of the twin pillars of Japanese Protestant thought along with Kagawa Toyohiko, Uchimura maintained a critical position toward the Japanese state during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). His anti-war position earned him the label of "enemy of the state" but the label had been affixed to him even earlier when he refused to bow deeply to the Imperial Rescript on Education—the decree promulgated by the Meiji Emperor in 1890 that enforced the imperial Shinto beliefs on the Japanese people—in an episode that came to be known as Uchimura's "lese majeste incident."

As Japan speeded toward military expansionism, Uchimura's Non-church Movement opposed military conscription and statist nationalism. Indeed, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, Uchimura expressed his dissident views in no uncertain terms: "I am not only dissenting against the argument for the Russo-Japanese War, but also insisting that it is necessary to abolish all wars. To profit from war is to profit as a robber" (Uchimura 2001, 10:327). Uchimura also criticized the way the state deployed traditional Confucian values to mobilize the Japanese people: "There are those who say that 'If Russia takes over Manchuria, Japan is in danger.' But that is not the greatest danger facing Japan today. The greatest threat to the twentieth-century existence of Japan lies in the way the Chinese moral values of loyalty and filial piety are demanded from the people" (Uchimura 2001, 10:336).

In addition to militarist statism, Uchimura remained a strong critic of American Protestantism. "As far as I know, there is no greater hindrance to the development of true religion than American money," Uchimura wrote in 1919. "If [Americans] spread their gospel through American money, the world will truly suffer a great calamity. I pray that God delivers the entire humanity from the curse of American money and gospel!" Uchimura's critical stance toward American Christianity, whose essential characteristic, he argued, was the marriage of gospel to money, allows us to see why the *Seongseo* Joseon group's position and outlook differed in striking ways from right-wing nationalist agenda of *seobuk* and *giho* Protestantisms. Consisting of Uchimura's Korean disciples, members of the *Seongseo* Joseon group, including Ham Seok-heon and Kim Gyo-sin, remained skeptics of statist nationalism for life. In accordance with the critique articulated by the Japanese Non-church Movement, which even gave it some anarchistic characteristics, the *Seongseo* Joseon group did not look to the United States as the ideal model of a Christian nation. In postcolonial South Korea, the Non-church Movement would go on to consolidate a powerful voice of opposition to strongly statist regimes and offer an alternative design for society.

The fact that Korean disciples of Uchimura would find the statist regimes of Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee objectionable is not surprising. Their teacher, after all, had been branded as an enemy of the

state for his refusal to show the degree of respect deemed appropriate by the Meiji state to the Imperial Rescript on Education. The nationalist philosophy of South Korean authoritarian regimes, as many scholars have pointed out, drew its inspiration from Meiji Japan. A particularly illustrative example is the case of Bak Jong-hong. Bak was the drafter of the National Charter of Education (1968), a document that embodies the nationalist ideology of the Park Chung-hee regime. Belonging to the first generation of Western philosophers in South Korea, Bak was widely recognized as a luminary in the field of philosophy. Bak graduated from Keijō Imperial University's Department of Philosophy with a major in German philosophy, and trained countless number of students of his own as a professor at Seoul National University. He was a member of the social section of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction during the rule of the military junta following the May 16 Coup, and in 1970 served as a special advisor to the president in education and culture. In 1968, the year of his retirement from Seoul National University, Bak Jong-hong drafted the National Charter of Education. Notable similarities between the Charter and the Meiji Imperial Rescript on Education that scholars have observed stem from the influence of the statist philosophy of Tanabe Hajime on Bak's thought in the late colonial era.

As Uchimura had resisted Japanese statism, Ham Seok-hon, Uchimura's disciple, became the most incisive critic of Korean statism. "The spiritual bankruptcy of this country," deplored Ham famously in response to the Syngman Rhee regime's campaign to pluck the ancient Silla tradition of *hwarangdo* from history and extol it as a spirit of self-sacrifice for the nation that all Koreans should emulate: "The impoverishment of its thought! Alas, our leaders peddle the age-old rhetoric, extolling the way of *hwarang*, our nation as the ultimate good, our state as the ultimate good! How could words adequately capture such spiritual poverty of our nation!" (Ham 1983, 281). The Rhee regime's invocation of Silla and *hwarang* drew upon the works of scholars like Yi Seon-geun and Kim Beom-bu, who argued, without much empirical basis, that the spirit of *hwarang* was the oldest ideology representing the national spirit.

For Ham, the fundamental problem was the desire to turn the nation

and state into absolute entities. “The nation (*minjok*) is not some eternal, timeless entity,” argued Ham in a 1978 roundtable discussion. “It’s all fine and good to insist on the nation but we must not idolize it. As Gandhi has said, we have to be ready to cast even the nation away if it goes against the truth....What we need to defeat is narrow-minded communalism. The reason why I say that we have to fight statism is because it is a form of communalism cloaked in the name of the nation” (Ham 1983, 354–356).

The late 1970s, when Ham made this statement, saw the ascendancy of nationalist discourse not only as a tool of mobilization employed by the state but as a valorized subject of vigorous discussion among the dissident forces seeking to resist the Park regime. On the subject of economy, for example, the theory of national economy and the theory of comprador capital that constituted the heart of the progressive, anti-imperialist position were both built on a fundamentally nationalist outlook. In a manner markedly distinct from the Hanshin group, Ham’s critique of the authoritarian regime of Park Chung-hee rejected rather than embraced nationalism as the starting point for anti-authoritarian resistance, revealing in the process the persistence of Japanese Protestantism within Korean progressivism.

What, then, was the social model pursued by the adherents of Korea’s Non-church Movement? The answer was the Danish Model of social reconstruction. Emerging in the late 19th century as “a strong rural development movement based on cooperatives and ‘folk high schools’” (Paik 2018, 74), the Danish Model had anti-statism as its philosophical basis and resonated for that reason with Uchimura’s Non-church Movement. First introduced to Japan in the 1910s, it was partially appropriated during the colonial era by the right-wing *gihō* group, which saw the model as a form of social construction to combat the leftist vision. The most sustained and earnest effort to put the model into practice, however, occurred after liberation. The man who spearheaded this effort was one Ryu Dal-yeong, a devoted student of Kim Gyo-sin and the proverbial *godfather of Korean farmers*, who took the reins of the National Movement for Reconstruction under Park Chung-hee’s junta from 1961 to 1963.

Ryu Dal-yeong’s first encounter with the Danish Model occurred in 1933, when he was a student at Suwon Agricultural College. Kim Gyo-sin

had given Ryu a print of the transcript of a lecture Uchimura gave in 1911, titled "A Story of Denmark." The reading experience would turn out to be transformative for Ryu, giving a colonized youth robbed of his country a sense of mission for what he must do for his country: "My life's work must be...to make Korea the Denmark of the East" (Ryu 1998, 242). Then in 1952, finding himself in Daegu as a Korean War refugee, Ryu published a book that he had been planning to write for years. *Toward a New History: Education and Cooperatives of Denmark* became an instant classic, as evidenced by the fact that it went through twenty-six printings in just a few short years.

It was this book that brought Ryu to the attention of the Supreme Council on National Reconstruction (SCNR), the military junta under Park Chung-hee that was the governing body in South Korea from 1961 to 1963. SCNR had launched the National Movement for Reconstruction less than a month after the May 16 Coup, and named Yu Jin-o as the first director. When Yu resigned after just two months without much to show for his efforts, Park Chung-hee personally met Ryu several times to recruit him as the new director. In these conversations, Park singled out Ryu's knowledge of the Danish Model as a particularly desirable qualification for the position. Ryu accepted Park's offer on the condition that he would be allowed to run the organization without Park's interference, and took up the director position in September of 1961 (Ryu 1998, 252–253).

For the next twenty months, Ryu threw himself single-mindedly into the task of building a "Denmark of the East" in South Korea through the organizational platform provided by the National Movement for Reconstruction and the authority briefly granted to him by the military junta. Ryu's reconstruction program focused on four areas: (1) education and training of rural movement leaders; (2) infrastructural and territorial improvement including irrigation and reclamation projects; (3) reform of daily life aimed at improving dietary habits and living conditions; and (4) social cooperation emphasizing urban-rural connections and volunteer work. Within a year of the launch, Ryu's program posted meaningful results. More than 70,000 rural movement leaders were trained at its various education centers, and over 400,000 student volunteers were dispatched to

rural and fishing villages. Given all this, it would not be an exaggeration at all to say that Ryu Dal-yeong was the man behind the National Movement for Reconstruction until he stepped down in May of 1963, after running into conflict with statist forces within the organization. Despite the autonomy that Park Chung-hee had promised him, Ryu found himself locking horns with the heads of local branches of the organization, many of whom belonged to the eighth graduating class of the Military Academy and had been given their posts in recognition of the major roles they had played in the May 16 Coup. Ryu Dal-yeong's named successor, Yi Gwan-gu, attempted to press against the statist forces and continue the programs Ryu had started, but before long the entire enterprise was disbanded. In February of 1964, after Park Chung-hee won an election as a "civilian" candidate, having taken off his military uniform and donned a civilian garb, the National Reconstruction Movement Law was abolished.

Ryu Dal-yeong's years in the National Reconstruction Movement represent an extremely unusual moment in Korean history, when the statist desire for mobilization at the national level and the anti-statist program of community organization and self-help at the local level briefly came together as bedfellows of the strangest sort. As we have already noted, the intellectual genealogy to which Ryu Dal-yeong belonged was heavily indebted to the Non-church Movement of Japanese Protestantism, whose tenets were on the opposite end of the spectrum from elite-led, state-oriented philosophy. Ryu's efforts to build a civilian movement on a national scale by using the platform provided by the Park Chung-hee regime was perhaps ill-fated from the start. Ryu, who even had a large photograph of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig hung in his room, could not have been oblivious to the dangers of state-led, bureaucracy-driven mobilization (Ryu 1998, 255). Even though Ryu remained as vigilant as he could against statist tendencies within the National Reconstruction Movement, he could not ultimately overcome the constraints imposed by both the bureaucratic framework and the new military regime's keen political interests.

In the final analysis, the National Reconstruction Movement that Ryu Dal-yeong led from 1961 to 1963, whose inspiration was the Danish Model of voluntary self-reconstruction by the people themselves, was

fundamentally at odds with the statist vision of social reconstruction held by the Park Chung-hee regime. Despite its failure in the short term, however, Ryu's National Reconstruction Movement left behind recognizable traces as a model of social reconstruction, and in fact served as one of the key reference points for the New Community Movement (Saemaueul undong) that the Park regime pursued with a vengeance in the 1970s.

On the civilian rather than state policy front, we can note another important, albeit little-appreciated, way that Japanese Protestantism impacted South Korean society: organic farming. Korean organic farming took off when Gotani Junichi, the president of Japan's Ainōkai (Love for Agriculture) Association visited Pulmu School and Pulmu Farms in Yangju in September of 1975. (Won Gyeong-seon, the founder of Pulmu Farms, was a member of the board of directors for the Pulmu School, and named his farm after the school.) Japan's Ainōkai which was established upon the principle of three loves—love for God, love for humans, and love for soil—was the first organic farming association in Asia and was profoundly influenced by the Danish Model as first introduced to Japan by Uchimura Kanzō. Through the Non-church Movement connection, South Korean farmers were able to interact with Ainōkai members, and draw inspiration and know-how from Japanese experiences with organic farming. In 1976, Ryu Dal-yeong also established his Korean Society for Research on Organic Agriculture (Hanguk yugi nongeop yeonguhoe).

The social model championed by Korean Non-church Movement members under the influence of Japanese Protestantism was fundamentally critical of economies of scale. It resisted state-oriented mobilization, whether the state in question was nationalist or communist. But if capitalism inevitably led to the exploitation of labor and communism could not offer an acceptable alternative, what was to be done? How could they create, asked Ham Seok-heon, a model of living that does not exploit the labor value of another being “even under the capitalist system in which they lived as they must” (Ham 1956, 136)? In other words, how could one live within a capitalist society without exploiting and being exploited by another? The answer was to labor with the *honest sweat of one's brow* and achieve self-sufficiency through that honest labor. The matter of scale was crucial here

since a cooperative community that would support this vision would have to be both large enough and small enough to be self-sufficient. For the Non-church Movement in Korea, cooperative communalism was the only acceptable alternative to capitalism.

In South Korea today, the legacy of the Danish Model survives in the form of various agricultural co-op movements. The model has also attracted renewed attention more recently as a sustainable alternative for the future in the post-industrial era. It was the tradition of Japanese Protestantism, specifically the Non-church Movement established by Uchimura Kanzō, that served as the vehicle that brought the Danish Model to Korea. Put another way, an important, albeit rarely acknowledged, source of Korean cooperativism was Japanese Protestantism.

Conclusion: Intersections and Transversals

At the heart of the Christian experience in post-WWII South Korea was the imperative of social reconstruction. As the preceding pages have shown, Protestantism was not simply a gospel of individual salvation, but an inspiration and philosophy for conceptualizing a design of the new nation, as well as the organization and outer support network for effectuating that design. In addition, I have argued that the Protestantism that designed the Republic of Korea was not one but at least three, with the blueprint put forth by each significantly differing from the others. The Sasanggye group, with its roots in the Presbyterian conservatism of the northwest, espoused American-style liberal democracy. The Hanshin group had its basis in the more progressive tradition of Canadian missionaries in Hamgyeong-do and eastern Manchuria, and later relied on support from German churches. The Seongseo Joseon group was heavily influenced by the Non-church Movement of Japanese Protestantism. The relationship among these Protestantisms may thus appear to be one of competition between American and non-American Protestantisms. The reality, however, was not nearly as simple and it may be worth discussing several pieces of complicating evidence here.

Deep personal connections existed, for example, among the members of the Sasanggye and Hanshin groups. When *Sasanggye's* Jang Jun-ha entered the Japan Theological Seminary in 1942, his classmates in the College of Arts included later Hanshin members, such as Mun Ik-hwan, Mun Dong-hwan, Jeon Gyeong-yeon, and Bak Bong-nang. Because he was drafted as a student soldier into the Japanese army at the end of colonial rule, Jang Jun-ha was not able to finish his studies at the Japan Theological Seminary, but the connection to Hanshin members he formed there helped him to finish his studies under Kim Jae-jun at Joseon Theological Seminary (later Hanshin) after liberation. Hanshin members also contributed to *Sasanggye* from the beginning of the journal's publication to the 1960s.

Contributors to *Sasanggye* also included Ham Seok-heon. Even though Ham was a leading figure of Korea's Non-church Movement and a student of Uchimura Kanzō, he was also a native of Pyeongan-do, where *seobuk* Protestantism had flowered, and harbored great affinities for An Chang-ho's philosophy of self-strengthening and spiritual reconstruction through education. Ham endorsed An Chang-ho's philosophy, the most important source for *seobuk* thought, explicitly in his preface to *Eighty Years of Osan History*, which he wrote as president of the alumni association of Osan School: "One could of course have chosen to go to Manchuria and become an independence fighter, or to form a provisional government and lie in wait for an opportunity to fight. But today when we look back on the path trodden, it must be said that the greater contribution was made by those who braved many hardships to stay within the country and engage in a spiritual movement through education than by those who waged political or military struggles" (Ham 1987, 47).

Ham Seok-heon also maintained personal relationships with members of the Hanshin group, and had a great influence on An Byeong-mu in particular. Widely respected as the father of *minjung* theology, An was a theologian of the highest caliber, but he chose not to become an ordained minister and went on to establish a church of lay believers instead. The impact of Ham Seok-heon's Non-church Movement teachings on An is visible in these decisions. An Byeong-mu grew up in Manchuria and was educated at Eunjin; Kim Jae-jun was his lifelong teacher, but Ham Seok-

heon may have had the greater influence on An's theological thought and religious practice (G. Kim 1998, 260).

Indeed, as already suggested by the fact that it was at the Japan Theological Seminary that Jang Jun-ha first met Mun Ik-hwan and Mun Dong-hwan, two brothers who later became core Hanshin members, Japanese Protestantism played an important role in the consolidation of the Hanshin group as well. This is not surprising given two general facts: Korean intellectuals who received a higher education during the colonial era often did so as students in Japan, and the initial stage of growth for Japanese Christianity during the Meiji era was supported by college education, with Rikkyo, Doshisha, Meiji Gakuin, and Aoyama Gakuin serving as hubs. Kim Jae-jun studied at Aoyama where he was deeply moved by the writings of the Christian activist Kagawa Toyohiko, and Kang Won-yong also met and interacted with Kagawa while studying at Meiji Gakuin.

Kagawa Toyohiko was a social reformer and writer whose activism, especially among slum dwellers and in labor and suffrage movements, made him a standard bearer for Taisho Democracy. And after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 that ended the period of Taisho democracy, Kagawa turned to economic cooperative movements for laborers and consumers. It is not difficult to see why men like Kim Jae-jun and Kang Won-yong were so drawn to Kagawa's thought; Japan's early social movements were intimately linked to Protestantism. Realizing as a young man that "the social problem could not be solved by the preaching of Christian charity alone" (Piovesana 1964, 114)—already as a junior high student, Kagawa is said to have found the ideas of Christian socialism resonant with his own views—Kagawa built his concept of *social ethics* and reformist passions upon the basis of his Christian faith and lifelong evangelism.

Earlier in the body of the paper, I discussed the Hanshin group as growing upon the soil nourished by the Canadian church and watered by the German church. The group's connection to the Christian reformist thought of Kawaga Toyohiko, however, allows us to see that the influence of Japanese Protestantism shaped Hanshin at its roots. Our understanding of how multiple Protestantisms designed postwar Korean society should thus be revised. The rivalry between American and non-American

Protestantisms was more precisely a contest between American and Japanese Protestantisms. As can be glimpsed from the fact that the formation of the Socialist Democratic Party in Japan in 1901 was influenced by Christian socialist thought, Japanese Protestantism had distinctive characteristics that set it apart from its American counterpart from the start. Fundamentally anti-statist, Protestantism in Japan nurtured an antagonistic relationship with imperialist nationalism throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century before succumbing to military fascism in the last years of the Japanese empire. When we consider how anti-communist nationalism became the core legacy of the American Presbyterian Church in *seobuk*, a fundamental and important difference between American Protestantism and Japanese Protestantism is impossible to ignore.

In fact, *seobuk* Protestantism may be the exception rather than the rule in how contact with the “West” was mediated in colonial Korea, in that it was characterized by direct, face-to-face encounters with American Presbyterian missionaries. In general, however, colonial-era intellectuals were cultivated on the soil of imperial higher education. Receiving the highest-quality education the empire had to offer meant that one was baptized in knowledge through Japanese mediation. Transmission of Christian thought, as it guided Korean intellectuals’ visions of nation-building, followed this pattern too.

The surface upon which Christianity—and thereby modernity—made contact with Korean history was cut into multiple facets by the influences of American, Japanese, and Canadian Protestantisms. In the years following the initial contact, the torturous process of division and war that foreclosed leftist visions of what the new nation should be meant that the architects of the republic would now be drawn exclusively from the right. As this paper has shown, the right was not a monolithic body. The different blueprints of the republic that were drawn up, tested, and put into effect in post-liberation and postwar South Korean society revealed a range of possibilities on the ideological spectrum within the right. But what most of them had in common was the Protestant background of their architects. Christianity, in short, provided the foundation for most of the ideologies that shaped and designed Korean society in the postwar period.

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