

PROTESTANTISM, RITUAL CHANGE, AND THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE  
IN COLONIAL KOREA, 1910-1945

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HAJIN JUN  
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I certify that I have read this dissertation and that, in my opinion, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Yumi Moon, Co-Adviser**

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that, in my opinion, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Jun Uchida, Co-Adviser**

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that, in my opinion, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Sean Hanretta**

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that, in my opinion, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Kathryn Lum**

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that, in my opinion, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Dafna Zur**

Approved for the Stanford University Committee on Graduate Studies.

**Patricia J. Gumpert, Vice Provost for Graduate Education**

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines transformations in Korean ritual life to explore how and why religious difference emerged as a political problem under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). Protestant missionaries early on banned ancestral rites and other folk customs, while spreading liturgical (marriage and funerary) ceremonies, in an effort to inculcate orthodox doctrines among new believers. Converts' rejection of indigenous Confucian rites, however, became the focal point of heated public debates, as Korean nationalists and Japanese colonial officials grew concerned that Protestant rites posed threats to their own efforts to mold Korean identity. Reformist intellectuals seeking to construct a distinct national culture proposed avowedly modern and culturally authentic rites that transcended creed. Colonial bureaucrats, for their part, strove to foster loyal subjects of the emperor by simultaneously promoting simplified Confucian practices—ancestral veneration in particular—and Shinto observances. These nationalist and colonial efforts, I argue, incrementally yet substantially narrowed the meaning of religious freedom. By reframing rituals as civic concerns, reform initiatives underscored patriotic obligations at the expense of individual conscience, a development that only intensified when the Japanese empire shifted towards war.

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## CONTENTS

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Tables	ix
Figures	x
Introduction	1
1. “Outward Signs of Inward Grace”: The Making of Korean Protestant Rite	12
2. Protestant Rites and the Problem of Religious Difference	58
3. “Empty Formalities and Senseless Vanity”: Campaigns Against Ritual Spending	90
4. Mobilizing Rites: Colonial Reforms and the 1934 Guidelines on Ritual Practice	119
5. “To their own Master They Stand or Fall”: Protestants and the Shinto Shrine Controversy	154
Conclusion	192
Selected Bibliography	198

## TABLES

### *Chapter Four*

4.1 Groom's Wedding Expenditures, Kyōngju	127
4.2 Bride's Wedding Expenditures, Kyōngju	127
4.3 Funeral Expenditures, Kyōngju	127
4.4 Causes of Indebtedness Among "Rehabilitation Families" (1933)	129

## FIGURES

<i>Chapter One</i>	
1.1 Masked funerary attendants	22
1.2 Funeral Procession in Seoul	23
1.3. Corpses tied to Trees, circa 1890s	24
1.4 Graves of Smallpox Victims, 1890	24
1.5 Korean Mourner	38
1.6 Pastor Kil Sōn-ju's Funeral, P'yōngyang, 1935	44
1.7 A Korean Christian Wedding, 1917	47
<i>Chapter Two</i>	
2.1 Christian Shops Closed for Sabbath	69
2.2 Traditional Korean Bride	79
2.3 Protestant Bride and Groom, 1926	80
2.4 Yi Hye-gyōng and Kim Sōng-guk	82
<i>Chapter Three</i>	
3.1 Ritual Goods Store, n.d.	103
3.2 Third Presbyterian Church, P'yōngyang: "Built Entirely by the Koreans"	105
<i>Chapter Four</i>	
4.1 Traditional Korean Ancestral Ceremony, n.d.	123
4.2 Group Wedding at Koch'ang Church, 1934	132
4.3 Kyōnghakwōn Myōngnyundang, n.d.	137
4.4 Kyōnghakwōn Wedding, n.d.	137
<i>Chapter Five</i>	
5.1 Postcard of Heijō Shrine	160
5.2 Union Christian College, P'yōngyang, 1930	174
5.3 Presbyterian General Assembly Representatives at Heijō Shrine, 1938	179
5.4 Japanese Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1930s	188
5.5 Korean Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1940s	188
<i>Conclusion</i>	
6.1 Korean Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1940s	195

## INTRODUCTION

In 1924, bookstores in Seoul, stocked their shelves with a brand-new edition of an old classic. *The Expanded Guide to the Four Rites*, like its many predecessors, provided readers with illustrated diagrams and step-by-step instructions for the Confucian rites of passage—capping, weddings, funerals, and ancestral veneration.<sup>1</sup> This particular volume, however, included a curious addendum. In an appendix titled, “New Weddings and Funerals in Contemporary Practice,” the editor Hong Sun-p’il commented on changes to Korean rites in recent years.<sup>2</sup> He observed that in the past, books like *The Expanded Guide* had established common parameters for ritual practice. Now, many eschewed such traditional sources of ritual knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Growing numbers instead carried out, “rites of their own invention.” Some solemnized marriage vows by exchanging rings and singing songs. Others replaced customary mourning garb with black armbands. Even more stopped venerating their ancestors altogether. Rites were in upheaval, and it appeared only “stubborn traditionalists” (*wan’goja*) continued to concern themselves with ritual propriety.<sup>4</sup>

The *Expanded Guide* offers a glimpse into the magnitude of transformations underway in Korean ritual life at the turn of the twentieth century. To be sure, traditional rites had never been static or homogeneous. During the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910),

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<sup>1</sup> (*Hyōnt’o chuhae*) *Chūngbo saryep’yōllam*, ed. Hong Sunp’il (Kyōngsōng: Chosŏn tosō chusik hoesa, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> While Mun Okp’yo and Yi Ch’unggu maintain that only the authorship of original 1900 edition of the *Chūngbo saryep’yōllam* can be verified, religious scholar Jong-Seong Choi suggests the appendix of the 1924 edition was likely penned by the editor, Hong Sunp’il. See *Chūngbo saryep’yōllam yōkchubon* (Seoul: Han’gukhak chung’ang yōn’guwōn ch’ulp’anbu, 2014), 28; Choi Jong-Seong, “Ilche kangjōmgi ūi ūirye maenyeuöl kwa minsok chonggyo” *Yōksa minsokhak* 52 (2017), 19.

<sup>3</sup> (*Hyōnt’o chuhae*) *Chūngbo saryep’yōllam*, 332.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

despite the efforts of ruling elites to disseminate Neo-Confucian morals through Chu Hsi's *Family Rites*, considerable diversity persisted in Korean customary practices, whether according to geography, wealth, or individual family traditions.<sup>5</sup> The newfangled rites described in the *Expanded Guide*, however, represented a significant departure from the ritual pluralism that characterized Chosŏn society. Literati scholars and officials had debated amongst themselves how to best interpret the Confucian classics, not the authority of the ritual canon itself. Individuals who pursued "rites of their own invention" flouted Confucian norms entirely. More notable still, Hong noted that it was religious devotees who spearheaded this moral and ritual fragmentation. Exchanging rings, affixing armbands, and rejecting ancestral veneration (*chesa*) in fact represented hallmark customs of a burgeoning Protestant community.<sup>6</sup> Korean Christians insisted that ritual obligations depend upon one's religious affiliation, a notion that both gained popular traction and raised public alarm.

My dissertation examines transformations in Korean ritual life to explore how and why religious difference emerged as a political problem under Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). Protestant missionaries early on banned ancestral rites and other folk customs, while spreading liturgical (marriage and funerary) ceremonies, in an effort to inculcate orthodox doctrines among new believers. Converts' rejection of indigenous Confucian rites, however, became the focal point of heated public debates, as Korean

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<sup>5</sup> Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> While Don Baker maintains that Korean Catholics and Ch'ondogyo adherents first catalyzed ritual fragmentation during the nineteenth century, I argue that Protestants played an instrumental role in shifting broader public perceptions on the relationship between religion and ritual obligations. During the twentieth-century, Buddhist intellectuals like Yi Nŭnghwa explicitly looked to the Protestant model in advocating new lay rites for his religious community. See Don Baker, "The Religious Revolution in Modern Korean History: From Ethics to Theology and from Ritual Hegemony to Religious Freedom," *The Review of Korean Studies* 9.3 (2006); Don Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

nationalists and Japanese colonial officials grew concerned that Protestant rites posed threats to their own efforts to mold Korean identity. Reformist intellectuals seeking to construct a distinct national culture proposed avowedly modern and culturally authentic rites that transcended creed. Colonial bureaucrats, for their part, strove to foster loyal subjects of the emperor by simultaneously promoting simplified Confucian practices—ancestral veneration in particular—and Shinto observances. These nationalist and colonial efforts, I argue, incrementally yet substantially narrowed the meaning of religious freedom. By reframing rituals as civic concerns, reform initiatives underscored patriotic obligations at the expense of individual conscience, a development that only intensified when the Japanese empire shifted towards war.

My research engages closely with existing scholarly conversations on rites and the making of modern nation-states. Numerous studies have tended to the politics of ritual change. In revolutionary France, for instance, new “gestures of equality” and “rituals of republicanism” helped forge a shared political culture.<sup>7</sup> Rites went hand in hand with national subject formation in East Asia as well. The spectacle of imperial pageantry gave rise to a distinct Japanese identity centered on the person of the emperor during the Meiji era.<sup>8</sup> Kuomintang leaders created holidays and ceremonies to foster patriotic allegiance in Republican China,<sup>9</sup> while nationalist intervention extended even to

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<sup>7</sup> See Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

funerals and weddings, customs formerly considered part of the private domain.<sup>10</sup> I explore how this development unfolded in Korea, a story that has been largely overlooked in existing histories.<sup>11</sup> This historiographical gap has made it difficult for scholars to explain how rituals became central to many Korean nationalists' vision for creating a new modern culture, or why the Government-General placed such emphasis on rites in their efforts to mobilize Korean society during the 1930s and 40s. By attending to the continuities and ruptures between nationalist and colonial reform initiatives, my project offers a fuller account of how rites persisted as a lightning rod political issues throughout the early twentieth century.

Burgeoning studies on secularism offer a framework to better understand the relationship between ritual and politics in Korea. Recent studies have emphasized that empires and nation-states separated religion from the secular sphere not only to safeguard individuals' spiritual beliefs but also to justify their rule and strengthen control over subject populations.<sup>12</sup> The state reserved the right to curb any "uncontrolled religion" it

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<sup>10</sup> See Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Charlotte Lucia Cowden, "Balancing Rites and Rites: The Social and Cultural Politics of New-Style Weddings in Republican Shanghai, 1898-1953" (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Albert Park has suggested that the inroads of global capitalism during the 1920s and 30s contributed to the near disappearance of traditional rites in the countryside, as young men migrated from their villages to Manchuria or Japan in search for work. The few studies on rites in modern Korea have focused on royal rituals at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as studies of Shinto shrine observances during the wartime mobilization period. See Albert Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 69; Christine Kim, "Politics and Pageantry in Protectorate Korea (1905-1910): The Imperial Progresses of Sunjong," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68 (2009); Todd Henry, "Spiritual Assimilation: Namsan's Shintō Shrines and their Festival Celebrations" in *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 62-91.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Trent Maxey, *The 'Greatest Problem': Religion and State Formation in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014); and Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*.

deemed threatening or subversive, effectively placing religion under constant threat of exclusion from or absorption into the public domain.<sup>13</sup> Japan was no exception. Meiji statesmen established a “trinary” of the secular, religion, and superstition for the purpose of nation-building.<sup>14</sup> Establishing constitutional protections for the freedom of religious belief, for one, enabled government officials to demonstrate compliance with modern legal norms and secure recognition as a full-fledged member of the international community. The ability to define what constituted religion also greatly expanded the regulatory power of the Meiji state. The 1889 Constitution recognized only Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity as official religions. Without legal recognition or protection, other groups—charismatic religious movements in particular—found themselves subject to harsh police scrutiny and even persecution.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, in some respects, Meiji statesmen established a distinctive form of secularism in Japan. In addition to allocating a separate sphere for religion outside the public domain, they created what Jason Ananda Josephson calls, “the Shinto secular.” The Meiji government separated Shinto into two types. Sect Shinto dealt with doctrinal matters, while state Shinto focused solely on “national rites”—ceremonies devoted to the deified spirits of imperial ancestors, and later, those of departed soldiers. Many scholars have critiqued this split as merely semantic or administrative, pointing out how both

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<sup>13</sup> Talal Asad, “Trying to Understand French Secularism,” in Hent de Vries, ed., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 498.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 237-240. Sheldon Garon examines similar government persecution of new religions during the 1920s and 30s. Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

engaged with the gods.<sup>16</sup> Josephson, however, argues that the Shinto secular did not represent a “state religion” or a “theocracy” by another name. The state never attempted to use Shinto to “establish confessional unity or a powerful majority church,” nor did it seek to cultivate “converts or Shintoists.” Josephson suggests that in its desire to create Japanese subjects, the government engaged instead in a “common core” secularism. The government promoted “the way of the gods” as a kind of political Deism, one whose claims transcended narrow sectarian obligations. In this way, all Japanese, be they “Buddhists, Confucians, shrine priests, [or] National Scientists,” had a civic duty to observe Shinto rites at state shrines.<sup>17</sup>

The case of Korea prompts a re-examination of the role of state power in constructing secularism. Existing literature suggests that secularism in colonial Korea appeared nearly identical to that of Japan proper. The Government-General established the same “trinity of secular, superstition, and religion,”<sup>18</sup> which preserved the promise of religious freedom while curtailing politically subversive sects.<sup>19</sup> However, if we shift away from the high politics of regulating religion, Josephson’s “trinity” becomes much more fraught. Long before Japanese annexation in 1910, diverse understandings of what

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<sup>16</sup> Helen Hardacre, for instance, has characterized imperial rites as nearly indistinguishable in nature from sect Shinto rites. See Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Josephson, 133-134.

<sup>18</sup> In a brief postscript, Josephson notes the establishment of the 1915 Regulations on Religious Propagation, which, like the Meiji Constitution, identified Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity as protected religion while relegating all other indigenous religions as pseudo-religions. He does not, however, elaborate on how secularism in metropolitan Japan differed from that of colonial Korea, mentioning simply that “The trinity of secular, superstition, and religion was put into place by force, and what had originally been a Japanese tactic to deal with foreign powers had become a strategy in Korea to which the Koreans had to formulate a response in return.” *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>19</sup> Kyung Moon Hwang, *Rationalizing Korea: The Rise of the Modern Nation State, 1894-1945* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 164.

constituted religion (especially as they related to rites) had circulated among Koreans.<sup>20</sup>

Debates over the religious and the secular persisted throughout colonial rule, impacting state policies in critical ways. For one, faith groups continued to treat ritual ceremonies as the purview of religion. Colonial officials found it difficult to persuade Protestants of the secular nature of emperor worship, especially considering the centrality of *chesa* abstention to church culture. And while Korean nationalist intellectuals framed rites as a key public concern, they emphasized the role of civic society, not the government, in spearheading reforms. Colonial administrators responded with extraordinary measures to promote state Shinto during the 1930s and 40s. Not only did they redefine the meaning of ritual propriety, but officials also encroached ever further into religious affairs, ultimately dictating the parameters of proper faith and doctrinal orthodoxy.

My dissertation traces the contested efforts of Protestant leaders, Korean nationalist intellectuals, and Japanese colonial officials to re-make Korean rites, from the arrival of American missionaries during the late nineteenth century to liberation from colonial rule in 1945. I take a two-pronged approach to studying ritual change. First, I carefully examine visions for reform as articulated through ritual manuals, the vernacular press, and colonial promulgations to better understand the intentions of historical actors, irrespective of their success or failure. In analyzing these texts, I take a cue from Patricia

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<sup>20</sup> The term ‘religion’ (K. *chonggyo*, J. *shūkyō*) entered Korea as a Japanese neologism (as was the case in China) during the late nineteenth century, appearing in works such as Yu Kilchun’s *Sōyu Kyōnmun* (*Observations on a Journey to the West*), as well as vernacular newspapers. Notions of religion also circulated by way of foreign Protestant missionaries and Korean converts, who took great interest distinguishing Christianity from indigenous religions and idolatry (superstitions). For more on the circulation of Japanese neologisms through Asia, see, Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

Ebrey, who treats “lower-order ideas” concerning rituals, such as “what food to offer to ancestors, what materials to use in constructing a coffin or tomb, or when and how to make offerings at graves,” as windows into “higher-order” conceptions on “behavior and morality.”<sup>21</sup> Next, I construct a social history of Koreans’ changing customs by piecing together glimpses of everyday practices as revealed in photographs, missionary writings, newspapers, and local-level colonial surveys.

Chapter One explores Christian interventions in ancestral veneration, funerals, and weddings to trace how a distinct ritual subculture developed among Korean converts. Missionaries first spearheaded changes to traditional rites of passage in an attempt to eradicate competing religious influences and secure evidence of sincere conversion. Taking an ethnographic approach to materials such as missionary fiction, obituaries, photographs, hymnals, and ritual manuals, I show that Protestant ritual prescriptions did not simply demarcate between orthodox and heterodox practices. Converts abstained from ancestral rites as public expressions of their religious identity. Mutual aid for funeral preparations forged new church-based social networks, while liturgical wedding ceremonies for Christian couples portended future generations of believers. These changes, I argue, came to shape what it meant to live as a practicing Protestant in Korea at the turn of the twentieth century.

In Chapter Two, I trace the broader impact of Protestant rites on Korean culture, focusing especially on the heated public debates they sparked during the 1920s over the proper place of religion in society. The success of Christian ritual reform initiatives among new believers, as well as the institutionalization of religious freedom under

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<sup>21</sup> Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing About Rites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 220.

Japanese colonial rule, spurred the differentiation of Korean ritual life according to creed. Protestants' rejection of indigenous Confucian traditions, however, soon became a political flashpoint among cultural nationalists. Using the platform of the vernacular press, they charged that Christian converts' condemnation of ancestral rites as idolatry maligned fellow Koreans as primitive, while the popularization of Westernized church weddings unduly disseminated religious practices. Reformist intellectuals responded by proposing their own avowedly modern and culturally authentic alternatives that transcended creed. Such visions for nation-centric rites, I show, ultimately redefined rituals not as matters of individual conscience, but concerns subject to societal intervention.

Struggles over ritual reform did not take place solely on the discursive level. Chapter Three studies the on-the-ground efforts of various reformers to regulate ritual spending. The costs associated with ancestral veneration, funerals, and weddings long burdened Korean families, necessitating specially-allocated lands and mutual aid networks throughout the Chosŏn dynasty. By the 1910s and 20s, public concern over runaway expenditures reached a fever pitch, as colonial officials, nationalist intellectuals, and Protestant leaders decried the squandering of precious resources. This shared interest in curbing expenditures belied tensions undergirding relationships among the different actors. By closely examining provincial promulgations, nationalist newspapers and magazines, as well as Christian publications, I show that the reformers were competitors, not allies, in a scramble to redirect windfalls toward projects as divergent as increasing tax revenues, promoting Korean-made goods, and outfitting church coffers.

In Chapter Four, I trace how ritual reform emerged as a key concern of the colonial state during the 1930s, focusing on the promulgation and implementation of the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (1934), an exhaustive manual for “modernizing” customary rites. I show that government initiatives went beyond simplifying existing practices. Officials re-made traditional customs in service of an empire preparing for war. They urged Koreans to practice thrift, hoping to divert household ritual expenditures for public ends. They also undercut the social function of rites, orienting Koreans away from particularistic kinship ties toward a common East Asian morality, as well as a shared reverence for the Japanese emperor, the putative father-figure of the Japanese and Korean people. I argue that colonial ritual reforms ultimately expanded state encroachments into everyday life in significant ways. Not only did the *Guidelines* rely on heavy-handed surveillance and coercion, but it also claimed ritual customs as the purview of the state, a development that would leave lasting legacies in post-colonial South Korea.

Chapter Five examines the Shinto Shrine Controversy, which erupted just a year after the promulgation of the *Guidelines*, over the refusal of Protestant missionaries and Korean converts to participate in Shinto observances. Shifting away from straight-forward narratives of religious persecution, I situate this event within the broader context of wartime ritual policies. Spiritual mobilization campaigns coalesced around the principle of “Revering the gods and honoring ancestors.” Shinto shrine obeisance and ancestral veneration would serve as twin mechanisms for colonial subject formation. Protestants’ conscientious objections against both fell on deaf ears, especially as the Government-General shifted its definition of proper religion to better accommodate state Shinto. The ultimate purpose of all religions, officials maintained, was to promote respect

for the Japanese emperor and his imperial forebears. With recourse to only an enfeebled discourse of religious freedom, Presbyterian missionaries shuttered their schools, while Korean Protestants either acquiesced or suffered the consequences of their defiance.

By bringing together the stories of Protestant missionaries and converts, Korean nationalist intellectuals, as well as Japanese colonial officials, we can see that ritual reform was ultimately more than the sum of its parts. It went beyond questions of how people should dress or where they should gather. Rites became sites of heated contention, where disparate aspirations for the Korean people competed to gain ground: the making of pious Christians, patriotic nationalists, and dutiful subjects of the Japanese empire. Ritual reform was also fundamentally about religion: what counts as religious practice, and who gets to decide. In Korea, the meaning of religion was not simply imposed top-down by the state through laws and institutions. The category of religion was made and remade on the ground, by Protestants who abstained from ancestral veneration, by nationalists who created secular wedding ceremonies, by colonial agents who promoted Shinto rites as civic ceremonies mandatory for all. In the discussion that follows, we will explore just how colonial Korean society emerged as a crucible of ritual conflict and transformation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “Outward Signs of Inward Grace” The Making of Korean Protestant Rites

O heartless custom of heathen ages! Who are you and what is your power, that you shall thus be allowed to rob innocent childhood of its joy and plunge these young lives into a night of inky blackness, whose deep despair cannot be reached and fathomed by human imagination?<sup>1</sup>

J. Robert Moose

On July 11, 1886, Horace G. Underwood performed the first Protestant baptism on Korean soil.<sup>2</sup> After two years of preparatory work building schools and hospitals, the baptism marked an important milestone for the small band of American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries.<sup>3</sup> More promising still, the convert No Ch'un-gyōng had foresworn the time-honored practice of ancestral veneration (*chesa*). The mood in the room, however, was subdued. Huddled together at the home of John Heron, the doors locked, curtains drawn, and servants sent away, the missionaries faced a dilemma.<sup>4</sup> It would not be long before No's vow of *chesa* abstention drew the attention of his family members and relatives. Just two decades prior, tens of thousands of Korean Catholics had

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Moose, *Village Life in Korea* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, 1911), 170.

<sup>2</sup> No Ch'un-gyōng's given name was No To-sa. See Roy E. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 38.

<sup>3</sup> The first Protestant missionaries to arrive in Korea were commissioned by the Presbyterian and Methodist boards of foreign missions. These two denominations remained dominant in terms of missionary presence and number of converts throughout the colonial period, even after the entry of other denominations such as the Salvation Army, Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists, and Anglicans. In 1889, Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries established a comity agreement dividing the peninsula among the different branches of each denomination (Northern Presbyterian Mission, Southern Presbyterian Mission, Canadian Presbyterian Mission, Australian Presbyterian Mission, Northern Methodist Episcopal Mission, and Southern Methodist Episcopal Mission) to avoid competing for the same converts. See Chung-shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Annie Ellers Bunker, *Personal Recollections of Early Days* (Seoul: Korea Methodist News Service, 1934), 6.

been executed by the Chosōn state precisely for their refusal to carry out ancestral rites.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1882), which allowed the missionaries to enter the country, permitted the practice of Christianity within treaty ports, not the right to proselytize Koreans. Christianity remained prohibited by law. Wary that discovery imperiled No's life, not to mention the missionaries' future aspirations, some suggested that he be sent to China for religious study.<sup>6</sup>

Few records detail what befell No Ch'un-gyōng afterwards—whether he was reprimanded by his family or government officials, or if he actually fled to China—but the harrowing experience of his baptism notably did not prompt missionaries to relax their stance on ancestral veneration. Quite the contrary. During the years following No's baptism, political conditions became more favorable to Christianity and the danger of government persecution less imminent. Through their educational and medical endeavors, missionaries successfully secured the favor of the Chosōn king and queen.<sup>7</sup> More significantly, the sweeping modernizing policies of the Kabo Reforms (1894-1896) signaled to missionaries an unprecedented opportunity for the Gospel. In 1895, Samuel A. Moffett reported to supporters in America of the greatly expanded freedom of religion, as well as a potential loosening of the grip of Confucianism in Korean society (as evidenced by the abolition of the civil service examination system). The time had come, Moffett asserted, for a “transformation” of Korean society. Koreans would now find it “far more easy... to discard their former superstitions and to neglect the former

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the persecution of Catholics by the Chosōn state, see Don Baker and Franklin Rausch, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism in Chosōn Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Lawrence, “Missions in Korea,” *The Gospel in All Lands* June 1887, 274.

<sup>7</sup> In the face of Japanese imperialism, King Kojong and Queen Min cultivated personal ties with American missionaries in the hopes of securing aid from the United States. Lillias Horton Underwood (wife of Horace G. Underwood) and Annie Ellers Bunker even served as personal physicians to the Queen. See Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 30.

ceremonies.”<sup>8</sup> Missionaries traveled farther inland, proselytized more openly, and doubled down on their opposition to *chesa*.<sup>9</sup> Their reformist zeal even extended to two other Confucian rites of passage—funerals and weddings.<sup>10</sup>

This ritual dimension of early Korean Protestantism has been largely neglected in existing scholarship. For church historians focused chiefly on theological developments, Protestant rites as a field of inquiry presented little of interest. The Reformation bequeathed a legacy of iconoclasm, whereby Protestants long defined themselves against the formalism of Catholic liturgy and devotional practices. Others have echoed this assumption of “anti-ritualism” (*panǔiryesōng*),<sup>11</sup> suggesting that the particularly puritanical sensibilities of pioneer missionaries and Korean converts compounded Protestants’ disregard for ritual matters.<sup>12</sup> According to this view, Protestants concerned

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel A. Moffett, “The Transformation of Korea,” *Church at Home and Abroad*, August 1895, 135. This article appears in Oak Sung-deuk, ed., *Map'o Samyǒl charyojip* (Seoul: Saemulkyǒl P'ullōsū, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that missionary fears regarding government persecution had not disappeared completely. In 1890, Samuel A. Moffett wrote: “There are at present no signs of opposition to our work, but our position here is not assured and the present king is not secure on his throne. A revolution might bring to power the man [the king’s father] who twenty years ago had put 20,000 Christians to death.” Quoted in Shearer, *Wildfire*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> During the capping ceremony (*kwallye*), another Confucian rite of passage, a boy’s long braided hair would be put into a topknot to mark his transition into adulthood. While this rite remains outside the scope of this chapter, anecdotal evidence suggests conversion to Protestantism impacted this practice as well. Starting from the late nineteenth century, many early male converts cut their topknots to signal their new religious identity. Jennie M. Rehrer observed that at the Kennedy Hospital in Kanggye (North P'yongan Province), “[a] hair-clipper has become a part of the hospital equipment and is often used on the new believer’s head before he leaves the hospital.” See Jennie M. Rehrer, “Personal Report, 1921-1922” RG 140, Box 8, Folder 19, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries’ Files: Korea Mission, Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter, PHS).

<sup>11</sup> Chang Sǒk-man argues that “anti-ritualism” became a hallmark of Protestant missionaries and Korean converts as they competed with Catholicism and Confucianism for influence. See Chang Sǒk-man, “Han’guk ūirye tamnon ūi hyōngsōng: Yugyo hōryehōsik ūi pip’an kwa kündaesōng” in *Kündae rül tasi ingnūnda*, Yun Hae-dong, ed. (Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 2006), 75.

<sup>12</sup> See Ryu Sǒng-min, “Han’guk kidokkyo ūirye e taehan yōksajǒk koch’al” *Chonggyo Yǒn’gu* 16 (1998): 109-139; and Ch'a Ūn-jǒng, “Han’guk kaesin’gyo ūiryesang chōngch’ak kwa munhwajǒk kaltüng,” *Han’guk kidokkyo wa yōksa* 10 (1999): 103-136. Missionaries in Korea developed a reputation for zealousness widely disseminated through the publication of Arthur Judson Brown’s *The Mastery of the Far East*. Having visited Korea as the secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missionaries, Brown described the missionaries as men of the “Puritan type” who were singularly conservative in theology and biblical criticism. See Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), 540.

themselves with proper doctrine and evangelism, not ritual propriety. Even when Protestants proscribed ancestral veneration and “church-ified” (*yebaehwa*) weddings and funerals, they nevertheless refrained from codifying comprehensive ritual guidelines<sup>13</sup> or innovating completely new ritual practices.<sup>14</sup> The persistence of so many traditional customs in Protestant rites attested to how little ritual formalities mattered to church leaders.

This chapter takes a closer look at Protestant interventions in ancestral veneration, funerals, and weddings to trace how a distinct ritual subculture developed among Korean converts, not in spite of, but by virtue of their religious beliefs. Missionaries first spearheaded changes to traditional rites of passage in an attempt to eradicate competing religious influences and secure evidence of sincere conversion, or as one put it, “outward sign[s] of... inward grace.”<sup>15</sup> Drawing from previously under-studied materials such as missionary memoirs and works of fiction, obituaries, photographs, hymnals, and ritual manuals, I also show that Protestants did more than just delineate the bounds of the impermissible. Converts abstained from *chesa* as public expressions of their religious identity. Mutual aid for funerary preparations forged close ties among church members that at times even supplanted kinship and communal bonds. Christian weddings symbolized the promise of future generations of believers. In essence, these ritual reforms came to shape what it meant to live as a practicing Protestant in Korea at the turn of the twentieth century.

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<sup>13</sup> Ryu, 129.

<sup>14</sup> Ch'a, 123-124.

<sup>15</sup> Mattie Henry Miller, “A Christian Concubine,” *Korea Mission Field* 2.7 (July 1907), 170.

*“Deadly Enemies of the Native Culture”*

In a 1905 essay entitled, “Prerequisites and Principles of Evangelization,” Samuel A. Moffett had advice for missionaries about to embark for their work in faraway lands: hold fast to the Gospel. Having arrived in Korea over a decade prior as one of the pioneer missionaries, Moffett was a seasoned hand. He witnessed up-close how easily missionaries could misplace their priorities. They faced “constant and plausible” “temptations” to devote themselves to worthy, though ultimately lesser, endeavors. “Education, literature, language, science, history and philanthropy” jockeyed for missionaries’ attention while the actual preaching of the Gospel—their “one great commission”—languished.<sup>16</sup> Should missionaries stray too far, Moffett warned, they risked losing sight of their calling entirely, mistaking moral reformation for salvation, and civilization—“Western ideas, customs and inventions”—for Christianity itself.

Ambivalence toward missionary-led Westernization had been long in the making. From the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant missionary strategy began shifting significantly toward indigenization. Efforts to civilize “heathens” prior to conversion had proven costly and ineffective.<sup>17</sup> Concerned over diminishing funding and interest in missions among American laity, Rufus Anderson, the secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), developed a theory and practice of missions centered on evangelism and building up robust native churches. Anderson

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<sup>16</sup> *Counsel to New Missionaries from Older Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1905), 67.

<sup>17</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the ABCFM established assimilatory boarding schools as the cornerstone of foreign missions in Native American settlements. These institutions, however, proved to be prohibitively expensive to maintain and a disappointment in the number of converted students. See Paul William Harris, *Nothing but Christ: Rufus Anderson and the Ideology of Foreign Missions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

advocated what became known as the “Three Self” program, aiming to cultivate self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting native churches.<sup>18</sup>

The Three Self principles had a particularly pronounced impact on the development of Korean Protestantism. In June 1890, John Nevius, a long-time Presbyterian missionary in Shandong, spent two weeks in Seoul speaking with a fledgling band of missionaries. Nevius had developed his own methodical approach to the Three Self program for China, which disseminated widely through essays published in the *Chinese Recorder*. Nevius emphasized to Moffett and his colleagues the importance of missionaries’ commitment to personal evangelism, as well as the need to establish strict rules at the outset to cultivate self-sufficiency among native churches. According to his model, every believer would actively engage in local evangelism (having received training through Bible classes), submit to the oversight of local church leaders, and fully finance the work of the church. Presbyterian missionaries in Korea enthusiastically embraced what later came to be known as the Nevius Method, incorporating its ideas into the 1891 Presbyterian Northern Mission Rules and By-laws, and making Nevius’ *Methods of Mission Work* (1895) required reading for all incoming missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

The devolution of responsibilities to native Christians raised the stakes of sincere conversion. Presbyterian missionaries, as per Nevius’ suggestions, established a system in which Korean church leaders took charge of day-to-day pastoral work, while missionaries visited the substations (local churches) just several times a year to assess progress and administer sacraments. Since Koreans did not receive ordination until 1907,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Allen Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930), 74.

for decades it was lay Christians who took up the herculean task of church operations, leading regular worship services, selecting scripture readings, and exhorting congregations.<sup>20</sup> The Nevius Method incorporated mechanisms to ensure church purity in the absence of close missionary oversight. Shifting financial obligations from missionaries to converts themselves, in addition to assuring sustainability, attempted to reduce inducements for would-be ‘rice Christians’ from entering the church for material gain.<sup>21</sup> According to historian Paul S. Cha, missionaries also set out to winnow out other kinds of insincere conversion by imposing a three-tiered probationary process for church membership.<sup>22</sup> Casual church-goers were separate from those who made public professions of faith and announced their intention to enter the church formally. New believers were examined by missionaries (and later Korean pastors) before becoming catechumen, then subjected to further study and examination before advancing as full baptized members.<sup>23</sup>

The need to scrutinize conversion for demonstrable evidence of sincerity produced a keen interest in Koreans’ everyday practices despite missionaries’ repeated disavowal of civilizing agendas. To be sure, missionaries continued to advise caution and a “large-hearted and liberal regard” for Korean ways.<sup>24</sup> In the words of William M. Baird, a former seminary classmate and close friend of Moffett’s, “[e]very country has its

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>21</sup> Paul S. Cha, “Unequal Partners, Contested Relations: Protestant Missionaries and Korean Christians, 1884-1907,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 17.1 (2012), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods*, 77. While Methodist missionaries in Korea did not formally adopt the Nevius Methods, they nonetheless incorporated many similar policies as their Presbyterian counterparts. The Methodist church membership process delineated between seekers (*hoeu*), probationers (*hakstibin*), and full church members (*ipkyoin*). “Kyohoe chojikhan pōb,” *Sinhak Wōlbo* July 1902, 304-309.

<sup>24</sup> “Native Customs and How to Deal with Them,” *Korea Field*, November 1904, 204-205.

peculiar customs which should be followed.” Missionaries’ statements of toleration, however, had an important caveat. Baird went on to qualify his exhortation with the operative phrase: “when not contrary to the word of God.”<sup>25</sup> This stipulation allowed missionaries to reject moral reformation for its own sake, while simultaneously giving themselves wide latitude to demand significant, and at times onerous, lifestyle changes. In 1894, Moffett penned a code of conduct entitled, *Rules for the Native Church in Korea*, enjoining believers to strict Sabbath observance (church attendance and abstention from all work), diligence, and avoidance of “flagrant sins” such as the consumption of alcohol or opium, gambling, and all other forms of debauchery. When examining baptismal candidates, missionaries and Korean lay leaders not only inspected for orthodox beliefs regarding sin and redemption, or the regularity of devotional practices, but they especially scrutinized the quality of converts’ Christian living in accordance with the *Rules*.<sup>26</sup>

Protestant intervention into Korean ritual life emerged as a part of missionaries’ efforts to secure sincere conversion. Missionaries’ intolerance for “sinful” customs intensified when they were perceived as religious in nature. The very first clause in Moffett’s *Rules* enjoined believers from ancestral veneration, for “the Most High God hates the glorifying and worshipping of spirits, …even the honouring of ancestral spirits.”<sup>27</sup> Keenly aware of the burgeoning consensus among their colleagues in China against ancestral rites, missionaries in Korea defined the practice as idolatry, a clear

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<sup>25</sup> William M. Baird, “Should Polygamists be Admitted to the Christian Church?” (Seoul: Trilingual Press, 1896), 15.

<sup>26</sup> Robert E. Speer, *Report on the mission in Korea of the Presbyterian board of Foreign Missions* (New York: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1897), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

violation of the Second Commandment.<sup>28</sup> *Chesa* was deemed incompatible with Christianity, for it signified a “worship of the dead,” not just an expression of filial piety. Missionaries pointed to Koreans’ belief in three souls, whereby “[a]fter death one remains at the grave, one inhabits the tablet, and one goes on to its destiny.” During the *chesa* ceremony, the spirit of the deceased would enter into the hole drilled into the top of the ancestral tablet and partook of the food offerings prepared by the family of the deceased.<sup>29</sup> The eldest son, as Anabel Major Nisbet put it, would function as “high priest.”<sup>30</sup> Even those who viewed Confucianism as an ethical system treated ancestral veneration as a distinctly religious practice.<sup>31</sup>

The prohibition of ancestral veneration had spillover effects on other Korean rites. Considering that Zhu Xi’s *Family Rites*, which formed the foundations of Confucian rites of passage in Korea, embedded ancestral veneration into the performance of funerary and marriage ceremonies, missionaries could not reform the one without the others. The very first ancestral rite for the deceased, for instance, was customarily performed shortly after the interment of the body, whereby family members would offer food and drink at the foot of the burial mound. The ancestral shrine played an equally central role in traditional

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<sup>28</sup> The permissibility of the rites for converts long dogged missionaries in China. During the eighteenth-century, the Vatican repeatedly adjudicated the issue—in 1704, 1715, and 1742, finally ruling against Jesuits’ argument for toleration. From the late nineteenth-century, Protestant missionaries similarly developed a consensus. Over the course of three General Missionary Conferences held in Shanghai in 1877, 1890, and 1907, missionaries decrying ancestral rites for their exaggerated filial piety, worship of the dead, and plain idolatry overwhelmed the outspoken minority questioning the religiosity of the practice. See Eric R. Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 24; and Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 204.

<sup>29</sup> George Heber Jones, *Korea the Land, People, and Customs* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), 47-48.

<sup>30</sup> Anabel Major Nisbet, *Day in and Day Out in Korea: Being some Account of the Mission Work that has been Carried on in Korea since 1892 by the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1920), 104.

<sup>31</sup> William N. Blair, *The Korea Pentecost, and other experiences on the mission field* (New York: Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 1910), 12.

weddings. Before the groom departed for the marriage ceremony (typically held at the home of the bride), he first announced the forthcoming union to his ancestors (*komyo*). When the newlywed couple returned to the groom's home after the conclusion of the nuptial rites and festivities, the groom once more carried out *komyo* in order to cement his wife's status as a formal member of the lineage group.<sup>32</sup> Missionaries and Korean church leaders took pains to remove ancestral spirits from Christian funerals and weddings.

Samuel A. Moffett authored the earliest extant Protestant funerary manual entitled, *Yesugyohoe Sangnye (The Christian Funeral Ceremony)* (1907), which strictly prohibited *chesa*.<sup>33</sup> The *Hollyesyō* (Book of Marriage Rites), an undated Presbyterian primer on marriage rites similarly instructed believers to excise ancestral rites from weddings.<sup>34</sup>

Missionaries' project of ritual reform went beyond targeting misguided objects of worship to combating a whole spiritual worldview incompatible with Christianity.

Another reason for missionaries' hostility toward ancestral veneration was its proximity to shamanism, missionaries' catch-all term for Korean folk beliefs.<sup>35</sup> Shamanism, as Charles A. Clark put it, was above all a "religion of fear."<sup>36</sup> Malevolent spirits abounded, threatening "[t]errors untold"—"[s]ickness, madness, poverty, disgrace, death"—to any who neglected satisfactory offerings.<sup>37</sup> As many missionaries saw it, ancestral rites were no different. They charged that Koreans continued to sacrifice to ancestors in order to

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<sup>32</sup> Deuchler, 255-256.

<sup>33</sup> The fourth edition of *Yesugyohoe Sangnye* is the earliest extant version available to historians. Despite the difficulties in ascertaining the precise year when the first edition went into circulation, it is probable that it was published in the late-1890s, the period in which the first Protestant funerals were being carried out.

<sup>34</sup> *Hollyesyō*, The Korean Christian Museum, Soongsil University.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion on the development of Protestant missionaries' ideas on Korean shamanism, see Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 155.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Allen Clark, *Religions of Old Korea* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1961), 194. Though the book was published in 1961, Allen first wrote it as a series of lectures that were given in 1921 and 1929.

<sup>37</sup> Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 85.

secure future blessings and hedge against possible calamity. “The army of ancestral spirits,” Ellasue Wagner wrote, were simply one among a pantheon of “demons, goblins, elves, dragons, hill-gods, spirits of the trees and fairies good and bad” keeping Koreans in thrall.<sup>38</sup> *Chesa* and shamanism were so intertwined in missionaries’ minds that they warranted the same pejoratives. Ancestral tablets, like shamanic talismans, amounted to “dirty and grotesque fetishes [sic].”<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 1.1 Masked Funerary Attendants.  
SOURCE: J.S. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 71.

Traditional Korean funerals appeared even more rife with shamanic influences. Clark contended that while Confucianism, Buddhism, and shamanism all intermingled in Korean funeral practices, the latter exerted greatest sway.<sup>40</sup> The fear of the spirit world gave rise to rituals to secure speedy passage of the deceased into the afterworld and also

<sup>38</sup> Ellasue Wagner, *Korea the old and the new* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1931), 139.

<sup>39</sup> “He is a Farmer,” *Korean Repository* 5 (June 1898), 232

<sup>40</sup> Clark, *Religions of Old Korea*, 210.

to protect the living from harm. In *Yesugyo Sangnye*, Moffett decried all such practices, including: the calling of the spirit (*ch'ohon*), fashioning of the spirit seat (*kyowi*), employing a geomancer to select an auspicious gravesite, and engaging a shaman to perform an exorcism (*kut*).<sup>41</sup> The funeral procession, for some, was particularly troubling. Not only were funeral biers adorned extravagantly with “carved and painted hideous faces” to “frighten off...evil spirit[s],”<sup>42</sup> but funeral attendants also wore “hideous four- or six-eyed masks” for the same purpose.<sup>43</sup> In Mattie Wilcox Noble’s account, the funeral procession appeared outright diabolical, with bier carriers swaying back and forth to the sound “the drum beating, the bell ringing, and the flute,” appearing to “lose themselves in a horrid demon possession.”<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 1.2 Funeral Procession in Seoul.

SOURCE: George Trumbull Ladd, *In Korea with Marquis Ito*, p.n452.

<sup>41</sup> Moffett, *Yesugyo Sangnye*, 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> Moose, *Village Life in Korea*, 176.

<sup>43</sup> Clark, *Religions of Old Korea*, 211.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 188.



Fig. 1.3 Corpses tied to Trees, circa 1890s.

SOURCE: Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Moffett Korea Collection.

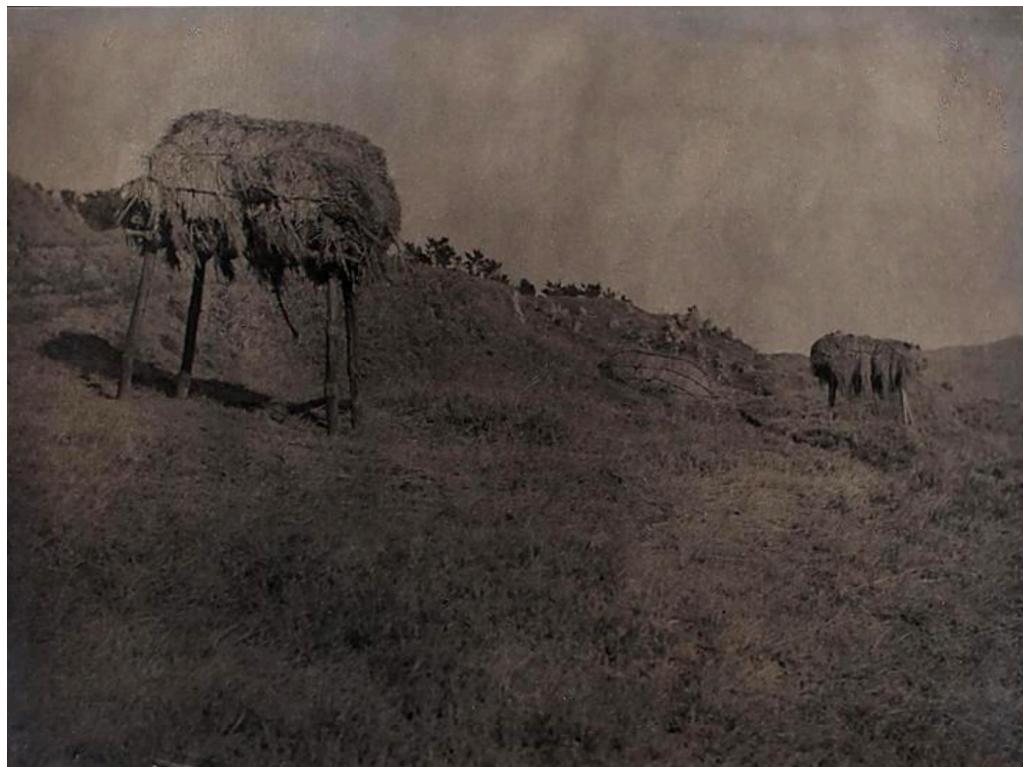


Fig. 1.4 Graves of Smallpox Victims, 1890.

SOURCE: Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Moffett Korea Collection.

Even more disturbing to missionaries was when some deaths did not warrant any funeral at all. Robert Moose observed children were “buried as soon after death as possible, and with as little ceremony as the case will admit.”<sup>45</sup> Parents became ancestral spirits upon death, but not so with children. P. B. Hill recalled that some were buried in bizarre ways. Unmarried girls were “buried in the roadway, their eyes having been first glued or sewed shut, their mouths and ears filled with dough,” while unmarried boys were buried “upright... in the mountains.” Missionaries observed that still-born children and victims of infectious disease were wrapped in straw and tied to trees “head downward” to prevent further “calamity in the home.”<sup>46</sup> Mattie Wilcox Noble, who had lost two young children, remarked, “The woods are full of bones.”<sup>47</sup>

Missionaries also scrutinized traditional customs for traces of “shamanistic superstitions.” Koreans, they maintained, lived in dread not just of vengeful spirits, but also of mercurial twists of fate. The ordinary Korean fixated on the idea of luck and did whatever he could to sway it in his favor. There were “[l]ucky days, lucky hours and lucky moments; lucky quarters, lucky combinations, lucky omens,” Homer Hulbert remarked, “luck or ill-luck in everything.”<sup>48</sup> When it came to funerals and weddings, auspiciousness was paramount. Missionaries critiqued how Koreans customarily hired the services of “Shamanistic Chikwan” (geomancers) to “scientifically locat[e] the proper grave site with the exact orientation and depth” to ensure both the ancestor’s peaceful

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<sup>45</sup> Moose, *Village Life in Korea*, 172.

<sup>46</sup> P. B. Hill, *Three Lessons on our Korean Mission* (Nashville: Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1919), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Noble, *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble*, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Homer Hulbert, “The Korean Almanac,” *Korean Repository* (February 1895), 71. Quoted in Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 166.

repose and their own good fortune.<sup>49</sup> Koreans also turned to astrological almanacs to select felicitous days for funerals and weddings (*t'aegil*), a senseless practice J. Campbell Smith pointed out, since “[a]ll days are made and given by God” and “[a]ll are blessings if we use them so.”<sup>50</sup> Worse still, Koreans relied on such “superstitions” for matters as consequential as the selection of marriage partners. As a part of marriage negotiations, the parents of a prospective groom sent to the bride’s family his *p’alcha*, “the four pairs of cyclical characters… indicat[ing] the hour, the day, the month, and the year of his birth.” Only if these signs proved compatible with those of the bride would her family assent to the union.<sup>51</sup> Needless to say, missionaries prohibited all such objectionable traditions, earning Protestants a reputation as “deadly enemies of the native culture.”<sup>52</sup>

#### *“Jesus People do not Sacrifice to the Spirits”*

William H. Chisholm recounted a particularly memorable experience in his memoir of the fifteen years he spent in Korea. A native of Emerson, Michigan, Chisholm served as a Presbyterian medical missionary in Sŏnch’ŏn, a small city in North P’yōngan Province near the Manchurian border. One Saturday afternoon, Chisholm and his helper paid a visit to the village of An’gol, where a former patient, who had become the leader of a small group of Christians, extended an invitation to survey the progress of the church. The following day, after Chisholm preached the Sunday sermon, his presence was urgently requested by a family living just beyond the nearby hill. A seventy-six-year-

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<sup>49</sup> Clark, *Religions of Old Korea*, 210-211.

<sup>50</sup> Noble, *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble*, 313.

<sup>51</sup> Deuchler, 252-253.

<sup>52</sup> Pyun Young Tai, *My Attitude Toward Ancestor Worship* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1926), 23.

old woman was on the verge of death. Her desperate family entreated the missionary for treatment, though in preparation for the worst, they had already washed her body and readied a coffin. Chisholm's operation, though risky and performed without anesthesia, ultimately proved successful. News of the incident "spread like wildfire," and the local church quickly brimmed with new attendees.

Chisholm's account took an even more uncanny turn after the near miraculous recovery. When Chisholm sent a Bible woman to check on the patient (and presumably proselytize), she returned with an unexpected gift: the ancestral tablets of the patient's family. The Bible woman explained to the bewildered doctor that his patient had had a divine revelation of sorts. Just prior to Chisholm's visits, the patient had two dreams:

First, she dreamed that she was dying, and that someone came along and saved her life. Then she had another dream, that she did die and went to heaven, but she was told she could not enter heaven, as there was sin in her life.

The patient insisted these dreams were messages from God. Chisholm had rescued her when she stood at the precipice of death, and as for the sin in her life, it had to be her family's continuation of ancestral sacrifices. With this realization, "[s]he gathered together the things connected with these sacrifices"—the hallowed objects passed down "for over one hundred years"—and surrendered them to Chisholm.<sup>53</sup>

By 1938, when Chisholm's memoir was published, missionary accounts were replete with stories of irrevocable, even spectacular renunciation of ancestral veneration. Missionaries did not explicitly require dramatic displays of *chesa* renunciation, but nor did they discourage such acts.<sup>54</sup> Since the establishment of Moffett's *Rules for the Native*

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<sup>53</sup> William H. Chisholm, *Vivid Experiences in Korea* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938), 30.

<sup>54</sup> Oak Sung-deuk notes that it became common practice for Korean Christians to give spirit tablets to missionaries as a "token of their conversion." See Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 207.

*Church*, missionaries steadily inundated converts with teachings on the sinfulness of ancestral veneration. Horace G. Underwood's *Yesugyo Mundap* (1894), one of the earliest catechisms published in Korea, instructed converts to stop viewing ancestral tablets as "gods" (*sillyǒng*) but "man-made" forms,<sup>55</sup> and to cease preparing sacrificial foods, a "useless" (*hōtdoen*) gesture that transgressed God's commands.<sup>56</sup> The *Sinhak Wōlbo*, a Korean-language Methodist monthly, repeatedly exhorted for readers to "completely abolish" the "useless" *chesa*.<sup>57</sup> Columnists reminded those who persisted in "idolatry" that their behavior was tantamount to "unfiliality" (*pulhyo*) toward their Heavenly Father, "betrayal" of Christ their savior, and "worship" (*sungbong*) of the devil himself.<sup>58</sup> Korean church leaders even made house calls to ensure compliance. Mattie Wilcox Noble wrote in her journal that traditional holidays such as the new year prompted heightened anxiety about backsliding. Because "the heathen sat up all night to sacrifice to their ancestors & the evil spirits," she wrote, lay leaders went around "warn[ing] probationers not to do so."<sup>59</sup> Church members found in violation of church rules would be denied communion, admonished, and depending on the severity of the transgression, suspended or excommunicated.<sup>60</sup>

Rejecting ancestor veneration exacted a heavy price for many early converts. Christians' symbolic violence against spirit tablets met the fury, not to mention physical force, of family members and relatives. Missionaries described children who were

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<sup>55</sup> *Yesugyo Mundap* (Seoul: Han'guk Kyohoesa Munhōn Yōn'guwōn, 2010), 2a-2b.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 31a - 31b.

<sup>57</sup> "Usang ūl p'yehal kōt," *Sinhak Wōlbo* 4.6 (1904).

<sup>58</sup> "Usang ūl syōmgiji mal kōt," *Sinhak Wōlbo* 4.9 (1904).

<sup>59</sup> Noble, *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods*, 128.

“beaten till the blood ran,”<sup>61</sup> and one man was repeatedly knocked in the forehead with an ink stone by his aunt for his refusal to carry out *chesa*.<sup>62</sup> In one account, a young man was “set upon by the more vehement of his relatives, who beat him and tried to trample him to death” when he refused to be won back to “the ancestral faith” “by persuasion, entreaty, and threats.”<sup>63</sup>

Abstention from ancestral rites raised the possibility of significant financial loss. Prominent *yangban* clans typically set aside lands to generate income to support *chesa*, and the eldest son of such a clan, if he were a Christian, would have to relinquish the “ancestral estat[e].”<sup>64</sup> In F. S. Miller’s *The Gospel in Korea*, a collection of vignettes written in the voice of Koreans, a father, who himself is “the oldest son of the oldest son in [his] clan,” entreats his son to consider the full material ramifications of his Christian conversion. He reminds the son that the “clan land” was the family’s sole livelihood—the means “to support [his] mother, educate [his] brothers and sisters, and feed [his] own family.”<sup>65</sup> According to Anabel Major Nisbet, the renunciation of ancestral veneration did in fact impoverish some converts. She expressed astonishment to find that “the humble coolie who carries [her husband’s] load was the head of his branch of the Cho clan.” The man reportedly “surrendered the use of the family rice fields,” and “for Christ’s sake,” resigned to “carr[y] a heavy load twenty miles a day for food and sixty-five sen.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Korea Mission Field*, 32.3 (1936), 57.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>63</sup> Jones, *Korea the Land the People and Customs*, 102-103.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, *The Gospel in Korea*, 96.

<sup>66</sup> Nisbet, *Day in and Day Out in Korea*, 104.

For many early Korean converts, abstention from ancestral rites entailed severe social marginalization. Some found themselves “cast out of their clans”<sup>67</sup> and disowned by parents who “can expect no sacrifices” upon their deaths.<sup>68</sup> Others found that the renunciation of *chesa* complicated prospects on the marriage market. One *yangban* convert complained that it was nearly “impossible” “to marry off...children in his own social class.” The social cost of *chesa* abstention extended beyond kinship relations. Converts who remained in their villages encountered “the dislike and ridicule” of their communities, likely because cutting off ancestral rites strained bonds of reciprocity.<sup>69</sup> In another story narrated in Miller’s *The Gospel in Korea*, one man refused to convert to Christianity for fear of severing communal ties. Considering villagers and relatives sent each other “rice, beer, meat, and cakes from their sacrifices,” he worried that withdrawal from these recurring exchanges would make his family “outcasts.”<sup>70</sup>

The ramifications of *chesa* abstention could be equally severe for women. Though marginal in the actual performance of lineage rites, women served the critical function of preparing the sacrificial foods.<sup>71</sup> Renouncing ancestral veneration for female converts entailed not only recusing themselves from the ceremonies, but also shirking an important part of their domestic responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> Women advanced in age, such as Chisholm’s patient, had greater leeway for such defiance. Their seniority afforded them

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<sup>67</sup> *Korea Mission Field*, 32.3 (1936), 57.

<sup>68</sup> Mattie Wilcox Noble, *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble: 1892-1934*. (Seoul: Han’guk Kidokkyo Yōksa Yōn’guso, 1993), 207.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Gifford, *Every-day Life in Korea*, 158-159.

<sup>70</sup> F. S. Miller, *The Gospel in Korea* (London: Revell, 1939), 31-32.

<sup>71</sup> Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Presbyterian missionaries in Andong remarked that after the women of one household converted to Christianity, ancestral veneration ceased altogether for lack of their labor. See “Andong Station Report, 1933,” RG 140, Box 7, Folder 4, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries’ Files: Korea Mission, PHS.

respect and deference. What is more, the herculean task of cooking for extended kin likely fell to their daughters-in-law. *Chesa* abstention made young women vulnerable to far greater risk. While Neo-Confucian ideology emphasized the permanence of conjugal ties, a woman's place in her husband's family remained precarious. The Chosŏn state recognized divorce in cases of "extreme disobedience": "disobedience toward the parents-in-law, failure to produce a son, adultery, theft, undue jealousy, grave illness, and extreme talkativeness."<sup>73</sup> The renunciation of ancestral veneration certainly ranked high among the unforgivable acts of disobedience, and missionary accounts commonly reported women cast out by angry parents-in-law for such impudence.<sup>74</sup>

Many struggled to withstand the economic, social, and personal costs of abstention. "Ancestor worship is an ever present factor in Korean life," one missionary wrote, and the "constancy" of the Korean convert is "under a continual test," to "resist forces of religious gravitation which are ever operating to pull him back."<sup>75</sup> Some women understandably took a more cautious approach to *chesa* abstention. Consider the example of Kim Tōksŏn.<sup>76</sup> Hailing from Hwanghae Province, Kim was a woman of *yangban* lineage who converted to Christianity well into adulthood—she was already forty-one years old when her paternal aunt first accompanied her to a Presbyterian church. Kim became a Bible woman locally renowned for her piety, tireless evangelism, sacrificial philanthropy, and miraculous healing prayers.<sup>77</sup> She withstood her husband's unremitting

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>74</sup> Samuel A. Moffett, "Personal Report of Samuel A. Moffett, September 1901 Annual Meeting" in *Map'o Samyǒl Charyojip* vol.3, ed. Sung-Deuk Oak (Seoul: Saemulkyǒl P'ullōsū, 2017), 844.

<sup>75</sup> "Obstacles Encountered by Korean Christians," *Korean Repository* 2 (Feb. 1895), 149.

<sup>76</sup> Kim Tōk-sōn, "Midūm ūro igin nae ilsaeng," in *Sūngni ūi Saenghwal*, compiled by Mattie Wilcox Noble (Kyōngsōng: Kidokkyo Ch'angmunsa, 1927), 112-118.

<sup>77</sup> The term "Bible woman" referred to paid Korean evangelistic workers who accompanied female missionaries. See Donald N. Clark, "Mothers, Daughters, Biblewomen, and Sisters: An Account of

scorn against her faith. She had swept her house clean of all its tutelary gods almost immediately following her conversion.<sup>78</sup> Yet even Kim did not attempt to relinquish ancestral veneration until after her husband's death, a full four years after her conversion. In her memoir, she recollects that it was only then when she was overcome with the desire to repent.<sup>79</sup>

The timeline of Kim's conversion and subsequent disavowal of ancestral rites should give us pause. Kim's regular church attendance, as well as her swift destruction of all household gods, suggests a full awareness of Protestants' strict prohibition against all forms of idolatry, including *chesa*. More than a moment of moral awakening, the death of her husband likely established conditions that made it possible for Kim to renounce ancestral rites. Following her husband's death, and presumably those of her parents-in-law, Kim became the matriarch of her family, much like Chisolm's patient. When her unbelieving eldest son refused to get rid of his father's spirit tablets, Kim launched an operation of incremental iconoclasm. One day, she took advantage of her son's short absence from home to bury the tablets. When he replaced the tablets upon his return, Kim instructed her daughter-in-law to stop preparing the daily meal offerings. But Kim's expanded authority stopped here. She was not the head of her household. Her son was. Kim, unlike Chisholm's patient, did not have the sympathetic support of her family, and

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'Women's Work' in the Korea Mission Field" in *Christianity in Korea*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 170.

<sup>78</sup> Missionaries encouraged new converts to publicly destroy "fetishes" (household gods) and were frequently called upon to assist in the act. See "Syen Chun Station Report, 1929-1930," RG 140, Box 7, Folder 1, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries' Files: Korea Mission, Presbyterian Historical Society.

<sup>79</sup> Mattie Wilcox Noble, comp. *Sǔngni ūi Saenghwal* (Kyōngsōng: Kidokkyo Ch'angmunsa, 1927).

when her son beat his wife in retaliation, she had little choice but to capitulate. Ancestral veneration continued in their home until the son's own eventual conversion.<sup>80</sup>

The price converts paid for their renunciation of *chesa* raises the question of the motivations undergirding their choices. On the one hand, a clear power differential existed between missionaries and Korean Christians.<sup>81</sup> The Korean Presbytery was not established until 1907, and until then, missionaries dictated the parameters of "proper belief and behavior" by setting rules and reserving the authority to grant or deny church membership.<sup>82</sup> Pyun Young Tai, a Methodist convert and English-language instructor at the Central Normal High School in Seoul, authored a treatise entitled, *My Attitude on Ancestor Worship* (1926) concerning Protestant policies on *chesa*. He critiqued the excessive intolerance on the part of missionaries, while also lambasting the blind obedience of "mimicking Koreans" who surpassed the missionaries "in [their] harshness of verdict."<sup>83</sup> In Pyun's eyes, Korean Christians foreswore ancestral veneration because they did as they were taught.

Without discounting the power missionaries wielded during the foundational decades of Protestantism in Korea, we must also consider how abstention from ancestral veneration contributed to the formation of Christian identity and sense of belonging. Historian Paul S. Cha has pointed out the deep significance baptism and communion held for Korean converts. Catechumen and casual church-goers had fewer privileges and protections than baptized members in good standing. Not only did they not have access to

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<sup>80</sup> Kim Tök-sŏn, "Midüm ūro igin nae ilsaeng," in *Sŭngni ūi Saenghwal*, compiled by Mattie Wilcox Noble (Kyōngsōng: Kidokkyo Ch'angmunsa, 1927).

<sup>81</sup> For more on the complex hierachal relationship between missionaries and Korean Christians, see Cha, "Unequal Partners, Contested Relations."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>83</sup> Pyun, *My Attitude Toward Ancestor Worship*, 28.

a church trial in the case of expulsion, but they were also constantly reminded of their liminal status each time they had to recuse themselves from communion.<sup>84</sup> Kim likely experienced this sense of marginalization acutely. She had converted three years after the Great Revival of 1907, when Presbyterians and Methodists began to place even greater emphasis on genuine conversion and strict conformity to the devotional practices and lifestyle protocols of the church.<sup>85</sup> As someone living in violation of one of the most fundamental teachings of the church, she remained at the edges of her religious community no matter her piety or contributions. Tellingly, Kim's narrative does not construe her belated decision to renounce ancestral rites in terms of a sudden realization of transgressing God's law or the rules of the church. She simply states that once her husband died, she thought it "improper for a person who believed in the Lord to maintain a spirit tablet in the same manner as the non-Christians (*oein*)."<sup>86</sup> Kim may have been eager to declare as others did, that "Jesus people, did not sacrifice to the spirits."<sup>87</sup>

Abstention from ancestral rites became embedded in the communal life of Korean Protestants. Many converts turned to each other during occasions when *chesa* was traditionally performed. Some sought the sanctuary of church,<sup>88</sup> while others engaged in collective church projects.<sup>89</sup> Methodist missionary J.Z. Moore noted that in Hamjong, a small village in South P'yongan Province, the Christians had spent New Year's Day<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Paul S. Cha, "Unequal Partners, Contested Relations," 14.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>86</sup> Kim Tök-sön, "Midüm ūro igin nae ilsaeng," in *Sūngni ūi Saenghwal*, compiled by Mattie Wilcox Noble (Kyōngsōng: Kidokkyo Ch'angmunsa, 1927), 116.

<sup>87</sup> E.D. Follwell, "A Country Trip," *Korea Mission Field* 2.5 (May 1906), 85.

<sup>88</sup> Speer, *Report on the mission in Korea of the Presbyterian board of Foreign Missions*, 15.

<sup>89</sup> J.Z. Moore, "The Great Revival Year," *Korea Mission Field* 3.8 (August 1907), 113.

<sup>90</sup> In his essay, Moore wrote that this project took place "on the holiday when the people all go out to the mountains to worship at their ancestors' graves." While Moore does not specify which holiday precisely, it is likely he referred to the Lunar New Year, the most significant occasion for visiting ancestral graves.

together in the mountainside, “not to sacrifice, but to bring the timbers for their new church.” “It was a real Holy day of great joy for them,” Moore noted with approval.<sup>91</sup> During the late 1890s, Korean Protestants also developed their own memorial services to honor ancestors on death anniversaries. Known as the *ch’udohoe*, church members would gather on the night of the first anniversary, lighting candles, singing hymns, remembering the good works and faith of the deceased, and praying for the comfort of the bereaved.<sup>92</sup> Scholars have commonly noted the similarities between *chesa* and *ch’udohoe*—such as observing the first death anniversary, gathering at nighttime, and lighting candles—but there is a key difference between the two rites.<sup>93</sup> While the former strengthened lineage bonds among kin, the latter reinforced ties to the church. Accounts of *ch’udohoe* repeatedly mention the presence of church members, while silent on the attendance of non-Christian family or relatives. Even if the memorial services did not exclude outsiders, they nonetheless underscored Christians’ sense of belonging in the church.

### *Mourning Church-folk: Christian Funerals and Community Formation*

The “miraculous” (*ijökjök*) funeral of Chang An-na took place on an overcast April morning. Anxious of rain, family members pushed the funeral ahead of schedule. It was likely an easy decision, considering the family did not expect many mourners. Chang had lived in a small farming community in Hwanghae Province, and few could afford to step away at the height of sowing season. And who would blame them? Making matters

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 217.

<sup>93</sup> Oak interprets *ch’udosik* as an example of Korean Christian theological innovation. He writes that while they were “diluted” versions of their traditional counterparts, they fulfilled Christians’ “need for satisfying filial piety to their deceased parents.” Ibid., 219. See also, Ch’ a Ün-jöng, “Han’guk Kaesin’gyo üiryesang chöngch’ak kwa munhwajök kaltüng,” *Han’guk kidokkyo wa yoksa* 10 (1999), 118.

worse, Chang was a recent transplant to the P'yōngsan township, having arrived as a Bible woman just two years prior. She had no roots there. But when Chang's coffin arrived at the local church, forty church members were present. Later, as church brethren prepared to carry the bier to the mountainside for burial, thirty young men from the village, none of whom were Christian, abandoned their work to help bring Chang to her final resting place. Even more surprising, they were joined by over one hundred and twenty other non-Christians seeking to pay their respects. Chang had evidently become a beloved local fixture, a mother figure even, during her brief sojourn in the village.<sup>94</sup>

That Chang's obituary describes her funeral as "miraculous" might appear puzzling or even hyperbolic. Granted, it was unexpectedly well-attended, but villagers were customarily guests at each other's funerals and helped with the many accompanying preparations. During the Chosŏn dynasty, many villages formed community compacts (*hyangyak*) obligating members, among other things, to give mutual aid during major ritual occasions such as funerals and weddings. Moreover, the obituary does not indicate that it was particularly difficult for non-Christians to participate in the ceremony. The first recorded Protestant funerals took place in the late 1890s, yet even in 1930, when Chang's funeral took place, Christian ceremonies retained considerable traditional elements easily recognizable to ordinary Koreans. For instance, historian Ch'a Ŭn-jöng observed that with regard to the bodily preparation of the deceased, as well as the overall processional structure—confirmation of death (*imjongsik*), encoffining (*ipkwansik*),

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<sup>94</sup> "Ko chǒndo puin Chang An-nassi rǔl ch'uǒkham," *Chosǒn Kamni Hoebo*, May 1930.

sending off of the coffin from the home (*pal'insik*), and interment (*hagwansik*)—

Protestant funerals followed Korean custom.<sup>95</sup>

These resonances, however, belied the significant differences between Protestant and traditional funeral ceremonies. Contemporaneous accounts emphasize that what set the two apart mattered deeply to Christians and non-Christians alike. The traditional sequence of *imjongsik*, *ipkwansik*, *pal'insik*, *hagwansik* may have remained unchanged, yet as was the case with Protestant memorial services, church funerals took on new religious meaning as missionaries incorporated liturgical practices such as prayers, hymns, scripture reading, and the recitation of the Lord's prayer. Ch'a points out that with these alterations, seemingly traditional funeral proceedings followed the sequence of a Sunday worship service.<sup>96</sup> Korean converts correspondingly began to treat death as an occasion concerning the church. They requested the presence of a pastor or lay leader when death appeared imminent, and those whose families were non-Christian made special deathbed requests that they be buried according to "Christian rites" (*kyojungnye*).<sup>97</sup> Some families honored such entreaties, and Korean pastors routinely performed funeral services at "heathen home[s]."<sup>98</sup>

The disparities between Protestant and traditional funerals were also just significant enough to foment conflict between church members and families of the deceased. With the elimination of *chesa* and folk customs, the Protestant ceremony struck many non-Christians as a sacrilege. In 1903, the *Sinhak Wölbo* (*Theology Monthly*)

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<sup>95</sup> Ch'a Ŭn-jöng, "Han'guk Kaesin'gyo ūiryesang chōngch'ak kwa munhwajök kaltüng," *Han'guk kidokkyo wa yōksa* 10 (1999), 114-115.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>97</sup> *Korea Field*, May 1905, 255.

<sup>98</sup> "Kossi puin pyōlsye han il," *Chyosön Kūrisüdoin Hoebo*, Jan. 26, 1898.

published an obituary of Ri Ma-t'ae, a relatively new yet fervent Christian, who was the sole convert in his family. Ri's will made three requests of his family: that his wife and children become Christians, that he be buried according to the Christian fashion; that a donation of one hundred *yang* be made to the church in his name. In apparent disobedience to their late patriarch's wishes, Ri's family attempted to make arrangements for traditional rites, sparking what the author characterized as nothing short of a conflict between good and evil. "It was as though the archangel and the devil were fighting over his body," the author wrote, but "[i]n the end, the devil was defeated and Ma-t'ae was buried according to church rites."<sup>99</sup>



Fig. 1.5 Korean Mourner.  
SOURCE: J.S. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 71.

By changing funerary rites, missionaries and Korean church leaders sought to reinforce new ideas on the very meaning of death. Believers, they emphasized, died

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

differently than unbelievers. In his preface to the *Yesugyo Sangnye*, Moffett explains that “[d]eath entered the world” “through man’s sin when he violated God’s command and listened to the devil’s schemes.” But by Christ’s death and resurrection, he continues, “the souls of believers will rise to heaven… and when Christ returns, even their bodies will rise again.” Despair and the fear of death were incompatible with Christian doctrine. When death appeared imminent, a pastor, elder, helper, or other church member was responsible for strengthening the dying person’s faith through prayer and scripture. Furthermore, missionaries taught that the Christian funeral should be marked by peace, even joy. Unlike the “pagan,” who only perceived “the pain, and the grave, the bleached bones and the worms” of death, the Christian looked “far past the grave to… glorious eternal life.”<sup>100</sup> The *Yesugyo Sangnye* included a prayer for “victory over sadness,” and hymns such as “Blessed are the Faithful Dead” (*Chugǔn Sindo Pok Issǔm*), further reminded Christians to rejoice that their loved ones had “gone forever to paradise.”<sup>101</sup>

The joyfulness of the Christian death stood in stark contrast, Protestants liked to point out, from the anguish characterizing the “heathen” death. A common refrain among missionaries suggested that while funerals “[were] sad in any country,” it was peculiarly so in Korea, to a degree unmatched “in a Christian country.”<sup>102</sup> Two tropes dominated this discourse of “dead hopelessness.”<sup>103</sup> First was the cacophony of wailing mourners. J. Robert Moose observed that upon a father’s death, the entire family gathered together, arranged themselves according to age and rank, and began to cry aloud. In a high-pitched

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<sup>100</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, “Death has no Sorrow” (n.d.), Series 3, Box 163, Folder 1, Moffett Korea Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Princeton University Libraries.

<sup>101</sup> *Ch’ansyongga* (Kyōngsōng: Chosǒn Yasogyo Sōhoe, 1918), 263.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>103</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, “Death has no Sorrow.”

voice, they would howl, ““O! O! O! What shall I do?”” But this outpouring of sorrow would continue for just fifteen minutes “by the clock,” then “all [was] quiet.”<sup>104</sup> The visible orchestration of anguish deeply unsettled missionaries. It struck them as disingenuous, or worse, irreverent. The second trope was the figure of the eldest son. As chief mourner, he took on the posture of a sinner for his negligence in the care of his father or mother. He traditionally donned coarse sackcloth and conical hat, while carrying a small hand-held screen to cover his face, for he was “not fit to be seen by anyone,” even by heaven.<sup>105</sup> Some missionaries critiqued this practice as hypocrisy as well, pointing out that even the least filial sons dressed appropriately in mourning. Others pointed out that without the assurance of salvation the unredeemed soul could not help but despair.

The good Christian death reminded church members to live good Christian lives. As J. Campbell Smith put it, “Death is one of God’s ways of leading men’s thoughts to Him,” so that people would remember that “Life is given us as a time of preparation to meet our God.”<sup>106</sup> The exhortatory function of death manifested itself in the celebration of the spiritual character and contributions of the deceased. In the 1925, *Changnogyohoe Honsangyesiksō*, the practice of commemorating “meritorious deeds of faith” (*sōnghaeng sin’ang saōp*) was incorporated as a part of the funeral service, following the hymns, prayer, scripture reading, and sermon. Large banners carried during church funerals not only identified the deceased as Christian, but they also publicized church leadership roles previously held by the deceased. After the close of the funeral ceremony, obituaries printed in Christian newspapers and magazines publicized the stories of exemplary lives

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<sup>104</sup> Moose, *Village Life in Korea*, 172.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

even further afield. The obituary of a young Ehwa Academy student concluded with an encouragement for the reader: “We who believe in the Lord... must strive for the heavenly kingdom during our time on earth” and “earnestly hope to joyfully meet this child again.”<sup>107</sup>

Evangelical beliefs on the good death transformed funerals into prime opportunities for proselytization. With all the mourners in attendance, they brimmed with lost souls primed to the inevitability of death and the afterlife. Mattie Wilcox Noble recalled in her diary of the time she and a fellow missionary dropped in on a shamanic rite for the death of a young woman. The two went straight to the mother of the deceased to tell her of “the great love of God.” Christian funerals appeared even more promising. At the funeral of a man called Elder Mo, F. S. Miller recalled how as “the grave was being filled in,” “missionaries quietly urged his relatives to believe before their funerals would cut short their opportunities of salvation.”<sup>108</sup> Protestants also perceived evangelistic potential in the funeral ceremony itself. According to Ri Chin-gu, who penned Chang An-na’s obituary, everything about her funeral proceedings—especially the solemnity and absence of alcohol—made a deep impression on non-Christian guests. Many of the guests were reportedly so moved that they decided then and there to convert to Christianity. Chang had carried out a “mass evangelism” (*taejǒndo*) posthumously, just as the Old Testament prophet Elisha performed divine signs through his body after death.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Kim Ae-ma. “Rihwa haktang nyōhaksaeng pyōlseham.” *Sinhak Wōlbo*, November 1902.

<sup>108</sup> Miller, *The Gospel in Korea*, 116-118.

<sup>109</sup> “Ko chǒndo puin Chang An-nassi rūl ch’uǒkham.”

While the conversion of such a multitude certainly seems more “miraculous” than the assistance of non-Christians at a Protestant funeral, Ri’s astonishment at both reveals just how insular Protestant funerals became over time. *Chesa* abstention helped early converts forge a distinct religious identity. Funerals stitched those church communities together. Considering how Protestant funerals retained many traditional elements, their attending preparations were no less laborious than those of non-Christians. Funerary processions required substantial resources. The tasks of carrying the bier to the gravesite and digging the grave were customarily hired out to low-status day laborers. Early converts, however, faced several challenges. If they hired bier-carriers, likely non-Christians, the funeral procession would spiral into “the usual noisy confusion,” marked by drunkenness and shamanic rites.<sup>110</sup> The services of bier carriers would also squander “the widow’s mite.”<sup>111</sup> In the late 1890s, Korean Protestants began taking up those duties themselves, albeit reluctantly. Mattie Wilcox Noble recalled Korean Christians telling each other, “[t]here is no respect of persons before God,” so “Christians should help each other.”<sup>112</sup> By 1930, when Chang’s funeral took place, male church members readily volunteered for what the “pagan world looked down upon as belonging only to inferior hirelings.”<sup>113</sup>

In addition to providing each other the manpower necessary for funeral processions, Korean Christians furnished their own ritual paraphernalia as well. Funerary biers were elaborate and costly structures out of reach for most families. Villagers often

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<sup>110</sup> Miller, *The Gospel in Korea*, 116-118.

<sup>111</sup> “Chunju Notes,” *Korea Field* (May 1903), 101.

<sup>112</sup> Mattie Wilcox Noble, “Reminiscences of Early Christians in Korea,” *Korea Mission Field* September 1935, 198.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

formed mutual aid associations to pool funds and acquire one for common use, or if this were not possible, they resorted to renting one from a nearby village. It is unlikely, however, that Chang's family made use of the communal village bier. As previously mentioned, missionaries discouraged the use of traditional biers due to their shamanic iconography. It was up to Korean Protestants themselves to produce suitable replacements. In 1898, the *Kūrisūdo Sinmun* (*The Christian News*) lauded the appearance of the very first Christian bier, which was designed according to the plain and unadorned American model. The following year, an obituary published in the *Taehan Kūrisūdoin Hoebo* (The Christian Advocate) described how Christians in Wōnsan eschewed their communal village bier, in favor of constructing a new eight-person wooden palanquin (*p'alin'gyo*) to transport the coffin of a fellow church member.<sup>114</sup>

For expenses beyond what their own labor could cover, Korean Christians formed church-based mutual aid associations. While historical records regarding these associations are fragmentary at best, missionary writings suggest they first appeared in areas with burgeoning Protestant communities, such as Seoul and P'yōngyang.<sup>115</sup> In his personal report to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, Charles A. Clark noted that for members of a "mutual Burial Association" in P'yōngyang, church members and their families "receive[d] a site [in the church cemetery] free or at a nominal charge," and "[p]aying members receive[d] also in money enough to pay all of the ordinary expenses of the funeral."<sup>116</sup> By 1924, mutual aid associations became such a regular feature of

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<sup>114</sup> "Ri hyōngjae ryongsyōpssi pyōlsehan il," *Taehan Kūrisūdoin Hoebo* March 1, 1899.

<sup>115</sup> Philip Loring Gillett, "The Village Gilds of Old Korea," *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4 (1913), 38.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Allen Clark, "Personal Report of Charles Allen Clark for Year 1912-1913," RG 140, Box 8, Folder 6, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries' Files: Korea Mission, PHS.

Korean churches that they drew notice from non-Christians. The *Ch'üngbo Sarye P'yöllam*, a Confucian ritual manual unique for its commentary on contemporaneous Protestant rites, detailed how members of a church funerary society (*kyohoe ūi sanggyewōn*) had free access to the church bier, while non-members rented it for a fee.



Fig. 1.6 Pastor Kil Sön-ju's Funeral, P'yongyang, 1935.  
SOURCE: Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Moffett Korea Collection.

Together, Protestant funerary practices helped develop not just a sense of community, but surrogate kinship among church members. Christian doctrine instructs that all believers are children of God, making them spiritual brothers and sisters. In Korea, this teaching structured the language of church relations, as Protestant converts called non-Christians “outsiders” (*oein*), while referring to each other as fellow “church

members,” “friends of the doctrine,” or quite simply, “brothers and sisters.”<sup>117</sup> In Protestant publications, many writers preferred the humble self-referential term, “younger brother of the faith” (*kyojae*). The Christian funeral further underscored these ties. As one obituary put it, Christians who chose to wear the mark of the cross on their mourning clothes, did so not simply to proclaim their religious identity, but also to show “they have become brothers through the redemptive cross of Christ.”<sup>118</sup> Other Christians used traditional symbols to make similar declarations. In his description of Chang An-na’s funeral, Ri Chin-gu observed that church members not only wept as they would for their own mothers, but they wore the traditional mourning headdress (*p’ogōn*) typically reserved for close kin.<sup>119</sup>

### *The Sanctified Marriage and the Christian Home*

Ellasue Canter Wagner’s short story, “Come unto Me,” in her anthology, *Kim Su Bang and Other Stories of Korea* (1909) prominently features two wedding scenes. In the first, a nine-year-old protagonist is married off into a wealthy family after the death of her father. The ceremony followed Korean custom, with the bride and groom, complete strangers to each other, exchanging bows to seal their union. The bride wordlessly moves through the festivities, heeding her mother’s instructions to “appear... as though [she] were made of wood” lest she bring dishonor to her family.<sup>120</sup> In Wagner’s telling, the

<sup>117</sup> When explaining the requirements and privileges of each category of church membership, the Methodist monthly, *Sinhak Wōlbo*, emphasized the closeness of church members (*ipkyoin*). Rather than viewing each other as strangers (*nam*), they were to treat each other as they would their own siblings (*ch’inhōngjae*), sharing every hardship and joy (*ko wa nak*). See “Kyohoe chojikhan pōb,” *Sinhak Wōlbo* July 1902, 309.

<sup>118</sup> “Kossi puin pyōlsye han il.”

<sup>119</sup> “Ko chōndo puin Chang An-nassi rūl ch’uōkham.”

<sup>120</sup> Ellasue Canter Wagner, *Kim Su Bang and Other Stories of Korea* (Nashville, Pub. House of the M.E. Church, 1909), 80.

traditional wedding marked the beginning of a series of misfortunes. The young bride suffers abuse from her mother-in-law, expulsion from her new home, and another unhappy coupling as the concubine of an older man. The protagonist's travails end only when she is taken in by a Christian family after having been cast out once again. One day while attending church with her adoptive family, she chances upon her first husband. A new convert himself, he is a changed man, deeply remorseful for his wife's previous mistreatment. The story closes with the second wedding scene. This time, the bride and groom hold hands in a small chapel, pledging each other a lifetime of devotion and faithfulness.

Wagner's morality tale provides few details on the Christian wedding, despite the central role it plays in the narrative. She mentions that it takes place at a church with a minister as officiant, but she does not take the reader through the experience of the occasion—what the bride and groom wore, who else attended the ceremony, how the various ritual components proceeded. To be fair, when Wagner's anthology was first published, Protestant weddings were not yet standardized in Korea. Beyond the prohibition of superstitious or idolatrous customs, missionaries left matters such as dress and venue up to converts. Church weddings, much like Christian memorial services or funerals, incorporated liturgical elements into existing Korean marriage customs. In 1904, Duncan MacRae presided over a Korean Christian wedding in Hamhung that appeared nearly identical to a traditional ceremony. The occasion takes place outdoors, presumably at the home of the bride, and the newlywed couple is dressed in Korean ceremonial attire. The hosts treated guests to a customary banquet, where several women missionaries were

given seats of honor.<sup>121</sup>



Fig. 1.7 A Korean Christian Wedding, 1917.  
SOURCE: J.S. Gale Papers, The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Church wedding ceremonies were central to Protestant leaders' efforts to sanctify the meaning of marriage. In the *Hollyesyō* (Book of Marriage Rites), an undated Presbyterian primer on marriage rites, the author emphasized that marriage was a divine institution established by God himself at the start of creation. As such, the author instructed that whether a wedding took place at church or at the home of the bride (as per Korean custom), it required, first and foremost, a Christian officiant. Chosen from among senior-ranking church members such as pastors, elders, helpers (*chosa*), and deacons

<sup>121</sup> Donald Clark, ed., *Missionary Photography in Korea: Encountering the West through Christianity* (New York: The Korea Society, 2009), 95.

(*yōngsu*), the officiant guided the bride and groom through a set of public worship practices.<sup>122</sup> He would preach on the holy and indissoluble nature of the marriage relation, pray for God’s “grace and blessings,” lead the congregation in benedictory hymns, and instruct the bride and groom on their vows to each other. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the officiant would declare the couple husband and wife in the sight of God and the church.<sup>123</sup>

For missionaries, the solemnization of marriage held especial urgency in light of the unsanctioned intimate relations rife in Korean society. Confucian valorization of chastity and the conjugal bond, they pointed out, did not check the proliferation of extramarital unions. A man could have but one legal wife, but he was entitled to any number of concubines. Even at the turn-of-the-century, the problem of a wife who bore no sons or displeased her husband or in-laws in some other way was commonly remedied not by divorce but through the addition of a concubine. Missionaries also critiqued that the taboo against the remarriage of widows gave rise to informal cohabitation arrangements without any “promise, form or ceremony” binding the two individuals together.<sup>124</sup> William M. Baird bemoaned that even after the 1894 Kabo Reforms granted widows the legal right to remarry, the social stigma against remarriage perpetuated the “repugnant” practice of “keep[ing] house.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The author also specified that on the rare occasion when no ordained or lay leader were available, any ordinary Christian (*kyou*) would be permitted to administer the wedding ceremony. This qualification to accommodate small or isolated Christian communities suggests that the *Hollyesyo* predates the 1925 Presbyterian ritual manual (*Changnogyohoe Honsangyesiksyō*), which restricted the role of officiant to clergy and lay leaders. See *Hollyesyo*, The Korean Christian Museum, Soongsil University.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *Hollyesyo*.

<sup>125</sup> During the Chosōn dynasty, Neo-Confucian valorization of women’s chastity created an intense cultural taboo against remarriage. A woman had but one true husband, and as such, any subsequent union rendered her an adulteress. Starting in 1485, the Chosōn state prohibited the sons of such households from civil or military service. See Deuchler, 279.

Missionaries promulgated a set of rules concerning marriage practices to press converts to adopt Christian norms. Moffett's *Rules for the Native Church in Korea*, for one, advanced a new model of marital fidelity. The fourth clause reads: "Since God has appointed one woman for one man, let there be not only no abandoning of each other, but let there be a wife and no concubines, a husband and no lewdness."<sup>126</sup> The Christian husband promised faithfulness through every vicissitude of life, forswearing divorce and secondary unions to concubines. The Christian wife likewise pledged lifelong devotion, yet the stipulation urging "a husband and no lewdness" made clear that her obligations did not extend beyond death. Protestant leaders frequently cited Pauline precepts to urge widows to remarry in lieu of "vulgar and adulterous" liaisons.<sup>127</sup> As was the case with ancestral veneration, converts who engaged in "irregular" marriage relations were barred from church membership and communion.

The promotion of Christian marriage went beyond policing converts' sexual relations. For many missionaries and Korean church leaders, it was inextricably tied to safeguarding Protestant expansion. The number of Korean converts started to increase exponentially from the mid-1890s.<sup>128</sup> As church rolls swelled, missionaries worried over the prospect of attrition. In 1904, the Presbyterian General Assembly established additional rules governing Christian marriage practices, the first of which unambiguously prohibited "[m]arriage... contracted with unbelievers."<sup>129</sup> Missionaries feared that marriage to non-Christians would reverse their progress to date in Korea. In *Honillon* (A

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<sup>126</sup> Speer, *Report on the mission in Korea of the Presbyterian board of Foreign Missions*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> The *Hollyesyo* cites Romans 7:2 which reads: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he livith; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband" (KJV).

<sup>128</sup> Chung-Shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Charles Allen Clark, "Marriage Questions in Chosen," *Korea Mission Field* August 1919 (15.8), 160.

Treatise on Marriage) (1914), Presbyterian pastor Han Sŭng-gon echoed such anxieties, cautioning that a Christian who married a non-Christian careened precipitously toward apostasy. He claimed that much like playing tug-of-war on uneven ground, it was nearly impossible pull an un-believing spouse up toward Christianity. It was far more likely that the Christian spouse, whose faith was already compromised by “fleshly desires” (*yukch’e ūi chōngyok*) would slip away from Christ.<sup>130</sup> To further discourage marriage to outsiders, the Presbyterian General Assembly mandated consultation with “local pastors or helpers” prior to marriage and prescribed church suspension for violators.<sup>131</sup>

Considering the limited authority of wives in many Korean homes, missionaries were especially vigilant of unions formed between women converts and non-Christian men. Cyril Ross advised in *Kyoin ūi Hollyeron* (Christian Marriage) (1922) that women take special precaution in choosing a prospective husband. He maintained that being a church-goer or even a baptized church member was not enough. Women ought to probe deeper, inquiring whether the prospective husband had completed the catechumenate process in a timely fashion and whether the man had ever received church discipline. As a cautionary tale, Ross gave the example of one Christian woman who married a casual church attendee. By the first Sunday after the wedding, the parents-in-law barred her from going to church altogether.<sup>132</sup> F.S. Miller noted that such cases were so commonplace that many missionaries refrained from “baptiz[ing] girls from non-Christian families,” since they would be unable to “live up to their vows” once they were “married... into nonbelieving homes.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Han Sŭng-gon, ed., *Honillon* (Kyōngsōng: Yasogyo Sōwŏn, 1914), 3.

<sup>131</sup> Clark, “Marriage Questions in Chosen,” 160.

<sup>132</sup> Cyril Ross, *Kyoin ūi Hollyeron* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1922), 21.

<sup>133</sup> Miller, *The Gospel in Korea*, 34.

Protestant leaders intervened directly to ensure that converts married other Christians. Traditionally, it was a son's parents who took the initiative to find a suitable match, employing a middleman (*chungmae*) to verify a potential bride's social background before proceeding with marriage negotiations.<sup>134</sup> Korean Protestants turned to their religious community. Some asked itinerating pastors and Bible women to "convey messages back and forth" between parents of prospective brides and grooms.<sup>135</sup> Others looked to missionary teachers for aid. For instance, when Ch'ōng Chun-su, a young Korean preacher, sought to get married, he requested missionary Joseph Gerdine help him find an appropriate wife through his connections at the nearby Girls' School.<sup>136</sup> Reliance on missionaries as "go-betweens" became so common that Josephine P. Campbell bemoaned the drain on her "precious time" acting as "matrimonial contractor."<sup>137</sup> On occasion, missionaries even stepped in to dissolve betrothals to unbelievers. Edwin Kagin related the case of a Christian girl in Ch'ōnan whose father sold her in marriage for the "paltry sum of ten yen." When her distressed grandmother turned to Kagin for aid, he and other church members raised the necessary sum to break the engagement.<sup>138</sup>

If marriage outside the fold jeopardized the souls of new converts, marriage within the fold held the promise of future church growth. Christian marriage inaugurated the Christian home, which would in turn serve as the cradle of the next generations of

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<sup>134</sup> Deuchler, 252.

<sup>135</sup> Erwin, "A Korean Christian Wedding," 73.

<sup>136</sup> Ellasue Canter Wagner, *Korea Calls: Pioneer Days in the Land of the Morning Calm* (Bristol, Tennessee: King Print. Co., 1948), 14.

<sup>137</sup> Josephine P. Campbell, "Carolina Institute," *Korea Mission Field* September 1907 (3.9), 139.

<sup>138</sup> Edwin Kagin, "Personal Report of Edwin Kagin, Chung Ju, Korea, June, 1912," Box 8, Folder 4, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries' Files: Korea Mission, PHS.

believers. Missionaries commonly remarked that prior to the introduction of Protestantism, Koreans lacked the very concept of a home. Ellasue Canter Wagner once remarked, the “Korean woman has no home, only a house.”<sup>139</sup> The Korean wife who performed “the work of the house, the cooking, washing, and sewing,” missionaries claimed, represented “little more than a slave” to a husband who viewed his house “merely a place to go after business and pleasure were over.”<sup>140</sup> In contrast, “Christian civilisation [sic]” inaugurated “everywhere in its march throughout the world” “[t]he fair edifice of a happy home.”<sup>141</sup> Husbands would cherish their wives and turn to them for “advice and companionship.”<sup>142</sup> So distinct was the Christian home, Edna P. Henderson maintained, that one knew “without being told that it is Christians that live there.”<sup>143</sup>

Such companionship, missionaries maintained, enabled a husband and wife to enter into a holy partnership for the service of God. In *Kyoin ūi Hollyeron*, Cyril Ross asks the reader, “[f]or whom does one marry?” He answers his own rhetorical question, admonishing that believers married “for the glory of God,” “for the pursuit of His kingdom and righteousness.”<sup>144</sup> Missionaries drew from their own experiences in their depiction of the “ideal Christian marriage” as a “mutually helpful” “life of love and service.”<sup>145</sup> During the early years of Protestant missions, the reluctance of mission board

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<sup>139</sup> Ellasue Wagner, “A Korean Home,” *The Korea Mission Field* June 1908 (4.6), 90. Quoted in Hyae-wol Choi, “The Missionary Home as a Pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth-Century Korea,” in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyae-wol Choi and Margaret Jolly (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2014), 31.

<sup>140</sup> Wagner, *Kumokie A Bride of Old Korea*, 143.

<sup>141</sup> Annie L. Baird, *Daybreak in Korea: A Tale of Transformation in the Far East* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Korea, 1909), 85.

<sup>142</sup> Wagner, *Kumokie A Bride of Old Korea*, 143.

<sup>143</sup> Edna Pusey Henderson, “Personal Report for 1934-1935,” Box 9, Folder 19, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries’ Files: Korea Mission, PHS.

<sup>144</sup> Ross, *Kyoin ūi Hollyeron*, 11.

<sup>145</sup> “The New Woman of the East,” *Korea Mission Field* 8.1 (Jan. 1912), 28.

administrators to commission single missionaries, male or female, led to speedy courtships and marriages shortly before setting sail.<sup>146</sup> The Presbyterian and Methodist foreign mission boards adopted more relaxed policies by the late-nineteenth century, but this duty-bound model of missionary marriage endured. Ross himself married his wife Susan (née Shank), a medical doctor and fellow missionary hopeful, just eleven days before leaving for Korea, while many other missionaries in Korea found spouses among their single or widowed colleagues.<sup>147</sup>

Missionaries envisioned that as partners in God's work, husbands and wives would transform their homes into havens for the Gospel. Historians have previously examined how women missionaries viewed their homes as "object lessons" of Christian domesticity. Inspired by the cleanliness, organization, and middle-class tastefulness of missionary homes, native women were expected to desire Christian homes of their own.<sup>148</sup> "Evangelical domesticity," however, was not limited to the transmission of Western cultural values through virtuous household management. The home was an important physical site for religious teaching. In Korea, fledgling rural churches would often begin congregating in people's houses, and some female missionaries like Susan Ross invited local women to their homes for Bible classes.<sup>149</sup> The home was also where Christian parents would raise children to uphold the faith. In *Honillon*, Han Sŭng-gon describes a domino effect of the Christian marriage: believers would "marry according to

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<sup>146</sup> Mission boards, such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), strictly prohibited the enlistment of single men for the mission field out of fear that they would become entangled in sexual relationships with native women. See Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 41. See also, Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 41.

<sup>147</sup> Hyaeweol Choi, "The Missionary Home as Pulpit," 37.

<sup>148</sup> Hunter, 116.

<sup>149</sup> Clark, 169.

good principles, giving rise to more and more good couples,” while families formed by such unions would “provide good education to children, raising more and more good youths.”<sup>150</sup>

The church wedding ceremony became emblematic of Christian marriage. Liturgical components such as the sermon, hymns, and collective prayer reinforced Protestant teachings on the meaning of marriage and the responsibilities of husband and wife. The church wedding also served as a public performance of redemption. In Wagner’s “Come unto Me,” the protagonist chooses to have a Christian wedding to signal a new beginning for her marriage. The protagonist recognizes the redundancy of the second wedding ceremony—legally and spiritually, she had never ceased to be married. Yet, she remarks that “in view of all that had happened” she felt compelled to have the church ritual. After the couple exchange vows, the protagonist thanks God for his forgiveness and muses that she had never felt “truly... married until that hour.”<sup>151</sup> Remedial Christian weddings were not limited to fictional missionary accounts. In 1904, Presbyterian missionary Edwin Kagin performed a double wedding ceremony for church members who had been previously placed under discipline for “irregular” unions. A convert named Kim had begun living with a widow “without a marriage ceremony,” while another named Yi had “married a heathen.” Because they both “showed signs of repentance” and dutifully attended church with their wives, Kagin suggested they “bring their friends and have a Christian marriage ceremony.” The ceremony transformed sinful

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<sup>150</sup> Han Sung-gon, ed., *Honillon*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Wagner, *Kim Su Bang and Other Stories of Korea*, 97-98.

relations into consecrated marriages, enabling the couples to “liv[e] in peace and respectability before their brethren.”<sup>152</sup>

But to the missionaries’ dismay, Christian wedding ceremonies often proved more appealing than adherence to church rules on marriage. The ideal of Christian endogamy remained elusive in many communities. Some parents were unwilling to marry their daughters to impoverished Christian boys in the face of more attractive offers from wealthy families.<sup>153</sup> Far more often, there simply were not enough marriageable Christians to go around. C. L. Philips described visiting one church in a mountain village, which “for some unknown reason,” had a disproportionate number of young boys. Recourse to the broader church network proved futile, since Christian girls in the lower hills near P’yongyang showed little interest in marrying “country hayseed[s].” Enough Christians complied with the injunction against marrying unbelievers such that the church became well-known locally as the “‘Old Bachelors’ church,” full of men “hopelessly beached on the pitiful shores of bachelorhood.” Others, however, made the calculated decision to accept church discipline.<sup>154</sup> Marriage to a non-Christian was more readily tolerated (though still proscribed) in the case of a Christian groom. Some Christian parents assumed they could simply compel daughters-in-law to convert.<sup>155</sup> One such family in Syu Heung [Si Hŭng] Church betrothed their son to an unbeliever and even persisted in securing a Christian ceremony to bless the union. “The church frowned, and the Christians stayed away,” William C. Kerr wrote, with the exception of one officer

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<sup>152</sup> Edwin Kagin, “In Difficulties,” *Korea Mission Field* 5.7 (July 1909), 144.

<sup>153</sup> Clark, “Marriage Questions in Chosen,” 162.

<sup>154</sup> C. L. Philips, “Back on the Job,” *Korea Mission Field* June 14.6 (1918), 127.

<sup>155</sup> Han Sŭng-gon, on the other hand, took a hardline stance against any marriage outside the faith, arguing that it threatened to “pollute” the church. See Han Sŭng-gon, ed., *Honillon*, 4.

who agreed to officiate and ensure that “things were in order.” Instead of the usual marriage hymn, however, the officer “picked out the one the whole application of which was ‘sin.’ And the family had to swallow hard, and sing.”<sup>156</sup>

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This chapter explores how and why early Protestant communities in Korea took such a great interest in transforming the ritual lives of believers. Christian ritual reform was not a foregone conclusion at the turn of the twentieth century. Many American missionaries prioritized evangelism over cultural change, expressing ambivalence over the wholesale importation of Western practices. However, the small band of itinerating missionaries grew increasingly concerned over securing signs of sincere conversion. They had to be sure that lay leaders entrusted with overseeing churches would not backslide or guide others astray. Rejecting traditional Confucian marriage, funerary, and ancestral ceremonies served as public declarations of faith, as well as integral parts of what it meant to live in Christian community and cultivate future generations of believers. While this chapter largely focuses on the motivations driving Protestants’ reformist zeal, it is also important to acknowledge how fraught their projects were in practice. Korean Protestants were no strangers to outside critique, and church leaders encountered considerable inertia within their own ranks. In the following chapter, I examine the broader societal impact of Protestant practices, paying close attention to how Korean nationalist intellectuals sought to circumscribe the dissemination of Christian

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<sup>156</sup> William C. Kerr, “Chae Ryung,” *Korea Mission Field* 7.4 (April 1911), 101.

culture by constructing avowedly modern and non-sectarian ritual alternatives of their own.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Protestant Rites and the Problem of Religious Difference

In 1917, prominent intellectual and Buddhist layman Yi Nŭng-hwa brought up a matter he claimed concerned the very “survival” of his religious community: weddings and funerals.<sup>1</sup> When Yi penned his essays for the *Journal of Korean Buddhism* (*Chosŏn Pulgyo Ch'ongbo*), movements to modernize Buddhism had just begun their heyday. Monastic leaders eagerly considered ways to address a broader audience, whether by broadcasting in newspapers and magazines or expanding their urban outreach.<sup>2</sup> Yi welcomed such measures to make Buddhist learning more accessible to fellow lay devotees. He lamented that Korean Buddhism had developed a reputation as a religion for monks and nuns, whose withdrawal from society and vows of celibacy threatened to “extinguish their family lines.”<sup>3</sup> But the propagation of Buddhism would require more than doctrinal instruction. Yi argued that the Buddhist “spirit” (*chōngsin*) had to correspond to its “form” (*hyōngsik*). More specifically, ordinary adherents needed ways to combine their “deep religious faith” with “careful observance of religious practices.” Buddhist weddings and funerals promised just that, allowing laypeople to practice rites of

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<sup>1</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “*Ŭijōng pulsik hwahonbōp*,” *Chosŏn Pulgyo Ch'ongbo* 4 (1917), 1. For more on Yi Nŭng-hwa see, Jongmyung Kim, “Yi Nŭnghwa, Buddhism, and the Modernization of Korea,” in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. Chin-yōng Pak (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010): 91-108.

<sup>2</sup> See Mark A. Nathan, *From the Mountains to the Cities: A History of Buddhist Propagation in Modern Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Yi, “*Ŭijōng pulsik hwahonbōp*,” 1.

their own faith (*chagi chonggyo ūi yesok*), rather than “superstitious” and “ostentatious” Confucian customs.<sup>4</sup>

Yi Nŭng-hwa’s proposal responded directly to concurrent developments in the fast-growing Protestant community in Korea. He observed with particular interest how Christian converts used their distinct ritual practices to forge a collective identity. Christian marriage and funerary rites, he maintained, were fundamentally “religious practices” (*chonggyo ūi hyōngsik*) that showcased core doctrinal beliefs. Every aspect of a chapel wedding underscored “submission to God’s will, matrimonial harmony, and lifelong devotion.”<sup>5</sup> Church funerals likewise embodied Christian teachings on human mortality. Yi noted how pastors would read from scripture, likely a psalm on the brevity of life, or perhaps the Apostle John’s assurance of eternal life for believers.<sup>6</sup> Buddhists needed their own such ceremonies. He imagined that at a temple wedding, a monk could lead the bride and groom in chanting the Three Refuges as they solemnized their vows before Buddha.<sup>7</sup> Cremation rites would likewise remind families of the impermanence of the mind and body.<sup>8</sup> For Buddhism to become a “world” (*segyejōk*) religion like Protestantism, Yi insisted, lay adherents needed rites that affirmed their beliefs and sense of community.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Pulgyo pogūp ūn chōngsin kwa hyōngsik i pyōnghaeng yōnku,” *Chosŏn Pulgyo Ch’ongbo* 3 (1917), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Ŭijōng pulsik hwahonbōp,” 1.

<sup>6</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Pulgyo pogūp,” 2.

<sup>7</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Ŭijōng pulsik hwahonbōp,” 4.

<sup>8</sup> Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Pulgyo pogūp,” 6.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the influence of Christianity on Buddhist reform, see Nathan, *From the Mountains to the Cities*; Hwansoo Ilmee Kim, *The Buddhist Empire: A Transnational History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018).

Not everyone had such a positive view on Protestant customs. In 1920, when the Government-General broadened press freedoms through its so-called “cultural rule” (*bunka seiji*) policies, critiques against Christian ritual practices began filling the pages of vernacular newspapers and magazines.<sup>10</sup> To be clear, progressive intellectuals who wrote for these publications did not advocate a return to traditional customs. They charged that Confucianism had enfeebled the Korean nation. Ritual manuals like *The Expanded Guide* only embodied the kind of formalism and irrationality that impeded progress. After the failure of the 1919 March First Independence Movement, moderate nationalists focused their energies on reconstructing Korean society through cultural means (*munhwa undong*). These elite cultural nationalists, who were largely concentrated in urban centers, hoped to prepare for eventual political independence by building schools, spearheading Korean language reform, and promoting domestic production.<sup>11</sup> They also took interest in matters of morality, and by extension, rites. If traditional rites once served to disseminate Confucian ethics and social order, new national rituals were needed to cultivate modern and patriotic values among the Korean people. Protestant rites, which inculcated a distinct identity and worldview based on creed, even inspiring other religious groups to follow suit, appeared a grave threat to cultural nationalists.

The contested history of ritual change opens up new avenues to explore Protestantism and politics in colonial Korea. Much of existing scholarship has focused on Protestants’ participation in modernization or anti-colonial activities, paying special attention to how their contributions (or lack thereof) impacted their expansion in the

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<sup>10</sup> Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the projects spearheaded by cultural nationalists, see, Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea*; Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

peninsula.<sup>12</sup> Historians have paid far less attention to the ways in which Protestant beliefs and practices raised concerns over religion itself. What counts as religious practice, and who gets to decide? To a great extent, such questions were adjudicated by the Japanese colonial state. In 1915, the Government-General promulgated the Regulations on Religious Propagation, defining which groups counted as religion and setting parameters for proselytization.<sup>13</sup> But colonial officials were not the only ones to perceive the subversive potential of unfettered religion. For cultural nationalists, the proliferation of Protestant rites underscored how faith communities might splinter society, diverting Koreans away from the national cause toward their own individual sectarian interests. Reformist intellectuals began to view religious difference as a problem to be managed and subsumed under the aegis of the nation.

In this chapter, I examine print media discussions of Protestant rites from the late 1910s to the early 30s to explore how cultural nationalists understood the proper place of religion in society. I ground my analysis in three case studies. First, I engage in a close reading of Yi Kwang-su's essays on Protestantism. His writings not only articulated cultural nationalists' visions for re-making the Korean people, but they also drew attention early on to the vexing hindrances of Protestant culture. Next, I trace the controversy that exploded in 1920 over Protestants' denigration of ancestral veneration (*chesa*) as idolatry. *Tonga Ilbo* editors who spearheaded this debate struggled to reframe the Confucian tradition in a way that did not malign *chesa* practitioners—many millions

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Wells, *New God, New Nation*; Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*; Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*; Andrew Eungi Kim, "A History of Christianity in Korea: From its Troubled Beginning to its Contemporary Success," *Korea Journal* 35 (1995): 34-55; Timothy S. Lee, "A Political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea: Protestantism and the 1919 March First Movement," *Church History* 69.1 (2000): 116-142.

<sup>13</sup> Hwang, *Rationalizing Korea*, 156.

of compatriots—as primitive. Lastly, I study how the spread of Western-style church weddings in the 1920s and 30s spurred a flurry of ritual innovation, as reformist intellectuals strove to create modern and nation-centric ceremonies that transcended creed. In all three cases, cultural nationalists demonstrated a keen awareness of the malleable boundary separating the sacred and the secular. They took pains to define rituals less as matters of individual conscience and more as public concerns, all the while, claiming to champion the cause of religious freedom.

### *“A Theory of New Life”*

In 1918, the vernacular Korean newspaper *Maeil Sinbo* ran a serialized essay titled, “A Theory of New Life” (*Sinsaenghwallon*).<sup>14</sup> The treatise was penned by none other than Yi Kwang-su, a writer, educator, and social activist newly famous for having authored Korea’s first modern novel, *The Heartless* (*Mujōng*, 1917). In his essay, the twenty-six-year-old firebrand called for sweeping social reforms. “Life is change,” Yi pronounced. Ways of life were not fixed, and the morals, laws, customs, and habits of the past could not continue as they had before.<sup>15</sup> Korea’s old ways gave rise to “poverty, vulgarity, and ignorance,” all of which, he need not mention, paved the way for foreign domination. Only a “lifestyle revolution” (*saenghwal ūi hyōngmyōng*) could usher in the “wealth, refinement, and knowledge” Koreans truly needed. Not that his compatriots had much other choice. Without this change of course, Yi maintained, the future of the peninsula was dire. Not only would Koreans remain colonial subjects, but they would

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<sup>14</sup> Yi Kwang-su, “Sinsaenghwallon,” in *Yi Kwang-su Chōnjip* vol. 10. The essay was originally published in the *Maeil Sinbo* between September 6, 1918 and October 19, 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 327.

find life itself untenable under worsening material conditions. Before long, the whole nation would hurtle toward utter annihilation (*myǒlmang*).<sup>16</sup>

How exactly might this “lifestyle revolution” come about? According to Yi, change happened in one of two ways. “Unconscious change” (*muǔisikchǒk pyǒnhwa*) took place on its own over long periods of time. Iron, for instance, rusted slowly but surely in the presence of air. Similarly, people gradually adopted innovations like kerosene lamps and steam engines, even without much reflection. But Koreans could hardly afford to wait for progress. Yi insisted that they required instead swift and purposeful “conscious change” (*üisikchǒk pyǒnhwa*). Presaging what would later become a core feature of Korean cultural nationalism, he emphasized the critical leadership of an elite vanguard. Just as a scientist might accelerate the oxidation process by applying electricity, the Korean people could deploy “enlightened individuals” (*munmyǒng ’in*) to catalyze transformation. This select group would methodically scrutinize the historical roots of Korea’s shortcomings, weigh the contrasting practices of “successful nations,” then devise new solutions for the broader public. Yi surmised that with their expertise in modern culture, education, and politics, enlightened individuals could achieve in several years the work of several hundred years.<sup>17</sup>

Promoting “conscious change” presented challenges for any nation, but Yi Kwang-su claimed that the legacies of Confucianism made the task especially difficult for Koreans. After five hundred years of dominance during the Chosǒn dynasty, he observed, Neo-Confucianism maintained a firm grip on Korean society and culture, perpetuating all manner of ills. Gender inequality, social stratification, and disdain for

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 327-328.

economic enterprise remained deeply entrenched problems. Yi reserved his sharpest critique for filial piety, the cornerstone of Confucian ethics. Traditional understandings of filiality, he argued, elevated “absolute submission” (*pokchong*) to parents as the highest moral virtue. Parents bestowed the gift of life, for which children owed a lifelong debt of gratitude. Dutiful children were expected to tend to their parents’ every need, greeting them solicitously, preparing meals, and running errands day and night. It came as no surprise to Yi that so few Korean youth exhibited “revolutionary fervor” (*hyōksin ūi kiun*) for cultural transformation. Filial piety cultivated a “lifestyle of dependency” (*ūiroe saenghwal*). Bereft of even a “hairbreadth of freedom,” children could not lift a hand or foot on their own, let alone muster the wherewithal to challenge Confucian thought, the “inheritance of their ancestors.”<sup>18</sup>

Filial children were never truly free from their obligations. The death of parents, Yi Kwang-su remarked crassly, offered some relief but hardly enough. By the time children secured freedom from parental “tyranny,” the “golden years” of their youth would have long passed them by.<sup>19</sup> Worse still, Korean ritual norms enshrined and preserved Confucian filial piety, keeping children in perpetual thrall to their parents. Custom dictated three years of mourning for the death of a parent, during which the eldest son--the chief mourner--was duty-bound to recuse himself from work so that he might weep uninterrupted beside the grave. When this prolonged period of mourning ended, children faced still more onerous duties. Deceased parents joined the ranks of hallowed family ancestors, who demanded regular sacrificial offerings. In another essay published the same year, Yi observed that the need to commemorate four generations of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 333-334.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 332.

ancestors kept Koreans chained to a never-ending cycle of ritual observances.

Ceremonies for death anniversaries and traditional holidays “consumed” Koreans’ “precious wealth, energy, and time.” The plaintive “aigo, aigo” filial children cried for their parents, he noted bitterly, was in fact the “dirge of a fallen nation” (*mangguk ūi ūm*).<sup>20</sup>

Inaugurating “new life” in Korea called for new moral values and practices.

Above all, Koreans needed a different understanding of filiality. While Yi did not suggest that children suddenly “scorn” their parents, he urged compatriots to radically reconsider the relationship between children and parents. Children were not the “private possessions” of their parents. They, like their parents, were “constituent members of state and society” (*sahoe, kukka ūi ilwōn*). Children were also ancestors-in-waiting, who, in due time, would give rise to countless generations of descendants. And since children bore the “fate of the entire nation” on their shoulders, it was their needs that should take precedence. No longer should children observe the customary three-year mourning period. Nor should they have to perform ancestral rites. In a stunning reversal of Confucian norms, Yi advocated that parents sacrifice for their children. When rearing their children, parents had to prepare to give of their very selves. They might be asked to “sever their flesh” as nourishment for their offspring. They might even have to surrender their lives as “fertilizer” (*kōrūm*) for their children’s ultimate happiness.<sup>21</sup> Suffice it to say, Yi’s irreverence stoked the ire of many (especially older) readers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Yi Kwang-su, “Chanyō chungsimnon,” in *Yi Kwang-su Chōnjip* vol. 10, 36. For more on Yi Kwang-su’s discussion of “Chanyō chungsimnon,” see Dafna Zur, *Figuring Korean Futures: Children’s Literature in Modern Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> Yi Kwang-su, “Sinsaenghwallon,” 335.

<sup>22</sup> Just one month after the *Maeil Sinbo* published the last installment “A Theory of New Life,” the monthly magazine *Pando Sibo* reported on the heated response Yi Kwang-su provoked among Confucian scholars.

Yi Kwang-su was hardly the first to question Korea's Confucian heritage. An earlier generation of progressive intellectuals laid the foundations for such critique starting from the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Yi acknowledged the contributions of still another group of pioneers: Korean Protestants. The previous year, he wrote an essay titled, "The Grace of Protestantism in Korea" for the magazine *Ch'ōngch'un* (*Youth*), explaining how this new religion helped many Koreans shift toward a "new civilization."<sup>24</sup> When foreign missionaries arrived in the peninsula in 1884, they exposed followers to a wider world beyond just Korea and China. Converts learned that the West did indeed have morality and learning, albeit ones different from their own.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Yi credited Protestants for promoting *han'gǔl*, the vernacular Korean script. At a time when the literati elite did not deign to translate commentaries of the Chinese Classics into *han'gǔl*, missionaries rendered holy scripture in "pure Korean," endowing the humble script with great "authority." Moreover, Christian teachings significantly undermined prevailing social hierarchies. Protestants held that since each individual—women, children, and slaves included—possessed a soul, everyone had equal "status" and "worth" in the eyes of God.<sup>26</sup>

As a former catechumenate in the Presbyterian church, Yi was also well aware of the long history of Christian dissent against Confucian filial piety.<sup>27</sup> Many Korean

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See Paek Tae-jin, "Yi Ch'unwǒn ūi sinsaenghwallon kwa yurim ūi mulūi e taehaya," *Pando Sibo* (Nov. 1918).

<sup>23</sup>Robinson, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Yi Kwang-su, "Yasogyo ūi Chosǒn e chun ūnhye," in *Yi Kwang-su Chōnjip* vol. 10. This essay was originally published in July 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> For more on Yi Kwang-su's relationship with Protestantism, see Ann Sung-hi Lee, "Introduction," in *Yi Kwang-su and Modern Korean Literature: Mujōng* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 2005).

Catholics and Protestants rejected traditional ways of honoring parents. According to church teachings, ancestral veneration represented idolatry. True filiality entailed caring for parents while they lived, not sacrificing to spirit tablets after they died. Thousands of Catholic converts suffered martyrdom for their “heterodox” practices during the early nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Decades later, shifting geopolitical circumstances and personal friendships forged with King Kojong and Queen Min emboldened Protestants to openly defy Confucian norms.<sup>29</sup> Foreign missionaries advocated wide-ranging ritual change among believers. Preachers denounced ancestral veneration from the pulpits, while lay leaders personally visited converts’ homes to prevent backsliding.<sup>30</sup> By 1894, *chesa* abstention became a precondition for full church membership.<sup>31</sup> Foreign missionaries and Korean church leaders extended their reformist zeal to the other Confucian rites of passage as well. Protestants were among the first to discontinue capping, the traditional coming-of-age ceremony.<sup>32</sup> They also replaced Confucian marriage and funerary customs, which incorporated elements of ancestral veneration, with new liturgical church ceremonies. By the early twentieth century, renouncing Confucian rites—and their attending values—became important expressions of Protestant identity.

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<sup>28</sup> See Baker, “A Different Thread”; and Baker, *Catholics and Anti-Catholics in Chosŏn Korea*.

<sup>29</sup> In the face of Japanese imperialism, King Kojong and Queen Min cultivated personal ties with American missionaries in the hopes of securing aid from the United States. Lillias Horton Underwood and Annie Ellers Bunker even served as personal physicians to the Queen. See Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Noble, *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble*, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Speer, *Report on the mission in Korea*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Starting from the late nineteenth century, many early male converts cut their top-knots to signal their new religious identity. Missionary Jennie M. Rehrer observed that at the Kennedy Hospital in Kanggye (North P'yongan Province), “[a] hair-clipper has become a part of the hospital equipment and is often used on the new believer's head before he leaves the hospital.” See Jennie M. Rehrer, “Personal Report, 1921-1922” RG 140, Box 8, Folder 19, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations Secretaries’ Files: Korea Mission, PHS

Yi Kwang-su, however, did not necessarily consider Protestants as partners in his vision for Korea's cultural renewal. Their iconoclasm alone was not enough. Half-way through “A Theory of New Life,” Yi pivots, shifting his critical gaze from Confucianism to Christianity.<sup>33</sup> Yi viewed the spread of Protestantism with growing apprehension. Not only did converts already number three hundred thousand strong, filling the peninsula with church buildings, but their growing presence also began to pose serious concerns for society. For one, believers engaged in what Yi termed, “Christianization” (*Yasogyohwa*).<sup>34</sup> Protestant converts appeared to adopt entire lifestyles that diverged from those of their non-Christian neighbors. Believers practiced their own ritual customs, inviting pastors to officiate weddings and funerals. The Sabbath day was reserved for church, not work. Protestants even developed their own ways of speech, peppering their conversations with pious sayings like, “in His grace,”<sup>35</sup> “the Lord has thus commanded,” and “according to Scripture.”<sup>36</sup> Yi contended that while such practices might appear innocuous, together, they produced a dangerous form of religious tribalism. Christians denounced unbelievers as “sinners and “heathens”—no matter their actual moral character—going so far as to avoiding social relations and intermarriage with outsiders.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Much of Yi Kwang-su’s discussion of Protestantism in “A Theory of New Life” was adapted from his earlier essay titled, “The Defects of Korean Protestantism Today” that was published in *Ch’ōngch’ün* in November 1917. See, Yi Kwang-su, “Kūmil Chosŏn Yasogyo ūi kyōlchōm,” in *Yi Kwang-su Chōnjip* vol. 10 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1971), 20-24.

<sup>34</sup> Yi Kwang-su, “Sinsaenghwallon,” 345.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 350.



Fig. 2.1 Christian Shops Closed for Sabbath.

SOURCE: General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church.

Protestantism proved just as insidious as Confucianism in one key respect: both oriented Koreans away from the nation. Just as overbearing parents distracted children from their responsibilities to state and society, Protestant leaders diverted converts' attention from matters of the here-and-now. Yi argued that the myriad “state-like” institutional apparatuses of the church—schools, hospitals, media organs, youth groups, and relief organizations<sup>38</sup>—indoctrinated believers with the principle of “church supremacy” (*kyohoe chisangjuui*).<sup>39</sup> Rank and file converts submitted unquestioningly to ecclesiastical authority. They held fast to “orthodox” (*chōngt’ong*) teachings on the immaculate conception, Christ’s miracles, and heaven and hell—ideas any “modern

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 350.

person” (*hyǒndaein*) would consider “superstitions” (*misin*).<sup>40</sup> What was worse, Protestant piety seemed inversely proportional to national sentiment. As Christians’ love for fellow believers grew stronger, their concern for other Koreans diminished. The faithful showed little interest in a secular “new life.” They prioritized theology over natural science and philosophy. They held pastors and elders in greater esteem than scholars, politicians, or entrepreneurs.<sup>41</sup> Yi surmised that if Protestants were made to choose between the church and the nation, they would undoubtedly side with the former.

“A Theory of New Life” raised broader questions on the proper place of religion in modern Korean society. Yi Kwang-su professed no animus against religion itself. As a moderate nationalist, he acknowledged the freedom of conscience as a cornerstone of modern law and a hallmark of civilizational progress. But Yi also understood the limits of this liberty. He pointed out how the Meiji Constitution guaranteed the “freedom of belief,” so long as it did not contravene the founding principles of the state (*ipkuk ūi chongji*). The government reserved the right to wield its “authority” to suppress any religion it deemed subversive. But instead of critiquing this expansive state power, Yi appended his own corollary. He subjected the freedom of belief still further to the “fundamental ideals of the nation.” The “prosperity and progress of the nation” transcended all other moral values and creeds, and religious adherents who transgressed this principle had to face “public opinion.”<sup>42</sup> Yi’s critiques against Protestantism demonstrated what this societal judgment might look like. He castigated Korean converts for espousing primitive, unscientific, and ultimately, anti-national practices.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>42</sup> Yi, “Sinsaenghwallon,” 345.

Nationalist misgivings over Korean Protestants continued to persist, even after the outbreak of the March First Movement the following year. Prevailing histories of the independence uprising contradict Yi Kwang-su's worst anxieties about Protestants' divided loyalties. Though they comprised just one percent of the population in 1919, Protestants made up sixteen of the thirty-three signatories of the Declaration of Independence, as well as over seventeen percent of those arrested in the aftermath.<sup>43</sup> But recent scholarship has challenged these narratives. According to Motokazu Matsutani, many Protestants who participated in the movement represented the fringes of their faith community, not the center.<sup>44</sup> Rank-and-file church members, with their troublesome practices, remained as problematic as ever. During the 1920s and 30s, Christian rituals in particular emerged as focal points for heated controversy.

### *The Chesa Controversy*

On September 1, 1920, the Korean newspaper *Tonga Ilbo* reported an unusual case of suicide in North Kyōngsang province. A forty-four-year-old woman named Pak had killed herself after prolonged conflict with her husband. The embers of marital strife smoldered ever since the husband's recent conversion to Christianity. Theirs had always been a Confucian home. And Pak was a paragon of womanly virtue—a veritable “saint” (*sōngnyō*)—who dutifully prepared daily morning and evening meal offerings after her mother-in-law's passing the previous year. Her husband, on the other hand, had grown increasingly peculiar. Suddenly dismissing ancestral veneration as mere superstition, he prohibited all future offerings. No amount of pleading or cajoling would change his mind,

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<sup>43</sup> Lee, “A Political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea,” 138-140.

<sup>44</sup> Matsutani, “Church over Nation.”

so finally, Pak took it upon herself to expiate her husband's unfilial conduct. Removing her mother-in-law's spirit tablet from the family shrine, she buried it in a hill behind their home, then threw herself into a nearby body of water. *Tonga Ilbo* editors pronounced Pak an "innocent victim of Christianity."<sup>45</sup>

According to the newspaper, the senselessness of the husband's behavior compounded the tragedy of the whole affair. In a companion piece entitled, "Lose not the Soul of Korea, Even for Religion's Sake," a prominent Protestant explained the actual compatibility of ancestral veneration and Christianity. Social reformer and YMCA leader Yi Sang-jae asserted that *chesa* abstention represented a gross misinterpretation of Christ's "true teachings" arising from an uncritical, slavish obedience to Western missionaries. He granted that Christianity prohibited the worship of idols, and supplicating spirit tablets for blessings clearly violated the Second Commandment. But if a person went before the tablets out of affection and longing, Yi insisted, the mere act of bowing did not amount to idolatry. It was the content of one's beliefs that determined the nature of the ritual, not its outer form. Yi went as far to suggest that ancestral veneration conformed to scriptural dictates. Through this expression of filial piety, believers fulfilled the Fifth Commandment charge to honor parents. The "weak faith" (*pakyakhan sinang*) of Christians like Pak's husband distorted the true meaning of ancestral rites, sullying the name of Christ and "shattering" time-honored Korean customs and morals.<sup>46</sup>

Church leaders mobilized swiftly in defense of their community. From their earliest years, Protestant converts faced the ire of kin and kith over their abstention from

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<sup>45</sup> "Aemaemujoehan kidokkyo ū hūisaengja," *Tonga Ilbo*, Sept. 1, 1920.

<sup>46</sup> "Chonggyosang edo Chosōn hon ūl musilhara," *Tonga Ilbo*, Sept. 1, 1920.

ancestral rites.<sup>47</sup> But this situation was different. A woman was dead, and the *Tonga Ilbo* held Protestants accountable. Just three days later, Yang Chu-sam, the pastor of Chonggyo Church, a prominent Methodist church in central Kyōngsōng, penned a rebuttal questioning the very authority of the newspaper to discuss *chesa*. He argued that as a doctrinal issue, ancestral veneration went beyond the scope of public adjudication. If the *Tonga Ilbo* indeed spoke for all Koreans, and if it had any respect for religious freedom, Yang charged, the newspaper had to act as an “impartial observer” in matters of faith. He felt the *Tonga Ilbo* had violated this trust. Not only did its essays impose scriptural interpretations contrary to church teachings, but they peddled in anti-Christian propaganda. It seemed implausible to Yang that any woman, let alone a Korean woman, would kill herself for the sake of her mother-in-law. He charged that the newspaper likely overlooked the true causes of Pak’s despair to sensationalize the role played by Christianity.

*Tonga Ilbo* editors could not easily dismiss Yang Chu-sam’s appeal to religious freedom. Like Yi Kwang-su, they knew full well how Western powers treated this principle as an essential part of modern societies. Advocacy for ancestral veneration, the editors thus maintained, by no means reversed the march of historical progress in Korean society. If Confucianism, as the “state religion” (*kukkyo*) of the Chosōn dynasty, once suppressed other faiths and imposed its ritual prescriptions on the entire population, Koreans now enjoyed the freedom of religion “recognized everywhere under Heaven,” as well as the concomitant right to carry out rituals according to their “own beliefs” (*chagisosin*).<sup>48</sup> Yi Sang-jae retracted the most controversial of his statements, professing that he

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<sup>47</sup> Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 207.

<sup>48</sup> “Chesa munje rūl chaenonhanora (il)” *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 24, 1920.

had never intended to portray ancestral rites as a scriptural mandate. He clarified that churches should show greater latitude for individual conscience, allowing members to reach their own conclusions without interference or fear of excommunication.<sup>49</sup> Intellectual and former statesman Kim Yun-sik similarly moderated the *Tonga Ilbo*'s initial stance, calling for a return to mutual noninterference. "Let Protestants, as Protestants, forbid ancestral veneration," he counseled. As for himself, Kim held firm that *chesa* represented the foremost expression of filiality and would persist in his regular observances.<sup>50</sup>

Professions of toleration notwithstanding, the debates over ancestral rites raged on. *Tonga Ilbo* editors no longer demanded that Christians resume *chesa*. They did, however, dispute the characterization of ancestral veneration as idolatry. One author contested the charge by recasting Confucianism as a monotheistic religion on par with Protestant Christianity. Confucius was no "polytheist" or "worshipper of idols," he argued. The sage taught disciples of the "unity of Heaven," apart from which none could supplicate. And given that "Heaven of Confucius" corresponded to "Heaven of Jesus," the sage in fact espoused the very same God as the Christians. Extending this logic further, the writer claimed that Korean devotees of Confucianism (*Kongjagyo*) were similarly monotheists, and their practices, monotheistic. Far from idolatrous, *chesa* merely consoled the souls of ancestors, functioning to preserve the memory of their former earthly lives. Since Christ himself recognized the existence of the human soul, ancestral veneration hardly "violated the precepts of monotheism."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Yissi chujang ūi kolcha" *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 5, 1920.

<sup>50</sup> "Yasogyo wa chesa munje: Yugoch'ük ūi kwanch'al" *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 5, 1920.

<sup>51</sup> "Chesa wa usangsungbae: Chosōn ūi chesa nūn ilsinsasang e wiban doeji anihanda" *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 10, 1920.

Other *chesa* advocates writing for the *Tonga Ilbo* took a decidedly different approach. Instead of treating Confucianism as a monotheistic religion, many disavowed the supernatural dimensions of ancestral rites altogether. Idolatry, as one writer put it, blurred the distinction between the spiritual and material realms. “God is God, not a thing,” he emphasized, just as “spirit is spirit.” Real worship honored God in “spirit and in truth.”<sup>52</sup> Deifying icons made of wood or clay most obviously infringed this principle, but so did transgressions such as revering “a mirror, jade, or sword,” or imagining heaven as a “golden palace.”<sup>53</sup> In the same vein, the notion that spirits descended into tablets during *chesa* to feast upon offerings smacked of superstition. The writer pointed out that Confucius never taught that the soul of the deceased “wandered to and fro like the wind,” “demanding food as humans do.” Spirits transcended time and space, having no capacity for “physical senses.” According to the “true meaning” (*pon’üi*) of ancestral veneration, people commemorated forbears out of a profound inability to forsake their memory.<sup>54</sup>

In some respects, the *Tonga Ilbo*’s forceful advocacy for ancestral veneration appears jarring. Their familiarity with the Confucian classics notwithstanding, staff writers and editors were hardly traditionalists. The newspaper attracted young, progressive intellectuals to its ranks and served as a central media platform for the cultural nationalist movement championed by Yi Kwang-su.<sup>55</sup> But not all social reformers shared Yi’s radical antagonism to traditional rites. Many recognized that ancestral veneration, as a deeply ingrained cultural practice, would not disappear overnight. And so long as most Koreans continued to observe *chesa*, Christian discourses

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<sup>52</sup> “Chesa munje rül chaenonhanora (yi).”

<sup>53</sup> By “mirror, jade, or sword,” the *Tonga Ilbo* editorialist referred to the Japanese imperial regalia.

<sup>54</sup> “Chesa munje rül chaenonhanora (yi).”

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea*, 52-53.

on ancestral veneration posed significant civilizational implications. At the height of social Darwinism, rituals served as a convenient shorthand for a nation's cultural advancement.<sup>56</sup> Yang Chu-sam had not merely opposed ancestral veneration as a competing religious tradition. By calling *chesa* idolatry, he denigrated it as a primitive custom common to cultures with “shallow scientific knowledge, irregular religious thought, and immature moral reasoning.” Ancestral rites continued in China, India, Egypt, the South Seas, Africa, and Israel, Yang noted, but even in these places, only remnants remained.<sup>57</sup> As *Tonga Ilbo* editors saw it, the Protestants’ slur of idolatry relegated the many millions of *chesa* practitioners—already colonial subjects—to the bottom of the racialized hierarchy of nations, right alongside the “barbarian peoples” of Africa.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas Yi Kwang-su called for the abolition of ancestral rites, *Tonga Ilbo* editors instead advocated to substantially overhaul the practice. Many *chesa* advocates defended only a narrowly defined, idealized form of ancestral veneration. Supernatural understandings of ancestral veneration, they conceded, constituted idolatry, stymying “public knowledge and morality.”<sup>59</sup> Such superstitions led people to fixate on the preparation of sumptuous food offerings and the meticulous observance of ritual protocols. To restore the rites to their “original spirit” (*pollae ūi chōngsin*), one writer proposed several subtle but far-reaching changes. People should venerate two generations of ancestors, rather than the customary four. Simplified practices would replace the

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<sup>56</sup> For more on social Darwinism in Korea, see Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: the beginnings (1880s-1910s): 'Survival' as an Ideology of Korean Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Yang Chu-sam, “Yasogyo ch’uk ūi kwanch’al” *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 4, 1920.

<sup>58</sup> “Chesa wa usangsungbae: Chosŏn ūi chesa nŭn ilsinsasang e wiban doeji anihanda.”

<sup>59</sup> “Chesa munje rūl chaenonhanora (yi).”

complex ritual prescriptions preserved by elite *yangban* families. Humbler fare would substitute lavish sacrificial foods. And since spirits did not physically join the ranks of the living, people need not perform ancestral rites in the evening hours as dictated by tradition.<sup>60</sup> The *Tonga Ilbo* promoted *chesa*, but only in significantly altered, modernized form.

Through their essays, *Tonga Ilbo* editors made a claim on ritual and moral authority in Korean society. Chosŏn-era conventions for adjudicating ritual propriety had become defunct under Japanese colonial rule. Formerly, the sovereign king decided which practices best approximated the rites of antiquity, but no such arbiter now existed. Whereas traditionalists sought to preserve the “old mandates” intact in the absence of a Korean monarch, Christians did no better, ceding to ecclesiastical leaders the power to dictate their ritual lives. *Tonga Ilbo* editors argued that the Korean people themselves ought to determine the practices most appropriate for the nation. Rituals are not fixed entities, one writer emphasized. They existed in every society, differing and evolving according to circumstance. If the customs of a nation failed to correspond to the needs of the age, not only would the people cease to uphold them, but new, more appropriate practices would take their place. The latter-day rites, founded upon the dictates of “each person’s conscience” (*kakcha sosin*) and the “demands of society” (*sahoe yogu*), would continue to transform over time. And who better to assume this mantle of ritual change than the *Tonga Ilbo*, the mouthpiece of the nation?

The *Tonga Ilbo* did not have the last word on who ought to serve as the moral and ritual arbiter for the nation. Colonial censors belatedly discovered thinly-veiled criticism

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<sup>60</sup> “Chesa wa usangsungbae: Chosŏn ūi chesa nŭn ilsinsasang e wiban doeji anihanda.”

of the Japanese imperial regalia included in an essay on idolatry. The newspaper lost its publication privileges for the next 108 days on the grounds of *lèse-majesté*.<sup>61</sup> With the Tonga Ilbo effectively silenced, religious leaders took the opportunity to make their own case unopposed. Protestants redoubled their opposition to chesa. Ancestral veneration was a matter of religious conviction, YMCA leader Kim Ch'ang-jae emphasized, not an issue for “societal control.” He then went one step further, presenting the church memorial service as a model for the nation. Koreans could commemorate their ancestors in their hearts without recourse to spirit tablets, sacrificial food, or ceremonial bowing altogether.<sup>62</sup> Prominent intellectual and Ch'ondogyo adherent Yi Ton-hwa similarly framed ancestral veneration as a “spiritual issue,” proposing Ch'ondogyo practices as yet another alternative. He pointed out that since ancestral spirits united with the Divine Spirit, which itself resided in every person, Koreans could simply honor ancestors within their own spirits (*chaa simnyöng*). Ultimately, the *Tonga Ilbo chesa* debates did not settle the contest for ritual authority, and nationalist intellectuals sought other forums to continue their efforts.<sup>63</sup>

#### “So-Called New Weddings”

On a brisk fall day in 1917, Methodist missionary Cordelia Erwin made her way to the town of Hwach'ön in Kangwon Province. When she reached the home of the local Bible woman, there was a middle-aged man who greeted her. Deacon Pak, a well-respected church leader, as well as the wealthiest person in the county, had eagerly

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<sup>61</sup> Chöng, *Kükpi Chosön ch'ongdokpu ūi öllon komyöl kwa t'anap*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Kim, “Kidokkyo wa chesa: chesa nün kidokkyori e wibae doem (2),” *Kidok Sinbo*, Oct. 20, 1920.

<sup>63</sup> Yi, “Chesa munjae rül kihoe ro haya,” 34.

awaited her arrival. His son planned to wed the daughter of an affluent Christian farmer the following week. There was just one problem. Pak did not wish for the bride to dress in the manner of “unbelievers” on the wedding day, with “her eyes sealed up,” “her hair plucked out at the temples,” with “red spots put on her cheeks and forehead.” Pak wanted to arrange “a strictly Christian wedding with not the least savor of heathenism,” but he simply did not know how. Erwin’s visit was providential. “Han-i-nim [God] has sent [her] to show him about it,” Pak exclaimed. The missionary willingly obliged, helping the bride secure a silk gauze veil, pink satin slippers, and a skirt made of “exquisite white taffeta.” When it was finally time for the marriage ceremony, bride and groom stood “with dignity and grace” before the minister and exchanged vows to always “love and honor” one another.<sup>64</sup>



Fig. 2.2 Traditional Korean Bride.

SOURCE: Ellasue Canter Wagner, *Kim Su Bang and Other Stories of Korea*, 80.

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<sup>64</sup> Erwin, “Transition, A Korean Christian Wedding,” 73-74.



Fig. 2.3 Protestant Bride and Groom, 1926.

SOURCE: Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Moffett Korea Collection.

Korean Protestants had not always equated traditional customs with heathenism and Western ones with Christianity. During the late nineteenth century, missionaries banned specific “idolatrous” ceremonies, while incorporating liturgical elements such as scripture readings, hymns, and prayers into existing practices.<sup>65</sup> Matters like dress remained up to the converts themselves. Many early Protestant brides and grooms in fact appeared nearly indistinguishable from their unbelieving counterparts. But during the 1910s, the aesthetics of Christian weddings began to shift significantly. Youth who

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<sup>65</sup> Protestant missionaries took special efforts to discourage folk practices, as well as any custom related to ancestral veneration. Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 155.

attended mission schools in large urban centers brought Western influences back to their hometowns. Deacon Pak’s son himself was a student in Kyōngsōng. There, he experienced first-hand the dizzying transformations that swept the city. He also likely witnessed friends and classmates opt for stately church weddings, complete with organ music, flowers, frock coats, and white *hanbok* repurposed as bridal gowns. Perhaps hearing of such newfangled customs from his son, Deacon Pak visually displayed his family’s religious identity by hosting the “nicest possible Christian wedding” in their sleepy provincial town.<sup>66</sup>

By the 1920s, the Western-style marriage ceremony had become commonplace, especially in urban areas. The *Tonga Ilbo* wedding announcement column, *Bride and Groom* (*Sillang Sinbu*), routinely reported on the church nuptials of mission school graduates, as well as the children of pastors and lay leaders.<sup>67</sup> Before long, the newspaper began publicizing the chapel weddings of educated elites—believers and non-believers alike—including educators, lawyers, and classically-trained musicians. For some recipients of “modern learning” (*sin gyoyuk*), the Protestant ceremony offered an outlet to showcase their cultural refinement and worldly accomplishments. One wedding announcement, for instance, presented the groom, a recently-minted physician, dressed conspicuously in a Western suit and a graduation cap. For others, the Protestant ceremony, with its emphasis on individual consent and mutual love, embodied modern attitudes toward womanhood and marriage. Young men and women bandied about terms like “romantic love” (*yōnae*) and “love marriage” (*yōnae kyōlhon*), clamoring for greater

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<sup>66</sup> Erwin, 73.

<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, “Sillang sinbu,” *Tonga Ilbo*, May 24, 1920.

freedom to choose their own spouses.<sup>68</sup> So popular were Christian ceremonies among Korea's "new youth" (*sinsik ch'ōngnyōn*) that a new shorthand for marriage rites emerged among urban elites. Confucian ceremonies became "old-fashioned weddings" (*kusik honin*), while Christian rites assumed the moniker, "new weddings" (*sinsik kyōlhonsik*).

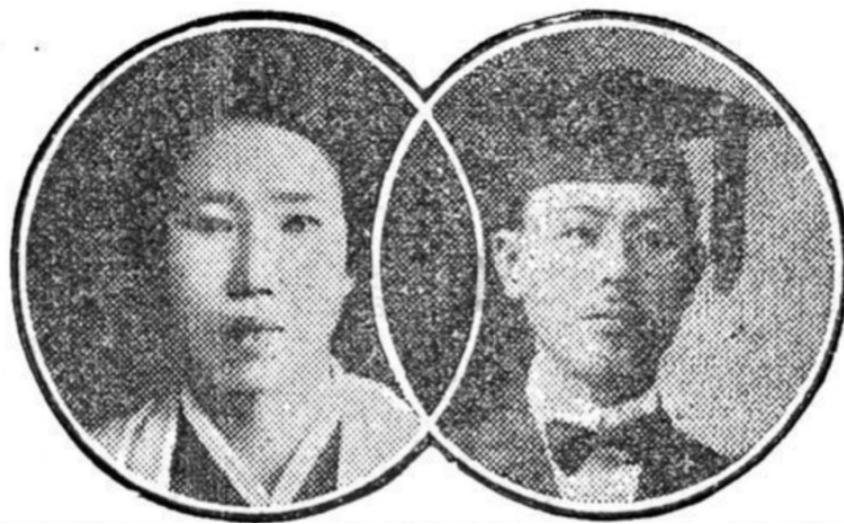


Fig. 2.4 Yi Hye-gyōng and Kim Sōng-guk.

SOURCE: *Tonga Ilbo* Aug. 3, 1922.

Not everyone welcomed the proliferation of new weddings. Older generations bemoaned the departure from time-honored customs. While progressive intellectuals did not call for a return to traditional ceremonies, they expressed their own misgivings. The notion that Western-style ceremonies could serve as "simple" and "frugal" substitutes for traditional rites proved short-lived, as we will explore further in the next chapter.<sup>69</sup> Others expressed concern that new weddings would incite religious strife. For all their

<sup>68</sup> For more on "love marriage" see, Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Yi Yōng-su, "Kaehwagi esō ilchae kangjōmgi kkaji honin yuhyōng," *Asiamunhwa yōn'gu* 28 (2012); and Kim Kyōng-il, *Kündae ūi kajok, kündae ūi kyōlhon* (Seoul: P'urūn Yōksa, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> "Hyujit'ong," *Tonga Ilbo*, April 17, 1921.

cosmopolitan cachet, Western-style marriage ceremonies were steeped in Christian beliefs and practices. Pastors and lay leaders continued to oversee church ceremonies to ensure that they proceeded in accordance with “God’s will” and “ritual prescriptions.”<sup>70</sup> Koreans also commonly referred to Western-style weddings as “amen-style,”<sup>71</sup> “worship-style,”<sup>72</sup> or simply, “Christian-style” ceremonies.<sup>73</sup> Intellectual and social activist Pak Sŭng-bin worried that the spread of these distinctly Protestant rites would create religious tensions. While most Koreans did not identify with one faith or another, Buddhists and followers of Ch’ondogyo nevertheless co-existed alongside Protestants.<sup>74</sup> Pak wondered at the kinds of dilemmas interfaith couples might face. “If a Christian bride married a Ch’ondogyo adherent,” he conjectured, “the groom may object to a church ceremony.” “And if the groom pressed for a Ch’ondogyo-style wedding,” he continued, “the bride would be unhappy.”<sup>75</sup> New weddings were ill-equipped for a pluralistic society, serving only to inflame sectarian differences that separated Koreans from one another.

Most alarming of all, critics charged that instead of cultivating thoughtful, nationalistic youth, new weddings gave rise to phony Christians. While Protestant missionaries had initially introduced church weddings just for converts, now, it appeared more unbelievers accounted for Protestant weddings than believers themselves.<sup>76</sup> As one

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<sup>70</sup> *Taehan Yesugyo changnohoe hōnbōp*, 249.

<sup>71</sup> “Naegaji kyōlhonsang,” *Tonga Ilbo*, August 26, 1925.

<sup>72</sup> Ko Yōng-hwan, “Sinan hollyesik aullō sin’gu yesik ūi kōmch’al, yuk,” *Tonga Ilbo*, August 30, 1931.

<sup>73</sup> “Pyōnch’ōndo hyōnghyōng saeksae: simnyōn’gan yuhaeng taejo,” *Tonga Ilbo*, April 3, 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Baker, “The Religious Revolution in Modern Korean History,” 253.

<sup>75</sup> “Uri ka kajil kyōlhon ūisik e taehan myōngga ūi ūigyōn.”

<sup>76</sup> Protestant leaders nursed their own misgivings about the opening of church weddings to outsiders. Kim Ch’ang-jae charged that the misappropriation of church rites blurred the boundaries distinguishing different religious communities and sowed public confusion about Christian doctrine. He gave the example of how a three-time divorcee, who had somehow compelled a pastor to officiate her unorthodox marriages,

*Tonga Ilbo* writer put it, “people without an inkling of religious faith” “momentarily played the part of Christians.” They bowed their heads and made promises to a God they did not believe in, all for the sake of a ceremony.<sup>77</sup> The monthly magazine *Pyōlgōngon* ran a satirical essay lampooning such duplicity. The bride and groom, both college graduates and self-professed liberals (*chayujuūija*), ordinarily never stepped foot in church, dismissing religion itself as “superstition.” On their wedding day, however, the two “heretics” (*idanja*) entered the chapel with utmost solemnity. They stood at the altar and nodded in assent as the minister droned on about Adam and Eve and the sanctity of marriage. Not once did they reveal their true feelings about such “senseless prattling.” New weddings were so pernicious that they induced Korea’s youth--the very group that should spearhead social change—to abandon their own convictions and principles.<sup>78</sup>

Nationalist intellectuals were not content to merely critique new weddings. They invented their own. Pak Sŭng-bin was a founding member of the Enlightenment Fraternity (*Kyemyōng gurakpu*), a nationalist association dedicated to improving Korean culture and daily life. In addition to spearheading Korean language reform, simplified Korean dress, and youth publications, the organization pioneered an alternative to new weddings.<sup>79</sup> In May 1922, its monthly magazine, *Enlightenment* (*Kyemyōng*), introduced a blueprint for the “society-style” (*sahoesik*) wedding. This ceremony differed from Protestant practices in several key respects. It would take place in a community center

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undermined the integrity of the church. Anyone who mistook her for a believer in good standing might assume that Christians endorsed such conduct. Kim urged stricter the church to adopt measures to bar unbelievers from church weddings. See Kim Ch’ang-chae, “Chosŏn kyohoe ūi sahoe ūisik munjae (il),” *Kidok Sinbo*, Jan. 1, 1931.

<sup>77</sup> “Taegae nŭn hyōngsik e pulgwanan sowi sinsik kyōlhonsik.”

<sup>78</sup> Wetdūingtebūlsaeng, “Chayu kyōlhonsikchang sullyegi (il).”

<sup>79</sup> The Enlightenment Fraternity included in its membership intellectual luminaries such as Ch’oe Nam-sŏn, O Se-ch’ang, Yí Nŭng-hwa, and Mun Il-pyōng.

(*konghoedang*), instead of at a church. A friend or a well-respected acquaintance would take the place of a minister as officiant. There would be no exchange of costly wedding rings. And most importantly, the bride and groom would make their vows before Heaven (*koch'õnmun*)--not any particular deity--paying respect to indigenous Korean thought (*sasang*), rather than Christian theology.<sup>80</sup> In proposing these changes, the Enlightenment Fraternity never suggested that the society style wedding replace church ceremonies altogether. Pak, for one, vocally supported the prerogative of religious adherents (*chonggyo injá*) to carry out their own customs. Rather, the organization claimed to offer a secular option for unbelievers (*pisinja*), who comprised the majority of the nation.<sup>81</sup>

When new weddings proliferate unabated, despite the steady rise of society-style weddings, nationalist intellectuals continued to fill newspapers and magazines with their counter-proposals. In August 1931, Ko Yõng-hwan, a staff writer for the *Tonga Ilbo*, created his own ideal Korean wedding ceremony, which he claimed would be even more cost-effective, culturally-authentic, and secular than society-style weddings. In his version, the ceremony would likewise take place in a civic space, but there would be no officiant. Excessive formalism, he complained, too often turned the bride and groom into a pair of “dolls” or “machines.”<sup>82</sup> The couple would walk themselves toward a dais from opposite ends of the room, donning crisp white *hanbok* in homage to the age-old moniker for Koreans as “the people of white clothing” (*paegüiin*). Once face to face, they would affirm their commitment to one another with a public declaration and simple shaking of

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<sup>80</sup> Yun, “Ilyong yebop e ch’wihaya,” 32-36. For Pak Sëng-bin’s recollections of conceiving of society style weddings see, Pak Sëng-bin, “Naega ch’anganhan kót” in “Uri ka kajil kyõlhon yesik e taehan myõngsa ū ūigyon.”

<sup>81</sup> Yun, “Ilyong yebop e ch’wihaya.”

<sup>82</sup> Ko, “Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin’gu yesik ūi kõmch’al (yuk).”

hands. At no point would the bride and groom reference any higher power or deity, which Ko perceived as an irredeemable flaw of society-style weddings.<sup>83</sup> There would be no extravagant banquet, just simple Korean desserts of *yaksik* and *sikh'ye*.<sup>84</sup> The festivities would finally conclude with the taking of commemorative photographs.<sup>85</sup>

In Ko's mind, the vexing problem of new weddings resulted from a yawning gap in Korean culture. Every nation as a matter of course possessed rituals appropriate for its particular way of life. Ko bemoaned that Koreans lacked "unique" (*tokt'ukhan*) marriage rites, earning themselves the unfortunate distinction as the exception to the rule. His compatriots fell into bondage to the practices of others. Throughout the five-hundred-year duration of the Chosön dynasty, he charged, Koreans had "imitated" Chinese customs "unreservedly and uncritically." "Old weddings" from the start had never been native to Korea. They instead belonged to the "Han Chinese" (*hanjok*), who differed entirely in "language, customs, and habits." And now, Koreans repeated the mistakes of history by "blindly" embracing Euro-American ways.<sup>86</sup> Ko circumscribed church marriage ceremonies to an even narrower group than his predecessors did, suggesting that they only befitted Christians in Western countries. Missionaries themselves, he pointed out, viewed Western weddings more as an "ethnic growth" rather than a universal biblical mandate. These "so-called church-style" weddings were nothing but "American-style" rites, inappropriate for Koreans, Christian or otherwise.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ko lambasted the *koch'õnmun* central to the society-style wedding as a poor imitation of the Christian ceremony. See, Ko Yõng-hwan, "Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin'gu yesik ūi kõmch'al (p'al)," *Tonga Ilbo*, September 2, 1931.

<sup>84</sup> Ko Yõng-hwan, "Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin'gu yesik ūi kõmch'al (sip)," *Tonga Ilbo*, September 5, 1931.

<sup>85</sup> Ko Yõng-hwan, "Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin'gu yesik ūi kõmch'al (sip-il)," *Tonga Ilbo*, September 6, 1931.

<sup>86</sup> Ko Yõng-hwan, "Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin'gu yesik ūi kõmch'al (yi)," *Tonga Ilbo* Aug. 26, 1931.

<sup>87</sup> Ko Yõng-hwan, "Sinan hollyesik aullõ sin'gu yesik ūi kõmch'al (ch'il)," *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 1, 1931.

While Ko Yǒng-hwan’s ideas never gained a popular following, they went beyond mere armchair theorizing. Published in the leading nationalist newspaper of the time, his proposal represented a significant shift in Korean intellectuals’ approach to ritual reform, one that was far less tolerant of religion. When the Enlightenment Fraternity first conceived of the society-style wedding in the early 1920s, its leaders emphasized the principle of religious freedom, disavowing any ambition to “unify” marriage customs.<sup>88</sup> Society-style weddings would supplement, not supplant, existing religious ceremonies. Ko Yǒng-hwan, on the other hand, wrote at a time when Korean leftists aggressively and publicly critiqued the Protestant church.<sup>89</sup> As such, he expressed few such compunctions, promoting his ideal wedding ceremony as suitable for all.<sup>90</sup> Ritual pluralism had gone too far. Emphasis on individual conscience gave rise to not just a diversity of sectarian customs, but also a bevy of newfangled and frivolous practices. Accounts of “vacation weddings, forest weddings, and waterfront weddings” “shocked the eyes and ears” of the public. A common set of sober, modern, and culturally authentic marriage rites, Ko maintained, would bring greater benefits to Korean society, even if at the expense of religious prerogatives.<sup>91</sup>

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Public debates over rites roiled Korean society during the 1920s and early 30s. For reformist intellectuals seeking to build a new national culture, how to commemorate

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<sup>88</sup> Pak Sǔng-bin, “Naega ch’anganhan kōt” in “Uri ka kajil kyōlhon yesik e taehan myōngsa ūi ūigyōn.”

<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, “Pankidokkyo undong e kwanhaya,” *Kaebŷōk*, Nov. 1, 1925. See also, See also, Choi, 1920 Nyōndae Chungban Pankidokkyo Undong Yōn’gu.”

<sup>90</sup> Pak Sǔng-bin, “Naega ch’anganhan kōt” in “Uri ka kajil kyōlhon yesik e taehan myōngsa ūi ūigyōn.”

<sup>91</sup> Ko Yǒng-hwan, “Sinan hollyesik aullō sin’gu yesik ūi kōmch’al (p’al),” *Tonga Ilbo* Sept. 2, 1931.

one's dead or solemnize the marriage bond became issues of pressing urgency. Proposals to modify or create alternatives to traditional Confucian customs filled the pages of vernacular newspapers, though few actually changed the habits of ordinary Koreans. Their limited success notwithstanding, ritual innovations shed light on the conundrums that religious difference posed for nationalists. On the one hand, advocating the freedom of belief enabled local reformers to situate themselves on the right side of civilizational development, a not insignificant matter for a colonized people. On the other hand, Protestant practices—especially abstention from ancestral veneration and Westernized wedding ceremonies—proved vexatious, misguiding people's loyalties and inappropriately imposing doctrinal teachings on non-believers. Proposals for non-sectarian rites promised to safeguard Koreans from such religious overreach, but they also intimated a vision of pluralism where national obligations eclipsed the demands of any devotional practice. “[A]ny religious believer will become a better believer,” Yi Kwang-su once remarked, when striving for the nation’s sake.<sup>92</sup>

Though largely limited to the discursive realm, reformist intellectuals’ efforts to circumscribe religious rites raise important questions concerning the historical agents of secularism. Recent scholarship has shed light on how modern nation-states separated religion from the secular sphere as a strategy of governance, simultaneously protecting the private beliefs of individuals and strengthening control over societies.<sup>93</sup> In the case of Korea, Japanese colonial officials likewise defined religion in ways that helped categorize, manage, and police religious life. The story of ritual reform, however, draws

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<sup>92</sup> Yi Kwang-su, “On National Reconstruction,” trans. Ellie Choi in *Imperatives of Culture*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> For more on secularism in East Asia see: Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*; Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*; and Maxey, *The ‘Greatest Problem.’*

attention to the central roles played by local actors shaping the demarcation between the religious and the secular. Reformist intellectuals largely failed to persuade their fellow compatriots to relinquish their traditional or liturgical rites in favor of new national practices. Yet, their proposals had significant ramifications for religious freedom. Even as they insisted on the importance of civic society in reforming rites, by subjecting ritual ceremonies to public scrutiny, they paved the way for extraordinary state intervention in Koreans' everyday lives. In 1934, as the Japanese empire prepared for war, the Government-General promulgated the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (*Girei Junsoku*), imposing its own version of the Confucian rites of passage as the duties of all Korean subjects, regardless of creed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “Empty Formalities and Senseless Vanity” Campaigns Against Ritual Spending

In December 1918, the *Maeil Sinbo* published rather unsettling findings from a study conducted by the South Chōlla provincial government. During the previous year, residents of the province had spent a total of 3,989,810 yen performing the Confucian rites of passage. Changsōng county logged 253,084 yen, while Muan county, 309,749 yen. Cheju island alone reported 830,719 yen in expenditures. These staggering sums apparently did not come as surprise to the author of the article. He pointed out the prevalence of bankruptcy among filial sons who observed the full three years of customary mourning. Households commemorating many generations of ancestors easily exhausted hundreds of yen annually on *chesa* rites. The problem of runaway ritual spending, according to the author, had plagued the Korean nation for over five hundred years, since the founding of the Chosōn dynasty. If anything had changed in recent decades, it was that people now employed new technologies to continue their old ways. As a case in point, the newspaper appended a photograph of a gleaming Ford Model T that a family chartered just the past week to transport wedding gifts (*napch’ae*) to the home of the bride.<sup>1</sup>

The statistics provided by South Chōlla administrators did not necessarily spell out a crisis of consumer excess sweeping Korean society. To be sure, ritual expenses represented a significant outlay for some Korean households. Head families of prominent *yangban* lineages, for instance, often required the use of specially-allocated clan lands to

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<sup>1</sup> “Kwanhonsangje e sabaengman,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Dec. 12, 1918.

cover the costs of their numerous and recurring ancestral rites.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the Chosŏn dynasty, many Koreans joined mutual aid associations to share the financial burden of ritual ceremonies, especially weddings and funerals.<sup>3</sup> But there was little reliable data on typical ritual spending nation-wide. The *Maeil Sinbo* acknowledged that the Government-General had not yet commissioned studies on the rest of the peninsula. The newspaper also revealed little about the scope or methodology of the South Ch'olla survey. But even if provincial officials had managed to collect accurate data—a herculean feat in itself—average ritual expenditures did not reach the alarming levels suggested by the *Maeil Sinbo*. The government census reported a total of 354,007 Korean households living in the province in 1918, which would have amounted to a little over eleven yen per household ceremonial expenses that year.<sup>4</sup>

However modest ritual spending might have been for many Koreans, moralistic critiques against ostentation grew to a fever pitch during the 1920s. The *Maeil Sinbo* report, and many others like it, advanced the notion that ritual expenditures had reached a breaking point. Campaigns against “empty formalities and senseless vanity” (*hōrye hōsik*) proliferated among reformers of all stripes, including provincial administrators, Protestant church leaders, and Korean cultural nationalists. These three principal groups had much in common. They all relied on local community organizing. They advocated many of the same reform proposals, ranging from abstention from alcohol, setting caps on ceremonial spending, to prohibiting ostentatious gift exchanges. They even perceived Korean ritual expenditures much the same way: an untapped resource primed for

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<sup>2</sup> Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> See Kim Kyōng-ok, “19~20 segi changhŭng yuch'i sangp'ogye ūi chojik kwa unyōng,” *Inch'ōnhak yōn'gu* 8 (2008): 33-59.

<sup>4</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpō: Taishō 7 nendo* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1918), 40.

diversion to more worthy causes. Despite these similarities, however, colonial administrators, Protestants, and cultural nationalists interacted more as rivals than allies. Each had their own vision for diverting household spending—whether to tax payments, church coffers, or domestic industries. By tracing the disparate aspirations of the three groups in turn, this chapter builds on our previous discussion, exploring how ritual reform went beyond discourse and across local society.

### *Revitalization Associations*

In Nonsan county, South Ch'ungch'ong province, there was a small farming village called Kalsalli familiar among many colonial officials. Most administrators learned of the village through the many published stories of its remarkable transformation.<sup>5</sup> According to these accounts, Kalsalli was once notorious for its vice. Though comprised of just seventy-six or so households during the early 1910s, the community boasted eleven taverns, where many congregated daily to drink, place bets, and fight. Villagers evidently paid dearly for such dissolution. Some former self-cultivators had to till the fields of others, having frittered away the little land they once had. In the wintertime, wives and children suffered acutely. No steam of boiling rice rose from the homes of gamblers and drunkards. Far more common was the sight of women, barefoot and shabbily-clad, making their way to neighboring villages to beg for grain. But that was the old Kalsalli. By the early 1920s, Kalsalli became better known for its

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Suetake Nadao, “Chūsei nandō ni okeru shinkōkai no gaikyō,” *Chōsen* (June 1921), 270-275; Hishiki Shūichi, “Chūshōnandō ni okeru yūryō shinkōkai: Katsurayamari,” *Chōsen* 81 (Nov. 1921), 64-72.

virtue.<sup>6</sup> Residents replaced their debaucherous ways with lives of diligence and thrift. According to some reports, the community experienced such change that young children did not even know the word for gambling, let alone see it practiced.<sup>7</sup>

Provincial administrators credited Kalsalli's changed fortunes to the revival of an age-old Korean institution: the community compact (*hyangyak*). During the Chosŏn dynasty, local elites established village agreements as a way to maintain social order, obligating household heads to uphold the Confucian principles of cultivating morality, rectifying wrongs, preserving civility, and offering mutual aid.<sup>8</sup> In 1915, three "influential men" of Kalsalli--Pang Chong-gu, Kim Sŏng-bae, and O Yi-sŏn--established a moral reform cooperative (*kyop 'ung chohap*), which supplemented the customary community compact with additional prohibitions against gambling and alcohol consumption.<sup>9</sup> Colonial administrators similarly perceived potential in the traditional institution. In 1916, South Ch'ungch'ong governor Ohara Shinzō spearheaded a plan to establish *hyangyak*-like revitalization associations (K. *chinhŭnghoe*, J. *shinkōkai*) across the province. *Chinhŭnghoe* preserved the four customary Confucian prescripts, while also greatly expanding reformist measures. The same year, when local officials re-organized the Kalsalli Moral Reform Cooperative into the Kalsalli Revitalization Association, the group began promoting on-going government initiatives concerning hygiene, education, thrift, and the upkeep of public lands and infrastructure.<sup>10</sup> By the early 1920s,

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<sup>6</sup> By 1923, provincial administrators publicly recognized Kalsalli as home to a "model revitalization association" (*mohan shinkōkai*). "Chūsei nandō ni okeru shinkōkai," *Chōsen* 101 (Sept. 1923), 121-122.

<sup>7</sup> "Chōn Chosŏn mobōm nongch'on chosa ki ku," *Tonga Ilbo*, Jan. 17, 1929.

<sup>8</sup> Yi Chun-sik, "Hyōngmyōngch'ok nongmin chohap undong kwa ilche ūi nongch'on t'ongje chōngch'aek: Hamgyōngbukto ūi kwanbuk hyangyak ūl chungsim ūro," in *Ilche singminji sigi ūi t'ongch'i ch'eje hyōngsōng*, ed. Kim Tong-no (Seoul: Hyean, 2006), 247.

<sup>9</sup> "Chōn Chosŏn mobōm nongch'on chosa ki ku," *Tonga Ilbo*, Jan. 17, 1929.

<sup>10</sup> "Shinkōkai kiyaku junsoku," *Chōsen Sōtokufu Kanpō*, Jan. 18, 1921.

*chinhŭnghoe* emerged throughout South Ch'ungch'ŏng, not to mention other provinces in the peninsula.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, poverty relief was not the only, or even primary, objective of colonial rural reform during the late 1910s and early 20s. Revitalization associations conspicuously did not address the structural causes of material suffering in the Korean countryside--such as high rents or tenancy rates--and the story of Kalsalli's shifting fortunes remained an exception, not the rule. Bureaucrats promoted revitalization associations to serve broader colonial interests. For one, the *chinhŭnghoe* became a central part of colonial efforts to expand Korean agricultural exports for Japanese consumption, as well as integrate the peninsula more tightly into global markets. In 1920, the Government-General launched the Program to Increase Rice Production (*Sanmai zōshoku keikaku*) to meet growing consumer demand in Japan proper. It advocated the use of better seed varieties, chemical fertilizer, and farming techniques.<sup>12</sup> Revitalization associations offered an organizational basis to advance these initiatives at the village level.<sup>13</sup> The following year, when Ohara's successor, Tokizane Akiho, promulgated revised instructions for *chinhŭnghoe* by-laws in South Ch'ungch'ŏng, he made sure to include a section on "improving industry" (*sangyō kairyō*), enumerating the very same recommendations.<sup>14</sup> In South Ch'olla, provincial administrators likewise emphasized the

<sup>11</sup> During the first two decades of colonial rule, numerous other provinces established *hyangyak*-like organizations, though under different names. There was the North Hamgyōng *tonggye* (1911), North P'yōngan *tongyak* (1918), Kangwŏn *hūngp'unghoe* (1920), Hwanghae *hūngp'unghoe* (1921), South Ch'olla *minp'ung chinhŭnghoe* (1922), and the North Ch'olla *purak kaeryang chohap* (1926). See Kim, 1930 *nyōndae minjok punyōl t'ongch'i kanghwa*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Gi-wook Shin, *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1996), 43-46.

<sup>13</sup> For more on revitalization associations and the Program to Increase Rice Production, see Yi Ha-na, "Ilche kangjōngi 'mobōm purak' chōngch'aek kwa Chosŏn nongch'on ūi chaep'yōn," *Hangnim* 19 (1998), 147-148.

<sup>14</sup> "Chōsen Sōtokufu Chūsei Nandō kunrei dai ichi gō," *Chōsen Sōtokufu Kanpō* (Jan. 18, 1921), 155. In his recollections, Ohara Shinzō noted the importance of the Program to Increase Rice Production in the

duty of *chinhŭnghoe* leaders in leading their fellow villagers toward greater agricultural development.<sup>15</sup>

Revitalization associations emerged as some of the earliest sites of colonial ritual reform, as provincial administrators had their own ideas for diverting household ceremonial expenditures. Modernizing Korean farming practices to expand agricultural production would not come cheap. *Chinhŭnghoe* leaders pressed cash-strapped families to allocate funds for new seeds and equipment not only by encouraging greater diligence, but also by championing thrift.<sup>16</sup> They banned profligate habits such as gambling or alcohol consumption. In the same vein, they also decried unnecessary ceremonial expenditures. The *Principles for Guiding Revitalization Associations* (1925), a South Ch'olla primer on *chinhŭnghoe*, singled out runaway ritual spending as a particularly pernicious social ill. The text acknowledged the significance of traditional customs, maintaining that families should by no means carry out ceremonies (especially funerals and ancestral rites) in a “shabby” manner. Yet, it also sharply critiqued the prevalence of families incurring costs above and beyond their means. The primer charged that many “foolish” Koreans “imperiled” their household finances, drawing the scorn of young and old alike. All this for the sake of “ fleeting appearances.” Instead of squandering resources on lavish ritual expenses, the text maintained, Koreans should instead save the money for

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formation of revitalization associations. See Ohara Shinzō, “Chihō shinkōkai no sōsetsu,” in *Chōsen tōchi no kaiko to hihan*, ed. Kida Chūei (Keijō: Chōsen shinbunsha, 1936), 57-58.

<sup>15</sup> Chöllanamdo naemuguk, *Minp'ung chinhŭnghoe chido pangch'im* (Kwangju: Chöllanamdo naemuguk, 1925), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Revitalization associations strongly encouraged members to supplement their incomes by engaging in sericulture, basket weaving, and livestock rearing. Hishiki, “Chūshōnandō ni okeru yūryō shinkōkai: Katsurayamari,” 68.

more prudent ends, namely, investments in “productive enterprises” (*saengsanjök saōp*).<sup>17</sup>

Strategies to reduce Koreans’ ritual expenditures differed from one revitalization association to another. The Kalsalli *chinhŭnghoe* by-laws included a clause instructing members to practice simplicity and frugality when performing the Confucian rites of passage. In 1918, it went one step further, creating a mutual aid association for funerals (*hosanggye*), which had traditionally formed a part of *hyangyak* functions. Each *hosanggye* member was entitled to monetary aid on the occasion of a death in the family, whether for a parent, spouse, or child. The organization would furnish a one-time payout from initiation dues, as well as collect additional contributions from members. Bereaved families could then use these funds to procure hemp cloth for customary mourning garb and a funerary bier to transport the coffin to the gravesite. The *hosanggye* provided assistance in other ways as well. When notified of a death, all members had to gather at the home of the bereaved to offer comfort and help carry out a litany of customary burial preparations. By encouraging villagers pool resources and manpower, *chinhŭnghoe* leaders sought to alleviate the financial strain associated with funerary rites, as well as reduce families’ need to resort to high-interest loans.<sup>18</sup>

Revitalization associations also intervened more heavy-handedly in villagers’ ritual lives. Many established in their by-laws detailed instructions for curbing ceremonial costs. For instance, in May 1925, the Indongni *chinhŭnghoe*, located in Kwangyang county, South Chōlla province, revised its regulations to include specific

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<sup>17</sup> Chōllanamdo naemuguk, *Minp'ung chinhŭnghoe chido pangch'im* (Kwangju: Chōllanamdo naemuguk, 1925), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Hishiki, 67-68. See also, Chōsen Sōtokufu Naimukyoku Shakaika, *Yūryō burakuchō* (Keijō: Chōsen Sōtokufu Naimukyoku Shakaika, 1928), 58-60.

changes to members' customary practices. Members promised to abstain from ostentatious betrothal gifts, replacing luxury goods with practical, everyday items. During wedding celebrations, families of the bride and groom would no longer send each other banquet tables laden with delicacies. Villagers would minimize alcohol consumption during funerary and ancestral rites, to the extent possible.<sup>19</sup> Some revitalization associations attempted to prescribe set limits on ritual spending. In Kŭmsan county, South Ch'ungch'ong province, just west of Kalsalli, the Namil *hyangyak* capped ceremonial spending on a sliding scale, based on the tax burdens of each household. It stipulated that families at the lowest taxation bracket could not spend more than five yen on any ritual occasion. At the other extreme, the *hyangyak* stated that families at the highest taxation bracket could spend up to twenty times that amount for ceremonial expenses, for a total of one hundred yen.<sup>20</sup>

But more than simply vehicles for agricultural expansion, revitalization associations also served as mechanisms for fostering loyal Japanese subjects. When Ohara Shinzō took up his post as governor of South Ch'ungch'ong in 1915, the province had the greatest concentration of *yangban* aristocrats in the peninsula.<sup>21</sup> Early on, Ohara strove to win over local elites by paying homage to traditional values. He paid visits to individual *yangban* homes and local Confucian shrines (*munmyo*).<sup>22</sup> He made sure that *chinhunghoe* by-laws valorized filial piety, female chastity, and respect for social hierarchy. After the explosive outbreak of the 1919 March First Independence

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> "Ch'ohyölli hyangyak," 1922, IM0000039412, National Institute of Korean History.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Yǒng-hŭi, *Ilche sidae nongch'on t'ongje chöngch'aek yǒn'gu* (Seoul: Kyōngin Munhwasa, 2003), 372.

<sup>22</sup> Ohara Shinzō, "Chihō shinkōkai no sōsetsu," 56.

Movement, colonial administrators turned to *chinhŭnghoe* regulations to try to quell nationalistic fervor and instill patriotism for the Japanese empire. The 1921 South Ch'ungch'ōng Revitalization Association Regulations, promulgated by Ohara's successor, Tokizane Akiho, opened with the stipulation that members "thoroughly disseminate government laws" among fellow villagers. It then embedded clauses promoting Japanese assimilation alongside customary Confucian dictums. "Cultivating morality" now encompassed forging harmony between Japanese and Koreans (*naisenjin no yūwa*), not just honoring one's elders. Villagers were similarly duty-bound to propagate the Japanese language, attend public lectures, and raise the Japanese flag on national holidays.<sup>23</sup>

Colonial officials likewise intended for *chinhŭnghoe* ritual reforms to cultivate public-mindedness. The South Ch'olla *Principles for Guiding Customs Revitalization Associations* emphasized how reducing ritual expenditures allowed villagers to contribute to the good of the collective. The text turned to the Japanese countryside for inspiration, where rural reform initiatives had been underway since the early 1900s, focusing especially on the hamlet of Fuhimura in Aichi prefecture.<sup>24</sup> In 1908, villagers had decided to "rectify" the ills of "empty formalities" and "intemperance." The community established rules prohibiting the consumption of alcohol at funerals, stipulating that the funds be donated instead to the village. In 1924, Fuhimura residents expanded their ritual reform still further, resolving to practice thrift with regard to weddings and birth ceremonies as well. South Ch'olla officials insisted that this practice could make a big difference over time. "Accumulated steadily, even dust can become a mountain," the text

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<sup>23</sup> "Chōsen Sōtokufu Chūsei Nandō kunrei dai ichi gō," *Chōsen Sōtokufu Kanpō* (Jan. 18, 1921), 155.

<sup>24</sup> For more on rural reform in Japan, see, Smith, *A Time of Crisis*.

stated. “Ten yen turns into one hundred yen,” it continued, “then turns into one thousand yen.” Provincial officials pointed out that considering Fuhimura villagers typically donated 100 yen each year from their ritual savings, over the course of fifty years, they would have donated an astounding 280,000 yen.<sup>25</sup>

Provincial officials in Korea stressed the importance of one civic obligation in particular: the payment of taxes. Increasing tax revenues represented an important priority for the Government-General from the start, especially as state expenditures expanded at a rapid pace.<sup>26</sup> Between 1910 and 1918, it carried out the cadastral survey, an extensive, peninsula-wide project to clarify land-ownership and more effectively levy the land tax. At the local level, colonial administrators deployed revitalization associations to improve tax compliance.<sup>27</sup> Clauses on timely tax remittance appeared in the by-laws of nearly every *chinhŭnghoe*. The Kalsalli Revitalization Association created a separate tax-payment subcommittee,<sup>28</sup> while the Yugongni association in Tangjin county, South Ch’ungch’ōng province periodically visited villagers’ homes to remind them of their “greatest duty as national subjects.”<sup>29</sup> *Chinhŭnghoe* initiatives to promote thrift, including measures to reduce ceremonial expenditures, served the additional purpose of promoting tax payments. South Ch’olla provincial officials noted how Fuhimura residents used a part of their ritual savings to pay taxes.<sup>30</sup> The Changnimni community compact in Sŏngch’ōn county, South P’yongan province, took a similar measure, prohibiting alcohol during

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<sup>25</sup> Ch’ollanamdo naemuguk, *Minp’ung chinhŭnghoe chido pangch’im*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Kyung Moon Hwang notes that total government spending tripled between 1911 and 1920, and doubled during the 1920s. See Hwang, *Rationalizing Korea*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> For more on colonial efforts to promote tax compliance, see Kim So-yul, “‘Chosŏn’ tokpon’ kwa ‘napse’ ūi sôsa: següm naenŭn kungmin mandülki,” *Munhak kyoyukhak* 46 (2015).

<sup>28</sup> This subcommittee was headed by a Japanese settler named Aoki Kihachi. See Hishiki, 65.

<sup>29</sup> Chōsen Sōtokufu Naimukyoku Shakaika, *Yūryō burakuchō*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Ch’ollanamdo naemuguk, *Minp’ung chinhŭnghoe chido pangch’im*, 75.

customary ceremonies to divert the cost—five yen annually—to help villagers meet their tax obligations. Between 1923 and 1925, the initiative reportedly helped members of the community compact allocate nearly 410 yen for taxes.<sup>31</sup>

Revitalization associations ultimately relied on coercive measures to implement their reform initiatives. Provincial officials took great pains to ensure *chinhǔnghoe* maintained a semblance of autonomy, allowing members to choose their own leaders, who served their posts without pay. Many villagers, however, faced enormous pressure to join revitalization associations. In Pongamni, another village in South Ch’ungch’ōng province, reported that the heads of nearly every household—189 out of 200—had become members in the local *chinhǔnghoe* by 1920.<sup>32</sup> Those who joined revitalization associations subjected themselves to their stringent regulations. Violators risked stiff penalties. According to the Kalsalli Revitalization Association by-laws, first-time offenders would receive strong reproof from the organization leaders. Repeat offenders faced social and financial repercussions. The association would cut off village assistance of any kind, withholding aid during sowing and harvest seasons—making farm work financially prohibitive, if not impossible.<sup>33</sup> It would also deny help during occasions good and bad (*kikkyō keichō*), including during weddings and funerals. According to this stipulation, members of the funerary mutual aid association would relinquish any monetary payout to which they were entitled. In extreme cases, wayward residents faced expulsion from the village altogether.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “Kǔmju sodǔk ūro 140 ho myǒnse,” *Chosǒn Ilbo*, March 12, 1925.

<sup>32</sup> Kim, *Ilche sidae nongch’on t’ongche chōngch’aeak yǒn’gu*, 417.

<sup>33</sup> Some associations imposed direct monetary fines for violations. The Namil *hyangyak*, for instance, imposed a sliding scale of fines for those who went above their allotted ritual spending cap. At the lowest level, a violator was fined 1.5 yen, while at the highest, 30 yen. See *Ch’ohyǒlli hyangyak*.

<sup>34</sup> Chōsen Sōtokufu Naimukyoku Shakaika, *Yūryō burakuchō*, 57-58.

### *Protestant Self-Support*

On May 10, 1923, leaders of the P'yōngyang Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest and largest in the country, gathered at the Sungdōk Academy, a local Christian elementary school in the city. The meeting agenda concerned rites, namely, the marriage and funerary customs of believers. Ritual reform had long occupied the minds of Korean Protestants. Early converts excised “heathen” customs, while simultaneously adopting liturgical wedding and funeral ceremonies. These new practices in turn became central to the making of a distinct Protestant community. Members of the P'yōngyang church had still further ideas for improving church rituals. For one, they proposed that believers exchange simple and domestically-produced betrothal gifts. Lavish wedding banquets, as well as cash gifts for the host family, were also strictly forbidden. Funeral guests would stop contributing to extraneous ritual accoutrements, such as funerary banners and floral wreaths. In other words, it was not enough for Christians to reject the practices of their unbelieving forebears in favor of sanctified church rites. They had to combat the ills (*p'yep'ung*) of improvidence and ostentation.<sup>35</sup> Soon enough, these reform proposals spread beyond P'yōngyang Christians to congregations and youth groups across neighboring provinces.<sup>36</sup>

To some extent, church leaders attempted to address a problem of their own making. During the 1910s, missionaries had introduced Western customs as Christian alternatives to Korean traditions. But as Protestant rites grew more Westernized, they also became increasingly commercialized and costly, especially in urban centers like

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<sup>35</sup> “Ilbanjōk p'ungsok kaeryang ūi p'ilyo (2),” *Kidok Sinbo*, May 25, 1927.

<sup>36</sup> “Yasogyoin ūi kyop'ung migō,” *Chosōn Ilbo*, July 20, 1923; “Mulsan changnyō syōnjyōn,” *Kidok Sinbo*, May 23, 1923; “Honsangnye rūl chōlkōm,” *Chosōn Ilbo*, Dec. 2, 1923.

P'yōngyang. Church nuptials, for instance, required a litany of ritual goods and services beyond wedding rings for the bride and groom. “New weddings” typically entailed commemorative photographs taken at professional studios, Western desserts purchased at bakeries, and celebratory receptions held at restaurants.<sup>37</sup> Local businesses—many operated by Japanese settlers—eagerly met these demands, but at considerable expense to their customers.<sup>38</sup> According to one estimate, a Western suit for the groom alone could cost upwards of five hundred yen to purchase.<sup>39</sup> At a time when a well-paid factory worker earned just one yen a day (with many earning much less), this would have equated to over a year’s wages.<sup>40</sup> Even renting the outfit would not have been cheap. Outfitting the groom and the groomsman would have cost around twenty yen--over a half month’s wages.<sup>41</sup> Considering many Christians also continued traditional customs alongside Western practices, some churchgoers would have spent staggering sums on ritual occasions.

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<sup>37</sup> Ko Yōng-hwan, “Sinan hollyesik aullō sin’gu yesik ūi kōmch’al (sip),” *Tonga Ilbo*, September 5, 1931.

<sup>38</sup> Both Koreans and Japanese settlers operated businesses catering to ritual needs, though Japanese-run shops typically tended to be larger in scale. Japanese settlers were especially dominated the funerary industry, furnishing goods like hearses and floral wreaths. See Nakamura Sukeyoshi, *Chōsen ginkō kaisha yōroku*, (Seoul: Kukhak charyowōn, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Yu Yōng-jun, “Hōrye rūl p’yehara,” in “Uri ka kajil kyōlhon yesik e taehan myōngsa ūi ūigyōn,” *Pyōlgōngon* (May 1930).

<sup>40</sup> Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 197.

<sup>41</sup> Ko Yōng-hwan, “Sin’an hollyesik aullō sin’gu yesik ūi kōmch’al, sam,” *Tonga Ilbo*, August 27, 1931.



Fig. 3.1 Ritual Goods Store, n.d.  
SOURCE: National Museum of Korea.

Pastors and lay leaders expressed alarm over the emergence of this consumer culture centered on Protestant rites. When missionaries first began promoting liturgical customs, they did so to inculcate orthodox doctrines among Korean converts. The church wedding ceremony, for one, emphasized the notion of marriage as a consecrated partnership, one that would foster future generations of believers. Some critiqued that Christian youth now appeared more concerned with the outer trappings of church ceremonies than their underlying religious teachings. One writer for the *Kidok Sinbo*, a leading Protestant newspaper, bemoaned church members' preoccupation with saving face (*ch'emyoñ*), enumerating the many ways ostentation had become the ethos of church rites. He complained that the groom typically made a show of presenting the bride with "a gold ring or gold watch" and the presiding pastor with a large honorarium. Many couples were so fixated on Western attire that they demanded that the officiant

(traditionally the pastor of the bride's church) wear a suit as well. If he did not own a suit and lacked the means to rent one, some couples went as far as replacing the pastor with a minister from a neighboring church.<sup>42</sup>

The spending habits of churchgoers represented a significant concern for Protestant leaders. How believers allocated their resources had tangible effects on the life of local churches. If we recall from Chapter One, missionaries established the Nevius Method as the cornerstone of Korean Protestantism, making it their goal to establish self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting native churches. Since the late nineteenth century, mission boards in America and elsewhere supplied the salaries of missionaries, a limited number of Korean helpers, as well as the operating expenses of mission schools and hospitals.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, Korean church members increasingly took on the financial burden of erecting and maintaining church buildings, operating church-affiliated primary schools, organizing Bible study classes, holding revival meetings, not to mention hiring pastors, evangelists, and Bible women.<sup>44</sup> In the eyes of many missionaries in Korea, self-support went beyond reducing the financial burden of mission boards. It spoke to the character of the Korean church. As one missionary put it, while a "foreign paid helper system" might quickly gather "[a] goodly number of so-called converts," the churches they produce are "weak, cold, lifeless and helpless." Only self-support would produce "a strong, healthy, vigorous, independent, conscientious, responsibility bearing and self-propagating Christian church."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Chöng Saeng, "Honinyesik üi kyölchöm," *Kidok Sinbo*, April 30, 1930.

<sup>43</sup> Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods*, 224-225.

<sup>44</sup> "Kyohoe chejöng e taehaya," *Kidok Sinbo*, Jan. 18, 1922.

<sup>45</sup> W. L. Swallen, "Self-Support in Evangelism," *The Korea Mission Field* 10.4 (April, 1914), 107.

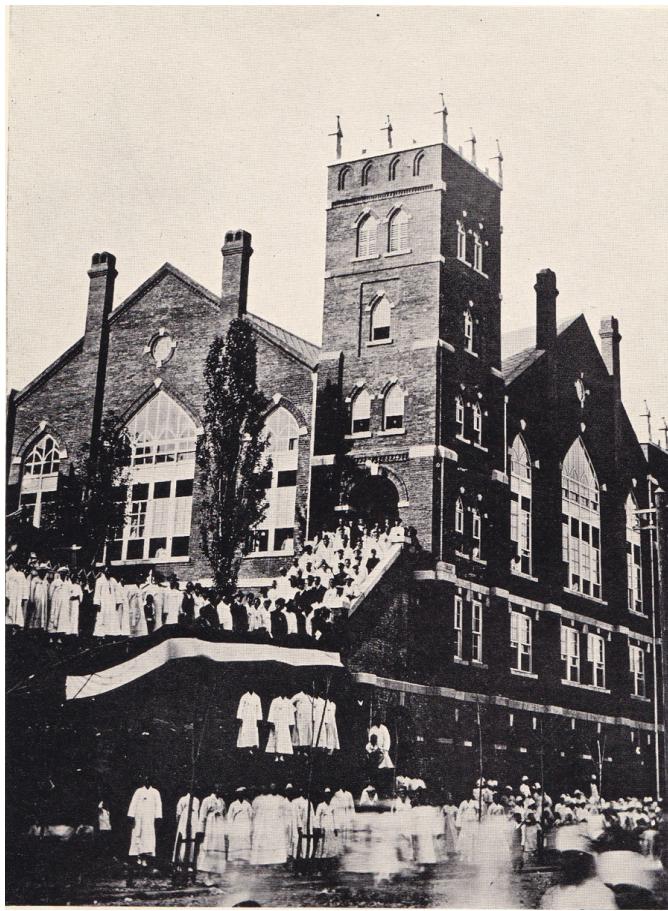


Fig. 3.2 Third Presbyterian Church, P'yongyang.

“Built Entirely by the Koreans.”

SOURCE: Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods*.

When writing to supporters in their home countries, missionaries often touted the Korea field as an “object lesson” for self-support. Korean Christians’ generosity was the stuff of lore. Horace G. Underwood recounted how converts gave sacrificially to the work of the church. In 1895, just eight years after its founding, Semunan Church in Seoul had outgrown its humble thatched roof building. When church members first managed to collect just twenty yen, far short of the 1,000 yen that the construction project required, Underwood prepared to fundraise the balance himself, going as far as purchasing land for the new church. But during one prayer meeting, a deacon named Yi Chun-ho “startled” Underwood, as well as fellow congregants. Yi proposed that the Koreans finance the

entirety of the construction. After some discussion, church members reportedly accepted the suggestion “enthusiastically.” Church women set aside grain from their daily meals, while the men volunteered their labor. By the time the new church was dedicated that Christmas, congregants had raised nearly 750 yen.<sup>46</sup> Similar stories of “zeal and consecration” continued to fill the pages of missionary reports. “[T]he people of Korea are a generous people,” Underwood emphasized, answering “nobly” to the “call” of self-support.<sup>47</sup>

Korean Christians’ heroic acts of generosity were heavily influenced by religious teachings on the right and wrong kind of spending. From the pulpits and Christian publications, congregation members encountered a steady stream of exhortations to fill church coffers.<sup>48</sup> Protestant leaders especially emphasized tithing. Methodist pastor Yang Chu-sam preached a sermon in 1917 titled, “The Great Purpose of Tithing,” which was later published in *Sinhak Segye (The Theological World)*. According to Yang, tithing represented a spiritual practice that benefited the giver. Setting aside a tenth of one’s household income taught believers to “put God and the church first.” Rather than giving what remained after meeting all other needs, tithing fostered a “lifelong habit of prioritizing God.” The practice also instilled the Christian doctrine of stewardship. “The whole world belongs to the Lord,” Yang maintained, and as such, believers ought to generously give back to God. Lastly, tithing served as an act of worship. Yang remarked that “worship requires Christians to offer God their very selves,” including their material

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<sup>46</sup> Horace G. Underwood, “Principles of Self-Support in Korea,” *The Korea Mission Field* (June 1908), 91-93.

<sup>47</sup> Horace G. Underwood, “Korea’s Crisis Hour,” *The Korea Mission Field* (Sept. 1908), 131.

<sup>48</sup> The Korean Religious Book and Tract Society, for instance, published several pamphlets promoting tithing, including, “What, Why, and How about Tithing” (written by Yang Chu-sam), “A Man and His Money,” “How to Tithe and Why,” and “The Lord’s Money.” See “Our Bookshelf,” *The Korea Mission Field* (April 1919), 83.

goods.<sup>49</sup> The following year, the *Kidok Sinbo* made clear the spiritual cost of stinginess.

Those who kept their purse strings closed to the church did not merely commit the sin of greed. They were idolators, valuing wealth more than God.<sup>50</sup>

Protestant leaders emphasized financial giving largely because many congregants did not in fact practice tithing. During the early 1920s, Korean churches faced greater financial difficulties than missionaries revealed in their public writings. On the one hand, Presbyterian and Methodist churches reported significant increases in financial contributions from year to year. The *Kidok Sinbo* reported that in 1921, the two denominations together collected 921,118 yen, an increase of nearly 200,000 yen from the previous year.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the levels of individual giving remained relatively modest. The newspaper article surmised that if the total contributions for 1921 came from baptized Christians alone, this meant each person gave approximately 10.35 yen that year. However, if one considered both baptized church members and catechumenates, average giving decreased to 7.37 yen per person. If one included all churchgoers into the calculation, each individual contributed just 3.85 yen.<sup>52</sup> At a time when Protestantism expanded at a brisk pace, creating a need for additional church buildings and personnel, congregants' giving did not keep pace.<sup>53</sup> "Churches nowadays face significant distress," Yang Chu-sam observed.<sup>54</sup> Some churches went into debt trying to meet their financial

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<sup>49</sup> Yang Chu-sam, "Sibilcho ūi taemokchōk," *Sinhak Syegye* (March 1917), 54-57.

<sup>50</sup> "Kyohoe ūi 5 chōk," *Kidok Sinbo* June 26, 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Church giving continued to increase until 1923, when the two denominations reported 1,649,717 yen in contributions. From that point, contributions flagged, dropping to 1,187,067 yen in 1926. See Edmund Brunner, *Rural Korea: A Preliminary Survey of Economic, Social, and Religious Conditions*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> "Chosön kidokkyo ūi ch'onggyep'yo," *Kidok Sinbo* March 15, 1922.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, the Presbyterian Church alone established 184 new churches in 1920, and 267 new churches in 1921. See Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Yang Chu-sam, "Sibilcho ūi taemokchōk," 54.

obligations. Others could not pay evangelists a livable wage.<sup>55</sup> Still others went without pastors altogether, finding it impossible to shoulder the burden of their salaries.<sup>56</sup>

Many congregants simply could not afford to give more to their churches. While urban centers had greater concentrations of Protestants, the vast majority of churchgoers represented poor farmers, much like the rest of the Korean population at the time.<sup>57</sup> In 1926, the Australian Presbyterian Mission conducted a survey of economic conditions in North Kyōngsang province, focusing especially on the village of Chilkongni. Most of the four hundred or so village residents, including thirty Christians, were comprised of impoverished tenant farmers. Missionaries reported that at the end of a harvest, believers in the village had very little left over. Two-thirds of crop yields were typically given to landlords as rent, due to exaggerated estimates at the beginning of the planting season. With the remaining third, households had to cover the cost of living expenses, as well as outlays such as government taxes, seed, fertilizer, and “squeeze gifts”—or bribes—to landlords. Missionaries found that on top of these burdens, all five Christian households in the village had taken on debt ranging from 250 to 400 yen at an interest rate of 40 percent to make ends meet. The seemingly modest contributions that Chilkongni (baptized and catechumen) church members made—an average of 8.53 yen per person—came at great cost.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> J. Selwyn Toms, “Personal Report of J. Selwyn Toms, Seoul, Korea, May 31, 1922,” RG 140 Box 8, Folder 19, PHS.

<sup>56</sup> “Kyohoe wa chejōng,” *Kidok Sinbo* Jan. 13, 1926.

<sup>57</sup> According to Edmund Brunner, while Christians typically represented just one percent of the rural population, as opposed to 1.7 percent of the urban population, far greater numbers of Christians actually lived in the countryside. Brunner, *A Preliminary Survey*, 49.

<sup>58</sup> Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. “Some Facts Concerning the Work in North Kyungsang Province, Taiku, Korea,” September 1926, Pamphlets Korea, PHS.

Encouraging Christians to reduce ritual expenditures represented part and parcel of a broader strategy to stabilize church finances. The poverty of believers translated into the poverty of Korean churches. As one *Kidok Sinbo* editorial pointed out, the causes of Christians' material hardship rested in insufficient revenue and excessive consumption.<sup>59</sup> Some church leaders attempted to address the former, establishing industrial schools<sup>60</sup> and promoting secondary industries like sericulture, beekeeping, and chicken farming.<sup>61</sup> Many also emphasized thrift. Protestant churches already prohibited gambling, alcohol, and tobacco as vices unbefitting believers. Ostentatious spending on ritual ceremonies fell into the same category of "unsavory practices" (*pulmihan il*).<sup>62</sup> The *Kidok Sinbo* critiqued how Christians "squandered thousands and tens of thousands of yen" on weddings without regard for the "overall state of the church or their own circumstances."<sup>63</sup> While lavish spending among wealthy believers was hardly commendable, the essay continued, the ostentation of many impoverished Christians was even worse.<sup>64</sup> The *Sinhak Segye* similarly lambasted believers for taking on debt to pay for weddings<sup>65</sup> and funerals they could not afford.<sup>66</sup> If congregants functioned as the "bones" (*kolcha*) of the church, one writer remarked, finances (*chejöng*) represented its blood (*hyōraek*).<sup>67</sup> Curbing ritual spending was essential to the continued expansion of Protestantism in the peninsula.

<sup>59</sup> "Sahoe kyeryang üi p'ilyo (1)," *Kidok Sinbo*, May 4, 1927.

<sup>60</sup> Yun Ch'i-ho established a prominent Christian industrial school in Songdo, Kyonggi province. Yun described his school as an important part of developing a self-supporting Korean Church. See, Yun Ch'i-ho, "What Shall We Eat?" *The Korea Mission Field* 14.1 (1918), 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> "Chosön kyohoe üi 4 kaji nangwan (2)," *Kidok Sinbo*, March 4, 1925.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> "Honin e taehayö (2)," *Kidok Sinbo*, Aug. 2, 1922.

<sup>64</sup> "Honsa ro inhaya puch'aekham üi akp'ung," *Sinhak Syegye* 2.1 (1917), 59-60.

<sup>65</sup> "Sangsa ro inhaya puch'aekham üi akp'ung," *Sinhak Syegye* 2.1 (1917), 61-62.

<sup>66</sup> "Kyohoe wa chejöng."

### *Thrift for the Nation*

On a brisk January afternoon in 1923, seventeen men congregated at the Namch'ondong Methodist Church in the port city of Wōnsan, Kangwōn province. Several prominent Christians attended the meeting, including former independence leader Yi Ka-sun, as well as Wōnsan YMCA leader An Chong-hyōp. The agenda that day, however, did not concern church matters. Most other attendees, many of whom were wealthy local businessmen, were not even Christians. The men had gathered for the inaugural meeting of the Wōnsan Moral Reform Association (*Wōnsan Kyop'unghoe*). With the inauguration of “cultural rule” policies in 1920, Koreans took advantage of their newly expanded freedom of association to create reform organizations of all types.<sup>67</sup> This particular group espoused three main goals. First, members would promote practices founded on “modern ethics, morals, culture, and economics.” Second, they promised to “give honor” to domestically-produced goods. Lastly, members pledged to improve upon traditional rites of passage (*kwanhonsangje*) by abolishing “harmful” customs and wasteful celebrations. Through these measures, the association hoped that fellow Koreans would leave their “primitive” ways behind, adopting “modern lifestyles” (*hyōndae saenghwal*) better suited for a “scientific” and “industrial age” (*sanggong sidae*).<sup>68</sup>

The Wōnsan Moral Reform Association formed part and parcel of a larger cultural nationalist project, the Korean Production Movement (*Mulsan changnyō undong*). Launched just one month prior, this peninsula-wide initiative sought to nurture the growth of domestic industries. Foreign-made products (especially from Japan) had flooded the market since the late nineteenth century, making it difficult for Korean

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<sup>67</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu keimukyōku, *Taishō 11 nen Chōsen chian jōkyō* (Seoul: Koryō Sōrim, 1989), 76.

<sup>68</sup> “Kyop'unghoe chojik,” *Choson Ilbo*, Feb. 2, 1923.

businesses to stay competitive. Domestic ventures had faced still other disadvantages.<sup>69</sup>

The Company Law, promulgated by the Government-General in 1910, placed onerous restrictions against the establishment of new Korean businesses. Local entrepreneurs had also faced considerable difficulty securing loans from Japanese banks. These barriers began to fall only when the colonial state repealed the Company Law in 1920.<sup>70</sup>

Nationalist reformers maintained that Koreans had to take matters into their own hands. They claimed that over the years, their compatriots had become wholly dependent on others' wares, lining the pockets of foreigners while impoverishing their own nation. "If we have nothing to eat or wear or even lean on," the Korean Production Association (*Chosŏn mulسان changnyōhoe*) warned, "our very way of life will face destruction."<sup>71</sup> The solution was simple: Koreans should patronize domestic goods whenever possible, whether food items, textiles, or other household necessities.<sup>72</sup>

Advocates for the Korean Products Movement viewed ritual reform as a potential way to promote domestic goods. Families typically made substantial material outlays—above and beyond ordinary expenditures—for weddings, funerals and ancestral rites. Ceremonial occasions thus served as important opportunities to patronize Korean-made goods. While the Korean Products Association—the main organ of the movement—never created a dedicated program for this purpose, numerous grassroots organizations included clauses on domestic ritual products as key parts of their platforms. The Wŏnsan Moral Reform Association, for instance, emphasized the use of Korean hemp and cotton for

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<sup>69</sup> Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea*, 92-93.

<sup>70</sup> Eckert, 48.

<sup>71</sup> "Chosŏn mulسان changnyōhoe chwijisō," *Sanopkye* 1 (Dec. 1923), 55-56.

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea*, 96.

traditional mourning garb.<sup>73</sup> In North P'yongan province, the Ūiju Thrift and Reform Society (*Ūiju kyop'ung chōlyakhoe*), encouraged members to choose local varieties of silk for betrothal gifts and the bridal trousseau.<sup>74</sup> These provisions lent especial aid to domestic commercial interests. Not only did traditional marriage and funerary rites entail large fabric purchases, but during the early 1920s, textiles represented one of the largest Korean-backed industries.<sup>75</sup> Reform organizations imbued ritual occasions with national significance, emphasizing to their members the urgency of supporting Korea's economic development through their consumer choices.

Leaders of the Korean Products Movement, and cultural nationalists more broadly, had to manage a delicate balance between endorsing domestic goods and encouraging thrift. The ultimate goal of the movement, they maintained, was to help Koreans develop self-sufficiency and lift themselves out of poverty. Individuals ought to support native industries, but they also needed to balance their budgets. Reformist intellectuals sharply critiqued those who spent above and beyond their means on ritual spending. Newspapers and magazines decried families squandered hundreds and thousands of yen, jeopardizing their financial welfare in the process. Some sold cows or land, the very resources that sustained their livelihoods.<sup>76</sup> Others took on high-interest loans.<sup>77</sup> "The marriage of a son or daughter," one writer remarked, "was hardly a happy occasion." Instead, it represented a "calamity" (*hwasa*), one that caused "family ruin"

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<sup>73</sup> "Kyop'unghoe ūi kyōlui," *Chosón Ilbo*, Feb. 6, 1923.

<sup>74</sup> "Kyop'ung chōlyakhoe sōllip," *Tonga Ilbo*, March 22, 1923.

<sup>75</sup> Yun Hae-dong, "Ilcheha mulsan changnyō undong ūi paegyōng kwa kū inyōm," *Han'guksaron* 27 (1992), 285.

<sup>76</sup> One author went as far as claiming that thirty to forty percent of land sales resulted from efforts to secure cash for ritual occasions. "Nongch'on ūn ōdaero, nongch'on kuküp ūi ch'oeso hando yogu nūn muōt nongch'on undong ūi ch'oegüp kinsa nūn muōt," *Tonggwang* 20 (May 1931).

<sup>77</sup> Korean intellectual elites likewise faulted ceremonial spending as leading causes of household debt. See "Nongch'on kujae chwadamhoe," *Chogwang* (Sept. 1932).

(*p'aega*) and hastened parents to their graves. The death of parents produced grief, a peculiar kind of grief that “consumed wealth” in the process.<sup>78</sup> In the best-case scenario, ceremonial spending beggared just the individual for the rest of his life. Far more often, it created ripple effects for his children and grandchildren, “annihilating” the family line. Worse still, collective extravagance “sickened” society and the nation as a whole.<sup>79</sup>

The Wǒnsan Moral Reform Association especially prioritized the reduction of ritual spending. “The economic path forward” (*kyōngjesang hwallo*), organization leaders emphasized, rested on simplifying Korea’s customary practices.<sup>80</sup> Soon after the founding of the association, a sub-committee on rites put together a proposal to curb wedding and funeral costs, which it then circulated nationally through newspapers like the *Chosǒn Ilbo*. Members pledged to observe strict limits on ceremonial expenditures. Spending on betrothal gifts and wedding banquets were limited to 50 yen each. Commemorations for the first and second death anniversaries (*sodaesang*) would not exceed thirty yen. Members also agreed to abolish costly practices ranging from commissioning funeral banners to furnishing guests with lavish food and drinks.<sup>81</sup> The association did not limit itself to public exhortations; members took their ideas to the streets. That February, organization members, alongside nearly 1,000 local students, marched around Wǒnsan singing the association ditty and carrying banners emblazoned with reform slogans.<sup>82</sup> The association also hosted a series of talks open to city residents. In addition to speaking broadly on modernizing lifestyles, the founding members gave lectures such as “On

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<sup>78</sup> “Kwanhonsangje ūi pōnp’ye,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Jan. 19, 1917.

<sup>79</sup> “Ilyong yebōp e ch’wihaya (4),” *Kyemyōng* 8 (May 1922), 33.

<sup>80</sup> “Kyop’unghoe chojik.”

<sup>81</sup> “Kyop’unghoe ūi kyōlūi,” *Chosǒn Ilbo*, Feb. 6, 1923.

<sup>82</sup> “Wǒnsan ūi kyop’ung sōnjōn,” *Chosǒn Ilbo*, Feb. 9, 1923.

Marriage,” “On Funerals,” “Marriage and Society,” “Funerals, Ancestral Rites, and Contemporary Society.”<sup>83</sup>

The Wönsan Moral Reform Association was hardly singular. Around the same time, numerous grassroots organizations likewise advocated measures to reduce ritual expenditures. Village- and county-based prohibition leagues played especially important roles. Though motivated by moral and health concerns, in addition to economic considerations, they campaigned against one of the largest expenses in typical Korean marriage, funerary, and ancestral rites: alcohol. Some restricted the amount of alcoholic beverages families could offer guests during these occasions. The Talha Village Prohibition Society in Tökch’ón County, South P’yöngan province, for example, limited members to a single *tu* (approximately 18 liters) of alcohol, presumably rice wine.<sup>84</sup> Others adopted stricter measures. The Tangp’ori Prohibition League in South Hamgyöng province banned alcohol completely. According to league by-laws, violators who provided alcohol to guests or even used it for ceremonial purposes had to pay a fine of one yen or its equivalent in rice or grains.<sup>85</sup> A similar group in Sihüng County, Kyönggi province imposed even heavier punishments for alcohol consumption during ritual occasions, stipulating a ten yen fine for first-time violators and double for repeat offenders.<sup>86</sup>

Nationalist reformers hoped that reducing ritual costs would free up family budgets for nobler pursuits. In 1926, the *Tonga Ilbo* published an essay titled, “Let Us

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<sup>83</sup> “Wönsan kyop’unghoe taesönjön,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Feb. 13, 1923; “Wönsan kyop’ung kangyönhoe,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Feb. 19, 1923.

<sup>84</sup> “Talhari kümjuhoe,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Feb. 10, 1923.

<sup>85</sup> “Tangp’ori kümju tongmaenghoe,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Feb. 9, 1923.

<sup>86</sup> “Kümju tanyön silhaeng tongmaeng,” *Tonga Ilbo*, March 31, 1923.

First Reform Evil Customs and Outmoded Habits.” The author issued a call to action against ceremonial expenditures. The time and expense households squandered on rites, he critiqued, were not just imprudent, but unconscionable. Koreans devoted themselves to preparing ancestral offerings and securing auspicious gravesites while so many went hungry and homeless. He pointed out how tens of thousands of Koreans—men and women, young and old—wandered the streets for lack of “shabby hovels” (*mook*) to call their own. Money that went to cumbersome formalities (*pōnmunyongnye*) could go instead to any number of social causes that were desperate for financial support. The author urged those with the means and abilities to “take responsibility for the development of the nation,” perhaps by building orphanages to care for foundlings or libraries to cultivate future scholars. At a time when other nations “strove mightily” to advance forward, he maintained, Korea could not afford to idly dig graves.<sup>87</sup>

Cultural nationalists' efforts to reduce ceremonial expenditures went hand in hand with their on-going discussions concerning new rites for modern Korean society. If we recall, the 1920s witnessed a flurry of ritual innovations, as reformist intellectuals grappled with different ways to construct Korean identity. The Enlightenment Fraternity harkened back to the country's pre-Confucian past, incorporating the *koch 'ōnmun* (vow before Heaven) in its society-style wedding.<sup>88</sup> *Tonga Ilbo* writer Ko Yǒng-hwan advocated that brides and grooms eschew what he viewed as Tang-era Chinese ceremonial robes in favor of white *hanbok*, as a way to honor the moniker for Koreans as “the people of white clothing” (*paegüiin*).<sup>89</sup> Cultural nationalists at this time also framed

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<sup>87</sup> “P'yesüp nugwan put'ó kaeyókhaja,” *Tonga Ilbo*, September 13, 1926.

<sup>88</sup> Yun, “Ilyong yebop e ch'wihaya,” 32-36.

<sup>89</sup> Ko Yǒng-hwan, “Sinan hollyesik aullō sin'gu yesik üi kōmch'al (p'al),” *Tonga Ilbo*, September 2, 1931.

ritual austerity as an expression of patriotism. By practicing thrift, Koreans would replace old ways of thinking with nationalist devotion. No longer would families carry out ostentatious nuptials just to impress their friends and relatives. Nor would households carry out lavish funerals and ancestral rites that prioritized the needs of the dead over those of the living.<sup>90</sup> They would instead contribute to the nation's economic and cultural development.

Such campaigns to promote thrift, however, were not immune from public critique. Cultural nationalists advanced a moderate, and often times, elitist, vision for building Korea's future, which many of their leftist counterparts found deeply problematic. In 1928, when community leaders (*yuji*) in Tongnae, South Kyōngsang Province, founded a lifestyle reform association (*saenghwal kaesonhoe*), they encountered hostility from the local youth league (*ch'ōngnyōn tongmaeng*) and labor union (*nodong chohap*). The two groups penned an open letter denouncing the association for taking the wrong approach to addressing Koreans' material conditions. In their view, calling for families to work more diligently or to reduce expenditures represented measures grossly out of touch with reality. Most Koreans could not possibly work harder or save more money. Underdeveloped domestic industries offered too few job opportunities. The poor already kept bare bones budgets.<sup>91</sup> As such, proposals such as limiting alcohol consumption during funerals or prohibiting extravagant wedding banquets—measures the lifestyle reform association shared with many other similar organizations—would have little effect.<sup>92</sup> According to youth league and labor union

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<sup>90</sup> In its mission statement, the Wōnsan Moral Reform Association particularly critiqued customary funerary and ancestral rites as practices “centered on the dead.” See “Kyop’unghoe chojik.”

<sup>91</sup> “Saenghwal kaesōnhoe kōmt’omun kkadak e ch’ōngmaenghoegwan susaek,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Oct. 16, 1928.

<sup>92</sup> “Saenghwal kaesōn chogōn,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Dec. 15, 1928.

leaders, such policies amounted to stopgaps that did little to stop the rich from getting richer, the poor from getting poorer.<sup>93</sup>

Cultural nationalists faced yet another challenge to their credibility. Many Koreans viewed their initiatives as little different from those of the colonial state. In July 1933, prominent social activist Yun Ch'i-ho was invited to join the Central Revitalization Society (*Chung'ang chinhŭng hyōphoe*), an organization dedicated to frugality, literacy, and the abolition of “vain rituals” and superstition. “No sane person can object to any of [these aims],” Yun remarked in his diary.<sup>94</sup> The group did in fact attract a wide array of well-known nationalists, many of whom were already engaged in ritual reform projects. Among its ranks included Pak Sŭng-bin, the founder of the Enlightenment Fraternity, as well as Cho Man-sik, the architect of the Korean Products Movement. Yun did worry, however, about public perception of Central Revitalization Society.<sup>95</sup> He noted that the group name “smack[ed] of the local Jin Hung Hoi [sic] which the Japanese authorities have organized” to promote “putting up [the Japanese] flag on national holidays” and “paying taxes promptly.”<sup>96</sup> Yun’s concerns were not unfounded. With their similar names and reform platforms, cultural nationalist organizations struggled to set themselves apart from semi-official associations sponsored by the state. Not long after, the magazine *Samch'ölli* disparaged the “character” (*sǒnggil*) of the Central Revitalization Society, pointing to the inclusion of several notable collaborators in its membership.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> “Saenghwal kaesŏnhoe kömt’omun kkadak e ch’öngmaenghoegwan susaek.”

<sup>94</sup> Yun Ch'i-ho, *Yun Ch'i-ho Ilgi* vol. 10 (Seoul: Kuksa p'yōnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1973), 140.

<sup>95</sup> “Chungang chinhŭng hyōphoe,” *Maeil Sinbo*, June 28, 1933.

<sup>96</sup> Yun Ch'i-ho, *Yun Ch'i-ho Ilgi* vol. 10, 140.

<sup>97</sup> “Kongyōnhan pimilchip,” *Samch'ölli* 5 (September 1933), 27. The article noted in particular the involvement of individuals such as Yi Kak-chong, a bureaucrat working for the Government-General and Yi Sang-hyōp, a former clerk in the Seoul court system.

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During the 1920s, ritual reform went beyond the realm of discourse, extending into on-the-ground efforts to modify Korean customary practices. Colonial administrators, Protestant churches, and cultural nationalists all fixated on reducing ceremonial expenditures. Curbing ritual spending emerged as a panacea of sorts. Many claimed it would alleviate poverty conditions pervasive in the peninsula. More significantly, each group harbored its own aspirations for how Koreans should re-allocate their limited household resources, whether to pay taxes, fill church collection plates, or develop national industries and institutions. Local reform organizations produced few changes in Korean behavior. Wealthy elites continued to spend as they pleased, while the budgets of impoverished families had narrow margins from the start. Their limited success notwithstanding, these early experimentations in ritual reform would produce lasting effects. They strengthened a moralistic attitude on poverty, one that suggested that if only Koreans would reduce their (ritual) spending, they might have more to give to their families, as well as to state, church, or nationalist agendas. As we will see in the next chapter, this notion especially appealed to the Government-General when the Korean peninsula confronted economic depression and the prospect of war.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Mobilizing Rites

#### **Colonial Reforms and the 1934 *Guidelines on Ritual Practice***

In 1933, the Kyōnggi provincial government published *The Farmers' Reader* (*Kyōnggido Nongmin Tokpon*).<sup>1</sup> Considering the limited educational opportunities available in the countryside, bureaucrats intended for the text to help rural children and youth learn to read vernacular Korean, even if they could not attend public school.<sup>2</sup> The book began with lessons on *han'gūl* phonics and orthography, then quickly shifted to literary content. It included materials appealing to young readers: a lullaby, a ghost story, as well the familiar tale of Simch'ōng, the filial daughter who sacrifices herself to save her blind father. Just as important, the *Reader* also provided moral lessons to foster proper colonial subjects. Children would come to understand the close geographic proximity of Korea and Japan, as well as the shared ancestry of the Koreans and Japanese. At the very end of the *Reader* was an appendix of Chinese characters as well. Children would not only familiarize themselves with essential vocabulary, but they would also learn to connect key terms and ideas. Trains and transportation; telegrams and communication; state and society (*kukka kǔp sahoe*) and rites (*kwanhonsangje*).<sup>3</sup>

This passing mention of rites in *The Farmers' Reader* reflected significant shifts underway in the state's approach to Korean ritual customs. Two years prior, Japan had invaded Manchuria, setting into motion empire-wide preparation for war. As Governor-

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<sup>1</sup> *Kyōnggido Nongmin Tokpon* (Kyōngsōng: Kyōnggido, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> In 1933, approximately twenty percent of elementary school-aged children were enrolled in public schools. E. Patricia Tsurumi, "Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 305.

<sup>3</sup> *Kyōnggido Nongmin Tokpon*, 91-96.

General Ugaki Kazushige spearheaded the economic and spiritual mobilization of Korean society, he focused on ritual reform as a top policy priority. The Rural Revitalization Campaign (1932) expanded and systematized earlier initiatives to reduce ceremonial expenditures. More significantly, the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (1934) established for the first time a common colonial standard for performing weddings, funerals, and ancestral veneration. Drafted by the Chungch'uwōn, an advisory body composed of Korean elites, the text mirrored the structure of Chosōn-era ritual manuals, while simplifying traditional customs in the name of greater thrift, sincerity, and modernization.<sup>4</sup> Matters such as what to present as betrothal gifts, who to invite to a family funeral, and how many ancestors to venerate now fell under the jurisdiction of the state. If colonial officials previously represented just one reformist voice among many in Korean society, they now demanded a dominant say on the parameters of ritual propriety.

Historians have long grappled with the questions of what exactly the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* set out to change, and to what ends. Some have emphasized the material dimensions of its reforms, focusing on how efforts to curb ceremonial spending formed part of wide-ranging lifestyle reforms that government officials launched to help foster modern colonial subjects.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, others have depicted the *Guidelines* as an assault on Korean customs. According to this view, the rhetoric of economization served

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<sup>4</sup> The Government-General first tasked the Chungch'uwōn to draft the *Guidelines* in August 1933. Chu Yōng-ha, "Chosō ch'ongdokpu ūi 'Ūiryē chunch'ik' pallyōng kwa p'ungsok kyohwa chōngch'aek," in *Kǔndae Han'guk chonggyo munhwa ūi chaegusōng*, ed. Kang Ton-gu (Sōngnam-si: Han'gukhak Chungang Yōn'gwōn Chonggyo Munhwa Yōn'guso, 2006), 457.

<sup>5</sup> See Kim Īn-ju, "1930 nyōndae Chosōn ūi nongch'on saenghwal kaesōn saōp kwa 'kungminhwa' chagōp," *Han'guksaron* 58 (2012): 147-214; Yun Hae-dong, "Singminji malgi ch'ollak esō ūi 'ch'ongdongwōn ch'aeje' kuch'uk," *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* 33 (2006): 253-314; and Chu Yōng-ha, "Chosōn ch'ongdokpu ūi 'Ūiryē chunch'ik' pallyōng kwa p'ungsokhwa chōngch'aek," in *Kǔndae Han'guk Chonggyo munhwa ūi chaegusōnng*, ed. Kang Ton-gu (Sōngnam: Han'gukhak chungang yōn'gwōn, 2006).

as a pretext for eroding traditional rites and replacing them piecemeal with Japanese alternatives.<sup>6</sup> These dominant interpretations, however, share a key limitation. Neither approach seriously examines how Confucian ideology and practices became critically important for wartime mobilization.<sup>7</sup> Colonial officials did not merely seek to excise elements they perceived as undesirable from existing ritual traditions. They also sought out ways to put existing Confucian rites to work in service of the empire. Through the *Guidelines*, government administrators attempted to re-make Korea's Confucian ritual culture, particularly in ways that promoted the notion of a common East Asian morality, as well as loyalty to an expanding and multi-ethnic Japanese empire.

This chapter closely examines the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* to trace how ritual reform emerged as a central concern of the colonial state on the eve of war. I begin by analyzing Rural Revitalization Campaign initiatives launched at the height of global depression. Influenced by the agrarian notion of "self-improvement," officials pressed peasants to lift themselves out of poverty by curtailing their ceremonial expenditures. State directives, however, went beyond cost-cutting measures. I show that colonial administrators had a vested ideological interest in promoting Confucian rites. Advocating traditional nuptials (albeit in modified forms) over Westernized church ceremonies bolstered Japan's case as the custodian of the region's shared cultural values. Confucian funerary and ancestral ceremonies emphasized filial piety, the ethical foundation for revering the Japanese emperor. Yet, in mobilizing traditional rites, colonial officials

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<sup>6</sup> Kim Hye-yöng, "Chosön ch'ongdokpu chechöng 'Üiryé chunch'ik' üi pogüp kwa sihaeng silt'ae," *Minsokhak yón'gu* 39 (2016), 165. See also, Song Chae-yong, "Kaehwagi esö ilche kangjömgí kkaji kwanhonsangjerye üi chisok kwa pyönyong," *Tong Asia Kodaehak* 30 (2013), 175; Kim Mi-yöng, *Yugyo üiryé üi chönt'ong kwa sangjing* (Seoul: Minsokwón, 2010), 405.

<sup>7</sup> For a notable exception, see Aono Masaaki, *Teikoku shintō no keisei* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2015).

simultaneously transformed their meaning and practice, orienting Koreans away from particularistic kinship ties and toward the greater empire. The *Guidelines* ultimately invited unprecedented state intrusion in Koreans' everyday lives, a development that would intensify as war in continental Asia, and later, with the West, drew nearer.

### *Rural Revitalization*

On February 20, 1927, the *Tonga Ilbo* reported the suicide of a man named Pak Kyōng-ch'un in Kunwi county, North Kyōngsang province. At the time of his death, Pak himself had been in mourning. His father had passed, and the all-important *taesang* commemoration was just around the corner. Performed at the end of three years' mourning for a deceased parent, *taesang* represented one of the most consequential milestones in the Korean funerary tradition. It was the eldest son's final ritual duty before resuming ordinary life.<sup>8</sup> During the ceremony, he would present food offerings to the deceased, then transport the spirit tablet from inside the home to its permanent dwelling place at the ancestral shrine.<sup>9</sup> *Taesang* preparations varied from region to region, with considerable differences according to class. In nearby Kyōngju, a well-to-do family might prepare an offering table piled high with cooked rice, beef, chicken, fish, noodles, as well as seasonal fruits and greens.<sup>10</sup> But Pak could not procure such delicacies. In fact, he could not afford even a single dried pollack. With four days remaining before the rite

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<sup>8</sup> Martina Deuchler notes that while the customary mourning period was often referred to as spanning three years, it effectively lasted 27 months. Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 183.

<sup>9</sup> *Chūngbo saryep yōllam yōkchubon*, 478-483.

<sup>10</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Keishū-gun* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1934), 174.

was to take place, Pak succumbed to despair. He ingested rat poison, taking his own life at the age of forty-one.<sup>11</sup>

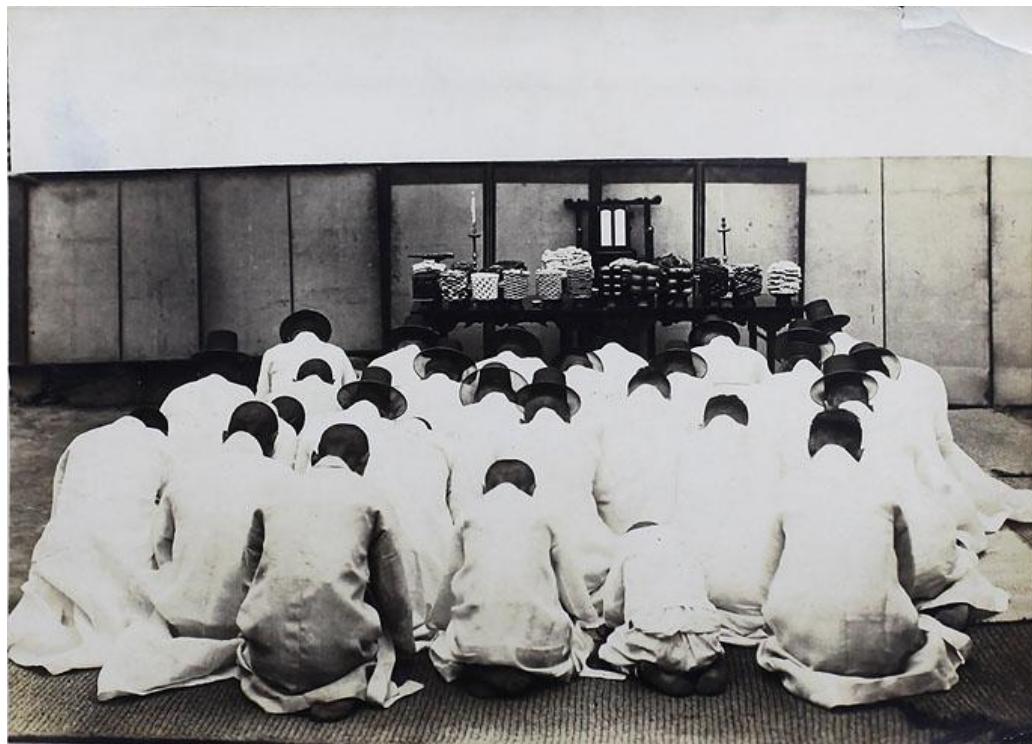


Fig. 4.1 Traditional Korean Ancestral Ceremony, n.d.  
SOURCE: Zenshō Eisuke Photograph Collection, Gakushūin University.

The tragic and sensational story of Pak Kyōng-ch'un reflected the material hardships that confronted much of rural Korea during the late 1920s, not just North Kyōngsang province. Many scholars have noted the unevenness of colonial development in the countryside. The benefits of commercialization and improvements in agricultural techniques were largely accrued by landlords, as well as a small group of wealthy tenant and semi-tenant farmers.<sup>12</sup> For most farming households, however, the prevalence of tenancy, insecure tenancy tenure, and high rental rates spelled continued impoverishment. The onset of global economic depression in 1929 only made things worse, as crop prices

<sup>11</sup> "Chemul ch'aril ton i ōpsō pokchung sangju chasal," *Tonga Ilbo* Feb. 20, 1927.

<sup>12</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 42-46.

plummeted. Between 1926 and 1931, the price of barley fell by over half,<sup>13</sup> as did the price of brown rice.<sup>14</sup> The price of soybeans and cotton fared only a little better, dropping forty-four percent and thirty-two percent, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Such developments decimated household earnings, rendering life in rural communities unbearable for many. Farmers left their villages in droves for urban centers, Manchuria, or Japan.<sup>16</sup> Before his father's death, Pak Kyōng-ch'un himself had left Kunwi for the nearby city of Taegu, "wandering" from place to place in search of work.<sup>17</sup>

In November 1932, the Government-General responded to these developments by launching the Rural Revitalization Campaign. From the perspective of the state, conditions in the countryside had reached a crisis point. Tenant disputes increased in frequency and intensity, while war loomed large on the horizon.<sup>18</sup> Colonial bureaucrats targeted what they identified as the key contributors of rural hardship: food shortages, indebtedness, and cash imbalances.<sup>19</sup> Some measures took aim at the structural causes of poverty. The 1934 Agricultural Lands Ordinance (*Nōchirei*) provided increased protections for tenant rights.<sup>20</sup> The expansion of financial cooperatives (*kǔmnyung chohap*) made low-interest credit more accessible to farming families. The core ethos of the campaign, however, was "self-improvement" (*jiryiki kōsei*). Much like statesmen in Japan proper, colonial officials eschewed large-scale (and costly) government relief

<sup>13</sup> Yi Yun-gap, "Ugaki Kazushige ch'ongdok ūi siguk insik kwa nongch'on chinhǔng undong ūi pyōnhwa," *Taegu Sahak* 87 (2007), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, "Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932-1940," *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 78.

<sup>15</sup> Yi Yun-gap, "Ugaki Kazushige ch'ongdok ūi siguk insik kwa nongch'on chinhǔng undong ūi pyōnhwa," *Taegu Sahak* 87 (2007), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Shin, 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> "Chemul ch'aril ton i öpsō pokchung sangju chasal," *Tonga Ilbo* Feb. 20, 1927.

<sup>18</sup> Shin, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Songsoon Lee, "The Rural Control Policy and Peasant Ruling Strategy of the Government-General of Choson in the 1930s-1940s," *International Journal of Korean History* 15.2 (2010), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Shin, 96.

programs. They instead placed the burden of economic uplift, not to mention the blame for prevailing poverty conditions, squarely on Koreans' shoulders. Revitalization initiatives emphasized diligence, encouraging better farm management and secondary industries. They also stressed frugality, urging households to tighten their belts.<sup>21</sup> At the crux of these measures was the paternalistic notion that peasants suffered on their own account, by not working or saving hard enough.

The project of “self-improvement” greatly expanded government reach in rural society. In 1932, Vice-Governor Imaida issued a directive to implement reforms by creating Committees for Rural Revitalization (CRR- *nongch'on chinhŭng wiwŏnhoe*)<sup>22</sup> in every province, county, and district.<sup>23</sup> In comparison with their village-level *chinhŭnghoe* predecessors of the 1910s and 20s, CRRs functioned as highly centralized and hierarchical organizational structures. The committees enlisted the participation of the top government officials at each administrative level, as well as that of police chiefs, heads of financial cooperatives, and public-school principals, who met monthly to discuss progress and setbacks.<sup>24</sup> Areas already populated with *chinhŭnghoe* made especially swift inroads, as colonial administrators reorganized local semi-official organizations to form new CRRs. By 1933, South Ch'ungch'ong, the province with the greatest number of *chinhŭnghoe*, established CRRs in ninety-five percent of its villages, mobilizing 162,365

<sup>21</sup> The counterpart to the Rural Revitalization Movement in Japan proper, the *Nōsangyoson keizai kōsei undō* (Farm, Mountain, Fishing Village Economic Revitalization Campaign), which also began in 1932, likewise underscored individual initiative to address rural poverty. Kerry Smith maintains that this emphasis on “self-revitalization” stemmed from growing antipathy among many Diet members toward the idea of state aid, as well as limited government resources to fund relief programs. Kim Un-ju suggests that similar views shaped colonial administrators’ policies in Korea. See Smith, *A Time of Crisis: Japan, the Great Depression, and Rural Revitalization*, 155-166; Kim, “1930 nyŏndae Chosŏn ūi nongch'on saenghwal kaesŏn sađp,” 171.

<sup>22</sup> The translation of *nongch'on chinhŭng wiwŏnhoe* as Committees for Rural Revitalization follows Shin and Han (1999).

<sup>23</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Nōsan gyoson shinkō undō kankei reikishū* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1937), 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Shin and Han, 86.

individuals to join 2,127 local committees.<sup>25</sup> That same year, officials elsewhere in the peninsula reported the formation of nearly 30,000 CRRs.<sup>26</sup> These fast-proliferating committees brought state power deep into the affairs of farming communities.

The Rural Revitalization Campaign expanded state interventions in Korean ritual life as well. During the years 1929 to 1933, not long after the death of Pak Kyōng-ch'un, Japanese anthropologist Zenshō Eisuke traveled across the peninsula on a Government-General sponsored project to study everyday life. His findings suggested that high ritual spending persisted despite the efforts of village *chinhŭnghoe*, Protestant church groups, and Korean cultural nationalists the previous decade. Zenshō reported that a middle- or upper- class family in Suwŏn, Kyōnggi province might pay 1,070 yen for a single wedding, while a similar family in Kangnŭng, Kangwŏn province might allocate nearly as much—1,017 yen—for a funeral.<sup>27</sup> In Kyōngju, Zenshō reported significantly lower yet still substantial levels of spending among the middle and upper classes, ranging from 300 yen to 600 yen for weddings and nearly as much for funerals. Lower-class Kyōngju residents purportedly spent beyond their means as well, devoting approximately 100 yen for weddings and 65 yen for funerals.<sup>28</sup> At the height of economic distress, when family budgets turned crimson and many went hungry, colonial officials like Zenshō pointed out how Koreans appeared to squander precious resources on one-time ritual affairs.

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<sup>25</sup> Kim, “1930 nyōndae Chosŏn ūi nongch'on saenghwal kaesŏn saōp,” 179.

<sup>26</sup> See Kim Min-ch'ol, *Kiro e sŏn chollak: Singmin Kwôllyôk kwa Nongch'on Sahoe* (Seoul: Hyean, 2012), 117; Kim, “1930 nyōndae Chosŏn ūi nongch'on saenghwal kaesŏn saōp,” 179.

<sup>27</sup> Zenshō Eisuke, *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Kōryō-gun* (Keijō: Chōsen sôtokufu, 1931), 157-159.

<sup>28</sup> Zenshō Eisuke, *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Keishū-gun* (Keijō: Chōsen sôtokufu, 1934), 165.

		Groom's Wedding Expenditures (Yen)				
		Attire	Bridal Ornaments	Banquet	Ceremonial Gifts	Total
Class	Low	10	20	30	30	<b>90</b>
	Middle	20	30	100	150	<b>300</b>
	High	30	60	210	300	<b>600</b>

Table 4.1 Groom's Wedding Expenditures, Kyōngju.  
 SOURCE: *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Keishū-gun*, pp. 165 (1934).

		Bride's Wedding Expenditures (Yen)				
		Attire	Clothing for Groom	Banquet	Gifts	Total
Class	Low	10	10	30	40	<b>100</b>
	Middle	30	20	100	100	<b>300</b>
	High	110	40	210	200	<b>600</b>

Table 4.2 Bride's Wedding Expenditures, Kyōngju.  
 SOURCE: *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Keishū-gun*, pp. 165 (1934).

Funeral Expenditures (Yen)								
		Shroud	Mourning Attire	Coffin	Labor	Reception	Misc.	Total
Class	Low	10	8	10	10	10	7	<b>65</b>
	Middle	60	50	60	60	60	40	<b>300</b>
	High	130	80	80	100	100	50	<b>500</b>

Table 4.3 Funeral Expenditures, Kyōngju.  
 SOURCE: *Seikatsu jōtai chōsa: Keishū-gun*, pp. 173 (1934).

Colonial officials framed the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (1934) as a core component of the Rural Revitalization Campaign. The “cancer” (*gan*) of ostentatious customs, as Director of Education Watanabe Toyohiko put it, affected all of Korean society—rich and poor, urban and rural—but it struck the countryside particularly hard. He maintained that in order to advance the cause of “self-improvement,” farming households had to first address the problem of rituals.<sup>29</sup> The *Guidelines* laid out a roadmap for reducing extravagance, focusing on the many of most egregious contributors to ritual spending identified in Zenshō’s study. For instance, the text enumerated a litany of ways to remedy what colonial officials viewed as unnecessarily costly demonstrations of hospitality. According to the *Guidelines*, Koreans should hold just simple wedding receptions, reserved for immediate family members and close friends.<sup>30</sup> Bereaved families would no longer host funeral guests who showed up at their homes night and day expecting food and drink.<sup>31</sup> And rather than preparing lavish ancestral offerings, as Pak Kyōng-ch’un so longed to do, Koreans should limit themselves to simple preparations of cooked rice, soup, wine, and vegetables.<sup>32</sup>

The *Guidelines* also called for an end to excessive formalism. Colonial officials identified several factors exacerbating Korean ritual spending. They claimed that some treated guests to lavish food and drinks for the sake of “saving face,” while others ran up costs out of a misguided devotion to centuries-old Confucian texts. As for the latter, government administrators purported to help Koreans save time and expense by offering

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<sup>29</sup> Watanabe Toyohiko, “Girei Junsoku no happu ni atarite” in Chōsen Sōtokufu, *Girei Junsoku* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1934), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei Kaisetsu* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1934), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 56.

a considerably simplified set of ritual prescriptions. The *Guidelines* stipulated that when mourning the death of a parent, for instance, the chief mourner would no longer have to spend three years wearing coarse hemp garb or abstaining from work. Just fourteen days would suffice. Mourning protocols for other family members and more distant kin were reduced concomitantly.<sup>33</sup> Ancestral rites (*chesa*) were no different. If in the past Koreans performed memorial ceremonies for four generations of forebears, households would now limit rites to two generations.<sup>34</sup> The *Guidelines* similarly reduced the frequency of gravesite ceremonies. They would be held on one of three traditional holidays—Hansik, Ch’usōk, or Chungyang—rather than the countless number of occasions that formerly commanded Korean families’ attention.<sup>35</sup>

	Amount (Yen)	Number of Households	Average Debt (Yen)	Percentage of Indebted Households
Farm Management	1,560,439	11,348	137.5	32.1
Natural Disaster	366,512	3,177	115.4	9.0
Ritual Expenses	619,658	4,973	124.6	14.1
Food Shortage	901,305	11,086	81.3	31.6
Illness	169,419	1,696	99.9	4.8
Other	547,934	3,073	178.3	8.7

Table 4.4 Causes of Indebtedness Among “Rehabilitation Families” (1933).  
SOURCE: *Kōsei shidō nōka nami ni buraku no gokanen no suii*, pp. 86-89 (1939).

Efforts to curb ritual spending, however, more closely reflected colonial administrators’ perceptions of Korean poverty rather than its true causes. Officials

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 43-49.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 55.

repeatedly maintained that runway ceremonial expenditures fueled peasant indebtedness.<sup>36</sup> Government-General statistics revealed some truth to this claim. In 1933, when colonial officials conducted surveys of 51,705 “rehabilitation families”—households living in villages specially selected to spearhead rural revitalization initiatives, they found that 35,353 families, or sixty-eight percent, carried debt. Of this group, 4,973 households, or fourteen percent, had acquired an average debt of 124.8 yen to finance ritual outlays.<sup>37</sup> With interest rates during this period ranging from 12 to 48 percent, as one observer suggested, ritual-related debt would have represented a significant economic burden for many families.<sup>38</sup> The same government data, however, attested that ritual expenditures did not account for the vast majority of household debts. Most rehabilitation families had not taken on loans for ceremonial outlays, but rather, for expenses related to “farm management” and “food shortages.”<sup>39</sup> Reducing ritual spending remained high on colonial administrators’ agenda likely because it supported the discourse of “self-improvement.” Peasants might have little choice but to incur debt to keep farms running or feed hungry families, but they could certainly opt out of ostentatious ritual ceremonies.

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<sup>36</sup> One *Maeil Sinbo* surmised that the vast majority of rural household debt comprised of loans for weddings and funerals. According to another account, some farmers even took advantage of local financial cooperatives, not to invest in crops or livestock, but to pay for ancestral rites. They had purportedly reduced cooperatives, which had begun as a government policy to “secure the livelihoods” of villagers, into an “institution that furthered wastefulness” (*nangbi chojang kigwan*). See “Honsang cherye piyong; Chōnbuk esō chosa,” *Maeil Sinbo*, May 26, 1933; *Maeil Sinbo*, May 26, 1933. See “Honsangje ūi chunch’ik chejōng (il),” *Maeil Sinbo*, July 18, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu nōson shinkōka, *Kōsei shidō nōka nami ni buraku no gokanen no suii*, 1939, CO0000009195, National Institute of Korean History.

<sup>38</sup> According to Edmund deSchweinitz Brunner, who conducted research in Korea on behalf of the Rural Church Commission of the Federal Council of Churches, interest rates below 24 percent were largely available only to members of financial cooperatives and “only on good security,” making low-interest loans out of reach for most poor farmers. See Edmund deSchweinitz Brunner, *Rural Korea: A Preliminary Survey of Economic, Social, and Religious Conditions*, (New York: International Missionary Council, 1928), 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Kōsei shidō nōka nami ni buraku no gokanen no suii*, 21-26.

### *Safeguarding Eastern Morality*

November 23, 1934 was a brisk and sunny day in Kangsō County, South P'yōng'an province—perfect weather for an afternoon wedding. By two o'clock, the sanctuary at Koch'ang Church brimmed with guests. Coveted pew seats had long since filled, and well-wishers jostled for standing room. Just about two thousand people had gathered from near and far. When the Wedding March began to play, all eyes turned back toward the entrance of the room. A “blushing bride” wearing traditional ceremonial garb—a red robe with billowing striped sleeves—walked solemnly down the aisle. Not long after, an identically-clad bride followed suit. Then another, and another, until finally, all ten brides reached the altar, where ten grooms in matching blue robes stood waiting. This was a group wedding. With the young couples lined up neatly before him, the officiant pressed on with the requisite proceedings of a Protestant marriage ceremony. He led the congregation in the singing of hymns, scripture reading, and prayer. When the minister called the names of each bride and groom in turn, they together made simultaneous vows of lifelong devotion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> George S. McCune, “A Plural Marriage Sanctioned by the Church!” *Pyengyang News*, March 1935.



Fig. 4.2 Group Wedding at Koch'ang Church, 1934.  
SOURCE: Zenshō Eisuke Photograph Collection, Gakushūin University.

Local officials lauded this unusual nuptial rite. While the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* made no mention of a group wedding, neither did it prohibit the practice, especially within a religious context.<sup>41</sup> Kangsō County chief Cho Hyang-man commended the ceremony for embodying the ethos of the Rural Revitalization Campaign. In his essay for the *Jiriki Kōsei Ihō*, Cho emphasized that the group wedding was first conceived by Kim Ūng-nok, an upstanding farmer and lay church leader (*yōngsu*). Having already spearheaded myriad reform projects, repairing village roads, establishing a private school, and organizing a financial cooperative, Kim set out to reduce ritual expenditures, a key provincial initiative. He persuaded young couples at Koch'ang church to take extraordinary measures to cut ostentation. In addition to opting

<sup>41</sup> The *Guidelines* recognized Koreans' prerogative to carry out nuptial ceremonies according to religious dictates, including Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and Christian churches (in that order) as acceptable wedding venues. See Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei junsoku*, 2.

for joint rites, which cost just 15 yen per person, brides and grooms eschewed the customary gift exchange. They also distributed rice cakes instead of hosting a banquet. When ceremony expenses totaled even less than expected, the couples reportedly donated the remaining 52 yen as an endowment for future group weddings. It was only fitting, Cho suggested, that such a public-minded ceremony would take place on *Niinamesai*, the annual holiday when the Japanese emperor would give thanks for another bountiful harvest.<sup>42</sup>

Such praise notwithstanding, government administrators harbored considerable anxiety over Korea's crowded and ever-changing ritual landscape. *An Explanation of Rites*, the authorized commentary on the *Guidelines*, advanced a very specific vision for reforming rites. The text opened its discussion by clarifying the characteristics of authentic rituals. First and foremost, true rites were sincere, serving as "channels for the heart." In the absence of "wholeheartedness" and "deep emotion," ceremonial words and deeds did not constitute rites but mere "imitations." Second, rites were also moral, upholding the paramount values of "love and reverence" (*ai to kei*). "No matter their sincerity," practices that transgressed prevailing ethical standards likewise did not represent rites.<sup>43</sup> In addition to sincerity and morality—attributes Confucian scholars themselves long emphasized—the colonial commentary appended several more. Rituals had to be hygienic, economical, adaptable, and universally agreeable.<sup>44</sup> These qualities were vague enough that bureaucrats like Cho Hyang-man might present new-fangled practices like group weddings as authentic rituals. At the same time, the commentary also

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<sup>42</sup> Cho Hyang-man, "Girei wo omonji jōhi wo fushishitaru: Rengō kekkonshiki no tenmatsu," *Jiryiki Kōsei Ihō*, Dec. 20, 1934.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 5.

made clear what constituted the truest rites: simplified Confucian rituals performed according to the dictates of the *Guidelines*.

Colonial officials in fact subtly discouraged alternative practices that competed with those outlined in the *Guidelines*. Western-style church nuptials that first appeared in

in Korea during the late 1910s showed no signs of waning. They remained ubiquitous in cities, and became increasingly prevalent in the countryside, as students returned to their hometowns with desires for their own urbane and cosmopolitan ceremonies.<sup>45</sup>

Government administrators viewed “so-called new weddings”—a pejorative for Protestant rites—as a thorn in their side. *An Explanation of Rites* included several not-so-subtle critiques against church ceremonies. It charged that they intermingled Western and Eastern traditions in disconcerting ways. Would-be grooms gifted fiancées with

engagement rings and traditional betrothal gifts. Families hosted wedding receptions at their homes, then again at restaurants. If Chosŏn literati had established a “tyrannical age of Neo-Confucian family rites” (*karei sensei jidai*), one official remarked, Protestants

ushered in an “era of confusion” (*konran jidai*), marked by ritual “incoherence and disorder.”<sup>46</sup> Colonial administrators moved to circumscribe the reach of Protestant

weddings. At a time when many non-Christians opted for church nuptials,<sup>47</sup> the text

stressed that religious wedding ceremonies were only appropriate for true believers, not those who only merely “borrowed” others’ rites and houses of worship.<sup>48</sup> In essence,

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<sup>45</sup> “Toshi seisaku kaizen kyōgikai (2),” *Chōsen chihō gyōsei* 13.1 (Jan. 1934), 102.

<sup>46</sup> Yi Kak-chong, “Girei no Hanashi,” *Chōsen* 236 (Jan. 1935), 251.

<sup>47</sup> During the early 1930s, church weddings were so common among non-Christians that Protestant leaders began questioning the propriety of administering liturgical marriage rites to outsiders. See Kim Ch’ang-jae, “Chosŏn kyohoe ūi sahoe ūisik munjae (1),” *Kidok Sinbo*, Jan. 1, 1931.

<sup>48</sup> *Chōsen sōtokufu*, *Girei kaisetsu*, 25.

Koreans, the majority of whom had no religious affiliation, should simply follow colonial recommendations.

Kangsō county officials were not solely, or even primarily, concerned with the economic dimensions of the Protestant group wedding. The ceremony did not actually keep costs low for the families of the newlywed couples. Cho Hyang-man conveniently omitted the fact that the nuptials functioned as a church fundraiser.<sup>49</sup> Kim Ūng-nok had convinced the brides and grooms to forgo their own individual ceremonies so that their parents could divert the savings—over 1,000 yen in total—to help construct a new church building.<sup>50</sup> In other words, curbing ceremonial did not help balance household budgets or free up resources to farm improvements--two of the main material goals of the Rural Revitalization Campaign. County administrators did, however, make one specific intervention. In 1931, the South P'yōng'an provincial governor had issued a directive establishing traditional ceremonial garb, then synonymous with Confucian nuptials, as the common standard for weddings.<sup>51</sup> When local bureaucrats recommended (or perhaps insisted on) this requirement for the group wedding, even offering the attire free of charge, the brides and grooms complied.<sup>52</sup> They eschewed the Western tuxedos and white wedding veils that had become *de rigueur* for “new weddings,” allowing officials to impart a “Confucian” look to an otherwise Christian ceremony.<sup>53</sup>

Colonial support for Confucian weddings took on more institutionalized forms as well. Although Korean marriage ceremonies customarily took place at the home of the

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<sup>49</sup> Cho, “Girei wo omonji jōhi wo fushishitaru.”

<sup>50</sup> McCune, “A Plural Marriage Sanctioned by the Church!”

<sup>51</sup> Cho, “Girei wo omonji jōhi wo fushishitaru.”

<sup>52</sup> Koch'ang kyohoe 100 nyōnsa p'yōnjip wiwōnhoe, *Koch'ang kyohoe 100 nyōnsa* (Seoul: Koch'ang kyohoe 100 nyōnsa p'yōnjip wiwōnhoe, 1996), 139.

<sup>53</sup> Cho, “Girei wo omonji jōhi wo fushishitaru.”

bride, the Government-General transformed the Kyōnghakwŏn, the former national Confucian academy, into a public wedding venue.<sup>54</sup> The Social Section of the Department of Education spent thousands of yen renovating the Myōngnyundang, the academy's main lecture hall, for its new function.<sup>55</sup> Starting in 1937, this rarified space, which once hosted Chosŏn kings for readings of the Chinese classics,<sup>56</sup> became open to the masses.<sup>57</sup> The newly-created Kyōnghakwŏn Department of Rites processed wedding applications and oversaw marriage ceremonies. So long as couples complied with the *Guidelines*, they gained access to the lecture hall, ceremonial attire, and necessary furnishings. They also had the opportunity to bow and announce their nuptials at a shrine to Confucius (*munmyo*) on premise--a practice not originally part of the traditional Korean wedding ceremony. All this would be available for the low introductory fee of ten yen.<sup>58</sup> The *Kyōnghakwŏn Journal* framed the policy as a way to preserve the "fundamental spirit" of traditional marriage rites against the dangers of excessive formalism or "so-called Western-style" practices.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> In 1937, the Government-General issued an updated edition of the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice*, which included the Kyōnghakwŏn as an acceptable wedding venue. See Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu, *Ūiryē chunch'ik kwa kū haesōl* (Kyōngsōng: Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu, 1937).

<sup>55</sup> "Akazu no dendō: Keigakuin wo kaihōsuru," *Keijō Nippō*, Jan. 23, 1937.

<sup>56</sup> Ryu Mi-na, "Chōnsi ch'aejaegi Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu ūi yurim chōngch'aek," *Yōsa wa hyōnsil* 63 (2007), 325.

<sup>57</sup> In July 1937, Yi Ch'ol-jae and Sin Sōng-nin, the daughter of a former provincial governor, became the first couple to get married at the Kyōnghakwŏn. See "Kyōnghakwŏn kaebang hu ch'oech'o ūi kyōlhonsik," *Maeil Sinbo*, July 4, 1937.

<sup>58</sup> The true cost of a wedding ceremony at the Kyōnghakwŏn, however, would have been considerably higher than ten yen. Not only was this price only guaranteed for one year, but it also did not include the cost of hiring assistants to help facilitate the ceremony or the cost of bridal preparations. The price of Kyōnghakwŏn ceremonies eventually did increase. In 1943, the *Maeil Sinbo* advertised a three-tiered pricing structure, whereby the "Plum package" cost twenty yen, the "Bamboo package," thirty yen, and "Pine package," fifty yen. See "Kyōlhonsik ūn koraesik ūro: Kyōnghakwŏn iyong yomang," *Maeil Sinbo*, Sept. 14, 1943.

<sup>59</sup> "Honin ūirye," *Kyōnghakwŏn chapchi* 42 (Dec. 1937), 64.



Fig. 4.3 Kyōnghakwŏn Myōngnyundang, n.d.

SOURCE: National Museum of Korea.



Fig. 4.4 Kyōnghakwŏn Wedding, n.d.

SOURCE: General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church.

The Government-General had a long history of (selectively) promoting Confucianism in Korea. On the one hand, Japanese annexation in 1910 significantly diminished the status and function of Confucian institutions. That very year, the Sōnggyun'gwan, the national academy of Confucian learning, where the brightest sons of aristocratic families once trained for public service, was made to shutter its doors to students. In the countryside, local administrators took control over rural Confucian academies (*hyanggyo*), diverting land endowment revenues to fund new government-run public schools.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, even as officials sidelined literary Chinese or the Confucian classics in favor of modern education, they also saw advantages in patronizing Confucianism. Not only did they perceive filial piety and loyalty to the sovereign--core Confucian values--as useful for colonial governance, but they also sought to co-opt traditional literati elites to help maintain social order. During the 1910s and 20s, the Government-General gave institutional support to the Kyōnghakwōn, the new center of Confucian culture,<sup>61</sup> as well as a slew of Confucian organizations, such as village revitalization associations, the Great Asian Literati Society (*Taedong samunhoe*), Confucian Revitalization Association (*Yudo chinhŭnghoe*), and Confucian Federation (*Yudo yonhaphoe*).<sup>62</sup>

Confucianism became even more indispensable to the colonial state after the Manchurian Incident. In 1935, as the gears of war began to churn, the Government-General launched the “Spiritual Cultivation Movement” (*Shinden kaihatsu undō*). The

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<sup>60</sup> Kim Chōng-in, “Ilche kangjōmgi hyanggyo ūi pyōndong ch’ui: hyanggyo chesan kwallyōn kongmunsō punsōk ūl chungsim ūro,” *Han’guk minjok undongsa yōn’gu* 47 (2006), 89.

<sup>61</sup> The Government-General re-christened the Sōnggyun'gwan as the Kyōnghakwōn in 1911, allowing it to keep its ritual functions (regular observances to Confucian sages), as well as publish the *Kyōnghakwōn chapchi*, a monthly journal on Confucian ethics. See Ryu Mi-na, “Ilbon ūi ‘Chosōn sinminhwa’ ch’ōngch’ae kwa yurim tongwōn ūi silt’ae,” *Ilbonhak* 31 (2010), 16-19.

<sup>62</sup> Song Chu-hyōn, *Singminjigi chonggyo wa minjok undong* (Seoul: Sōnin, 2013), 209.

term “spiritual cultivation,” which originally hailed from Buddhist teachings, likened the human heart to a field that needed careful tending.<sup>63</sup> Fostering the “heart of national subjects,” the ultimate goal of the movement,<sup>64</sup> required that individuals develop the following: a clear understanding of the “national body” (*kokutai*), a “mindset and faith” of “revering gods and honoring ancestors” (*keishin sūso*), and a spirit of “gratitude and self-reliance.”<sup>65</sup> Colonial officials turned to religious organizations to advance these goals (discussed further in Chapter Five), but they also relied on Confucian groups. The notion of a shared East Asian morality became essential to help justify an expanding Japanese empire. Speaking at a government-sponsored roundtable in April 1935, Kyōnghakwŏn instructor Chōng Pong-si emphasized the centrality of Confucianism to the Spiritual Cultivation Movement.<sup>66</sup> Western ethics, he charged, merely taught social Darwinian “survival of the fittest,” whereby the “strong consumed the weak.” Eastern morality, meanwhile, advocated social harmony based on Confucius’ five cardinal bonds.<sup>67</sup> Chōng maintained that through Japan’s guidance, Koreans could preserve East Asia’s “time-honored spirit and culture” against the tide of Western influences.<sup>68</sup>

### *Cultivating Filial Patriots*

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<sup>63</sup> Pak Kyun-söp, “Simjō kaeballon kwa kyoyuk int’oe munjae,” *Ilbonhakpo* 47 (2001), 471-472.

<sup>64</sup> Tatsugaru Sagai, *Tairiku jinja taikan* (Keijō: Tairiku jinja renmei, 1941), 157.

<sup>65</sup> Imaida Kiyonori, “Shinden kaihatsu ni kansuru ken,” Oct. 30, 1936, CJA27801, National Archives of Korea.

<sup>66</sup> Starting in 1930, the Kyōnghakwon resumed its educational functions with the creation of the Myōngnyun Academy (*hakwŏn*), which aimed to cultivate “Confucian leaders” (*yugyo chidoja*). See Yi Hui-jae, “Ilche kangjōmgi ūi yugyo ūiryē pyōnhwa yangsang,” *Ilbon yōn’gu* 15 (2011), 571.

<sup>67</sup> The five cardinal bonds in Confucianism referred to the relationships between king and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends.

<sup>68</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin, *Shinden kaihatsu undō ni kansuru kōenshū* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu chūsūin, 1936), 279-282.

In October 1936, the *Maeil Sinbo* published a cautionary tale of ritual reform gone awry. South P'yōng'an provincial councillor (*ch'amnyōgwan*) Chu Yong-hwan recounted how he once met a young man whose father had recently died.<sup>69</sup> This “model youth” (*mobōm ch'ōngnyōn*) professed a deep commitment to the *Guidelines*, boasting that he had spent just two yen for funeral preparations. This was certainly a significant departure from the hundreds or even thousands of yen that the wealthy putatively squandered. Chu singled out the young man as an object lesson, but not one of virtuous frugality. He critiqued the lad for having badly misunderstood the *Guidelines*. If the ultimate goal of ritual reform were simply cost reduction, the provincial councillor chided, then logically, the person who spent just one yen on funeral expenses would be doubly praise-worthy. The person who spent no money would be most laudable of all. Chu maintained that such a line of thinking—conflating the whole of the *Guidelines* with crass economization—was “nonsense.”<sup>70</sup> Government reforms purported to bring together outward and inward transformation, “matter and mind united as one” (*butsushin ichinyo*).<sup>71</sup>

Advocates of the *Guidelines* took pains to underscore a higher purpose for thrift. According to *An Explanation of Rites*, ostentation not only exacerbated rural poverty, but it had utterly corrupted traditional Korean customs, all but obscuring their foundations in filial piety. The funeral ceremony, for instance, represented a final “send-off” for beloved family members. While the occasion called for “quietude and solemnity,” the colonial commentary critiqued, many Koreans treated it instead as an occasion for feasting. They dined and drank to their heart’s content, not just at the home of the bereaved, but also at

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<sup>69</sup> Just as members of the Chungch'uwon served to advise the Government-General, *chamnyōgwan* served in advisory capacities for provincial governments.

<sup>70</sup> “Uiryē chunch'ik kwa sobi chōlyak ül hondong ūn pulga hada,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Oct. 3, 1936.

<sup>71</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei Kaisetsu*, 3.

the grave, turning the burial rite into a “mountainside banquet.”<sup>72</sup> Officials claimed that the same ill plagued ancestral veneration. *Chesa* rites demanded as much gravity as funerals, but all too often, families focused their attention on furnishing ceremonial foods. Many would prepare an overabundance of dishes, presumably to feed (and impress) relatives, neighbors, all manner of assorted houseguests.<sup>73</sup> That Pak Kyōng-ch’un, and others like him, would commit suicide rather than present a meager offering table, the commentary pointed out, only demonstrated how the outward trappings of Korean rituals had come to overshadow their inner spirit.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to helping justify wide-ranging ritual reforms, such discourses reflected a growing colonial interest in mobilizing Confucian ethics. The Spiritual Cultivation Movement singled out filial piety as a paramount moral virtue. Confucian teachings traditionally stressed reverence for one’s forebears as the ethical basis for loyalty to the country’s sovereign. Likewise, government officials underscored the critical importance of filiality for fostering dutiful subjects of the Japanese emperor. In his 1935 essay, Yoshida Masao, an instructor at the Keijō Teaching College (*Keijo shihan gakkō*), explained at great length how family life served as an incubator for patriotism.<sup>75</sup> The principle of filial piety taught children to recognize the boundless love of their parents, love as high as Seoul’s South Mountain and as deep as the Han River. Filial children would appreciate everything they had as manifestations of their “parents’ grace” (*oya no on*).<sup>76</sup> This sense of gratitude, Yoshida maintained, created ripple effects

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 5. Whether apocryphal or not, the *Girei Kaisetsu* noted an incident similar to the death of Pak Kyōng-ch’un in which a man committed suicide after finding himself unable to raise sufficient funds for lavish *taesang* offerings, despite having already invited guests to enjoy the food after the ceremony.

<sup>75</sup> Yoshida Masao, “Kōdō shiken,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Sept. 1935), 19.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22.

outside the home. It impressed upon children the notion that they did not exist as isolated individuals, but that rather, they belonged to their families and to society more broadly. More significantly, gratitude toward parents inculcated devotion to the emperor, the father of the nation who worked tirelessly for the welfare of his subjects.<sup>77</sup> Yoshida insisted that each person direct “love and reverence” (*ai to kei*) first to parents, but ultimately to the Japanese emperor.<sup>78</sup>

*Chesa* emerged as an especially critical component of colonial spiritual mobilization. During the 1930s, officials framed the Korean ancestral ceremony as a gateway rite of sorts for encouraging Shinto shrine observances.<sup>79</sup> Oyama Fumio, a bureaucrat for the Government-General Department of Home Affairs, expounded on this connection in his 1934 text, *Shinto Shrines and Korea*. The two practices, he maintained, shared an ancient history. Echoing an assimilationist theory long popular among Japanese anthropologists, Oyama noted how Japanese and Koreans originated from the same stock, forming two branches of a single family (*dōkon dōshū*), an elder and younger brother born of the same “flesh and blood.”<sup>80</sup> The two peoples naturally developed numerous linguistic and cultural commonalities, including ancestral veneration. According to Oyama, Korean *chesa* and Japanese shrine ceremonies possessed nearly an identical “spirit,” both paying obeisance to the hallowed souls of ancestors.<sup>81</sup> This resemblance had important ramifications for mobilizing Korean society on the eve of war. Just as filial

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>79</sup> As a part of the Spiritual Cultivation Movement, colonial officials often promoted ancestral rites right alongside Shinto shrine observances. See Yi Pōm-ik, “Chūnan no shinden kaihatsu undō,” *Chōsen* 252 (May 1935), 81; Aono Masaaki, “Chōsen nōson no ‘chūken jinbutsu,’” *Chōsen gakuhō* 141 (Oct. 1991), 56-57.

<sup>80</sup> Oyama Fumio, *Jinja to Chōsen* (Keijō: Chōsen bukkyōsha, 1934), 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 20.

piety would foster reverence for the Japanese emperor, the ritual commemoration of one's forebears would lead to the veneration of deified imperial ancestors at state shrines, a practice defined as the duty of all Japanese subjects.

Colonial officials recognized, however, that the traditional ancestral veneration as it stood did not necessarily inspire enthusiasm for shrine ceremonies. Despite the ubiquity of household *chesa* rites, Korean turnout at Chōsen Shrine atop Seoul's South Mountain remained lackluster at best, ever since its establishment in 1925.<sup>82</sup> Oyama attributed this disconnect to the disparate trajectories that Japanese and Korean ancestral rituals took over time. Never mind that state Shinto existed only since the Meiji period, he insisted that the Japanese people had always melded together “reverence for ancestral spirits” (*shizoku soshin no sonsū*) with “reverence for the imperial family” (*kōshitsu sonsū*). Oyama bemoaned that in Korea, on the other hand, the influx of Chinese influences dating back to the Silla dynasty (668 – 935 AD), stymied the “concept of national gods” from taking root.<sup>83</sup> He claimed *chesa* devolved instead into myopic clan-centeredness. As one Japanese scholar put it, Koreans only honored “their own family forebears,” devoting themselves to building gravesite shelters, publishing genealogies, and overspending on ceremonial expenditures.<sup>84</sup> An Yong-baek, a bureaucrat in the Department of Education, bemoaned the toll of such practices on the public. “Excessive affection for one’s own tribe,” he charged, weakened concern for others, creating a narrow “family morality” (*kazoku dōtoku*), rather than a “societal morality” (*shakai dōtoku*).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Henry, *Assimilating Seoul*, 84.

<sup>83</sup> Oyama, 5-6.

<sup>84</sup> Tatsugaru, 164.

<sup>85</sup> An Yong-baek, “Shinden kaihatsu shidō genri no sai ginmi (shita),” *Chōsen* 256 (Sept. 1936), 82.

The *Guidelines* quietly set out to rectify this vexing feature of traditional ritual ceremonies. Colonial officials rightly perceived that the Confucian rites of passage strengthened patrilineal kinship bonds in Korean society. *Chesa* observances regularly drew together relatives from near and far. For instance, in an aristocratic yangban family, ancestral rites to commemorate a great-great grandfather would assemble one's brothers; uncles; first, second, and third cousins; first cousins once removed; as well as second cousins once removed. Kinsmen traditionally honored four generations of common ancestors, convening for death anniversaries (*kije*), seasonal services (*sije*), as well as a number of traditional holidays.<sup>86</sup> Colonial reforms made such gatherings smaller and less frequent. By mandating the veneration of just two generations of forebears, the *Guidelines* limited chesa ceremonies to one's immediate family, first cousins, and uncles.<sup>87</sup> The text further dictated that this pared down group perform ancestral rites only on death anniversaries and one traditional holiday of their choice.<sup>88</sup> While government administrators often framed these changes as measures to cut costs and preserve the essence of filial piety, they effectively weakened the social ties facilitated through *chesa* rites.

Colonial funerary reforms exhibited a similar dynamic. Traditionally, Confucian ritual primers prescribed very specific mourning obligations for relatives according to their relational proximity to the deceased. As chief mourner, the eldest son bore the heaviest burden, customarily wearing unhemmed sackcloth and abstaining from work during his three-year grieving period. A great-grandson donned hemmed sackcloth for

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<sup>86</sup> Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 170.

<sup>87</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei Kaisetsu*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 55.

five months, while a more distant third cousin dressed in fine hemp cloth for two months.<sup>89</sup> These practices not only emphasized mutual kinship obligations, but they also provided visual cues of each mourner's place in the family tree. The *Guidelines* significantly curtailed such customs. For one, the text reduced traditional grieving periods across the board. The eldest son would observe full mourning for fourteen days, and a third cousin, a mere five days.<sup>90</sup> The text also homogenized funeral attire. Parents, spouses, and the eldest son would wear hemp garb, but everyone else would affix a simple black armband to their everyday clothing.<sup>91</sup> Colonial administrators simplified both *chesa* and funerary rites in efforts to channel Korean filial piety away from particularistic blood ties and toward the Japanese emperor.

### *Enforcing Ritual Propriety*

Lawyer and long-time civil servant Yi Kak-chong had a busy year in 1935. Working for the Social Section, the branch of the Government-General in charge of overseeing the implementation of the *Guidelines*, Yi threw himself into wide-ranging initiatives to promote ritual reform. He penned a three-part essay titled, "A Story of Rites," for the colonial monthly journal *Chōsen*. He also travelled across the peninsula giving public lectures. The end of the year was especially frenetic. Yi and his colleague Kim Myōng-jun, a member of the Chungch'uwon, led a series of roundtable discussions in Seoul regarding the best practices for carrying out the new colonial directives. Over the course of eleven days, starting on December 6, the two men visited twenty-four

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<sup>89</sup> Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 183.

<sup>90</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei Kaisetsu*, 39-40.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

different venues, often speaking at multiple events on the same day. They visited schools, community centers, local district offices, as well as prominent religious settings such as the Chonggyo Methodist Church and the Hwagwang Buddhist Social Welfare Center. The roundtables concluded with promising results, having drawn the kinds of audiences that Yi and Kim had set out to attract. Community council members (*chōdōkai*), district commissioners (*hōmen iin*), not to mention approximately forty “local men of influence” reportedly attended the events.<sup>92</sup>

From the outset, colonial administrators did not view ritual reform as the sole purview of the state. Considering the Government-General promulgated the Guidelines as recommendations, not laws, bureaucrats like Yi sought out civic and community leaders to serve as (junior) partners in transforming Korean customs.<sup>93</sup> In urban centers, wealthy Japanese settlers, Korean elites, and members of a growing middle class—many of whom actively participated in other social reform projects—helped drum up support for simplifying ritual ceremonies.<sup>94</sup> In the countryside, where customary practices supposedly wreaked greatest devastation, officials reached out to young and old alike. Publications like *The Farmers’ Reader* introduced youths to the idea that the state ought to provide guidance on ritual matters.<sup>95</sup> School teachers gave lectures and even arranged

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<sup>92</sup> “Girei Junsoku nami shokufuku shōrei zadankai,” *Keijō Ihō* 171 (Dec. 1935), 32.

<sup>93</sup> As early as July 1934, the *Maeil Sinbo* emphasized that colonial administrators would not implement the reforms “through force” (*kangjejōk ūro*), but that they would instead encourage “the public” to change their ways “voluntarily” (*chabaljōk ūro*). See “Uiryē chunch’ik ȏn ch’ongdok yugo ro,” *Maeil Sinbo*, July 22, 1934.

<sup>94</sup> The *Guidelines* formed part and parcel of moral suasion campaigns that emerged across the peninsula starting in the 1930s. With war on the horizon and the threat of radical ideologies ever-present, Governor-General Ugaki sought to mobilize the broader populace to carry out “moral reform” (*kyōka*) projects, ranging from improvements to daily life, public hygiene, civic morality, and patriotism. See Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*, 327-333.

<sup>95</sup> *Kyōnggido Nongmin Tokpon*, 96.

for special demonstrations of rites properly performed according to the *Guidelines*.<sup>96</sup> The great majority of rural initiatives, however, focused on the parents and grandparents of such children, especially those of aristocratic *yangban* lineages.<sup>97</sup> Colonial officials hoped that the cooperation of traditional elites would produce cascades of change across village communities. If members of prominent *yangban* clans or Confucian scholars would relinquish their Chosŏn-era ritual primers, the logic went, ordinary Korean farmers would quickly follow suit.<sup>98</sup>

Stories of successful ritual reform campaigns appeared everywhere in colonial publications. In March 1935, the *Maeil Sinbo* recounted the laudable conduct of one prominent *yangban* family in Ponghwa County, North Kyōngsang province. The Kwōns, who hailed from the venerable Andong Kwōn clan, supposedly took great interest in county officials' "vigorous efforts" to promote ritual reform. When the family patriarch, a Confucian scholar named Kwōn Sang-ik, died that February, his children decided to forgo traditional funerary customs in favor of the practices outlined in the *Guidelines*. After close consultation with local administrators, the Kwōns arranged for a model funeral ceremony. The family eschewed all trappings of ostentation. Nor did they permit backward practices like performative wailing. They pared the guest list to close family and kin, as well as thirty cherished friends. The *Maeil Sinbo* expressed great optimism for

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<sup>96</sup> In November 1935, when county superintendent for moral suasion Kim Sun-gwan visited the Miryang Public Agricultural School in South Kyōngsang province, he arranged for a demonstration of a model marriage ceremony. This demonstration was reportedly filmed for future use as well. "Nongjamgyo undonghoe ūirye chunch'ik ūro honsik ūl sil," *Maeil Sinbo*, Oct. 22, 1935.

<sup>97</sup> Local colonial officials organized numerous roundtables and lectures specifically for Confucian scholars and Confucian associations. See, for example, "Chōn'gun yurimhoehap: Ūirye chunch'ik kangsūp," *Maeil Sinbo*, Dec. 27, 1935; "Ūirye chunch'ik pogǔp k'oja kakgun e yurim kandamhoe," *Maeil Sinbo*, March 12, 1935; "Hamhŭng yurim esō Ūirye chunch'ik kangyō," *Maeil Sinbo*, Aug. 23, 1935.

<sup>98</sup> For instance, in Sangun county, North Kyōngsan province, the county government emphasized the active participation of clan representatives, Confucian scholars, and village heads in implementing the *Guidelines*. See "Ūirye chunch'ik ūi ch'wiji pogǔp e kwanhan kōn," January 24, 1935, IM0000035473, National Institute for Korean History.

the progress of ritual reform in Ponghwa County and beyond. As the first *yangban* family in their village to perform funeral rites according to the *Guidelines*, the Kwōns set an example for others in their community. They also sent a message to the broader network of Confucian scholars, including Kwōn Sang-ik's three thousand or so former disciples across the peninsula who had been politely requested not to attend, per colonial recommendations.<sup>99</sup>

Reports of Koreans' decreasing spending ritual ceremonies further contributed to this narrative of progress. The monthly journal *Chōsen* published the findings of a survey on ritual expenditures during the first four months following the promulgation of the *Guidelines*, from November 1934 to March 1935. The scope of the study was admittedly modest. It included data from just 2,539 participants, or an average of 195 from each province. Yet, the article emphasized the impressive changes already underway in Koreans' ritual practices across class lines. Funeral costs, which represented the highest ritual expenditures among those surveyed, decreased 84 percent among the upper class, 87 percent among the middle class, and 84 percent among the lower class. The cost savings were astounding in absolute terms as well. A wealthy family that once spent an average of 5,245 yen on a funeral now spent just 1,000 yen. At the other end of the spectrum, a poor family that might have allocated 524 yen formerly now expended just 100 yen.<sup>100</sup> The Kwōns themselves claimed to have saved nearly two thousand yen through their careful adherence to the *Guidelines*.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Üiryē chunch’ik ūl Ponghwa myōngmun solsōn silsi,” *Maeil Sinbo*, March 5, 1935.

<sup>100</sup> “Girei junsoku jisshi jōtai,” *Chōsen* 245 (Oct. 1935), 130-131.

<sup>101</sup> “Üiryē chunch’ik ūl Ponghwa myōngmun solsōn silsi,” *Maeil Sinbo*, March 5, 1935.

In reality, implementing the *Guidelines* proved an uphill battle. Even as colonial bureaucrats and their civilian allies touted the onward march of ritual transformation, they also nursed misgivings. Yi Kak-chong and Kim Myǒng-jun turned their roundtables on ritual reform into an annual affair, owing to the “extreme difficulty” (*shinan*) of “correcting long-standing customs of the past.”<sup>102</sup> The *Chōsen* article itself hinted at the limited effects of moral suasion. Wealthy survey participants, for instance, curtailed their ritual spending in comparison to the past, but they still spent in excess of what many colonial officials would have recommended.<sup>103</sup> Worse still for colonial administrators, the story of the Kwǒn family turned out to be the exception, rather than the rule. In May 1935, a Confucian scholar from North Ch’ungch’ǒn province named Yi Ki-hyang made an incendiary show of resistance to colonial ritual reforms. Not only did he petition the Government-General to rescind the *Guidelines*, but Yi called on fellow literati across the nation to oppose the policy that so desecrated Confucius’ “three bonds and five virtues” (*samgang oryun*), which formed the foundations of traditional ethics.<sup>104</sup>

Colonial officials did not rely on persuasion alone to implement the *Guidelines*, often resorting to heavy-handed inducements to secure compliance. In the countryside, committees for rural revitalization engaged in local surveillance. To give an example, the Kosǒng County CRR in Kangwǒn Province, which reported stunning success with ritual reform initiatives in 1933, encroached deeply into residents’ ritual lives. The committee required members to report in advance all weddings, funerals, and ancestral ceremonies that would take place in their homes. CRR leaders then attended the rites to ensure proper

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<sup>102</sup> “Dai ni kai Girei Junsoku nami shokufuku shōrei zadankai,” *Keijō Ihō* 174 (March 1936), 32.

<sup>103</sup> According to Kim Ŭn-ju, local officials oftentimes exaggerated reductions in Koreans’ ritual expenditures as well. See Kim, “1930 nyǒndae Chosǒn ūi nongch’on saenghwal kaeson,” 207.

<sup>104</sup> “Ŭiryē chunch’ik pandae e puhwanoedong ūn pulgwa,” *Maeil Sinbo*, May 11, 1935.

conduct, survey expenditures, as well as serve as co-hosts, having sent out the invitations on behalf of the committee, rather than the families themselves.<sup>105</sup> With the promulgation of the *Guidelines*, it was not just “exemplary” CRRs that employed such tactics. Committees across the peninsula formed subsidiary associations and cooperatives promoting ritual reform through similar means. Surveillance was also increasingly accompanied by disincentives. The Sihŭng County Association for Implementing the *Guidelines* (*Ŭiryē chunch'ik silhaeng wiwōnhoe*) stipulated monetary fines between one and ten yen for violating colonial reforms.<sup>106</sup> Its counterpart in Hŭich'ŏn County went further, levying fines between five and twenty yen.<sup>107</sup> Considering many felt little choice but to join CRRs, local officials exerted considerable pressure on Koreans to comply with the *Guidelines*.<sup>108</sup>

At times, local bureaucrats intervened even more directly in people’s ritual lives. Kimch’ŏn county officials in North Kyōngsang province gained notoriety as stringent enforcers of the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice*. The *Tonga Ilbo* reported a case that showcased their extreme zealousness. In July 1935, the An household prepared to observe the first death anniversary (*sosang*) of a parent, an important milestone in the Korean mourning process. Relatives from nearby villages, as well as kinsmen from further afield, made their way to Kimch’ŏn to observe the traditional rites. But when guests reached the An family home, they were greeted by several wholly unfamiliar faces. Pak Sŭng-gyu, the county superintendent for moral suasion (*kyohwa jusa*), along with three associates, stood at

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<sup>105</sup> “Nōson shinō undō shisetsu to jisseki,” 135.

<sup>106</sup> “Ŭiryē chunch'ik silhaenghoe: Sihŭnggun esō chojik,” *Maeil Sinbo*, April 18, 1935.

<sup>107</sup> “Ŭiryē chunch'ik wibanja e wiyakgūm ūl chingsu,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Dec. 24, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> In Taejŏn, local township chapters of the Association for Implementing the *Guidelines* required all residents to join, committing themselves to association by-laws that punished infractions against the *Guidelines*. See “Ŭiryē chunch'ik silhaeng silhaeng: wiwōn ūl paech'i,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Feb. 24, 1935.

the entrance, taking down names.<sup>109</sup> The officials would not permit entry to guests beyond the close relatives prescribed in the *Guidelines*. Others would not even be allowed to greet the chief mourner. Considering many had traveled from as far as Taegu and Yongch’on for the ceremony, those sent away expressed outrage at such treatment.<sup>110</sup>

Police officers took active roles in implementing the *Guidelines* as well. Some reform provisions, such as enforcing the minimum age requirements for marriage, fell directly under their jurisdiction. But as constituent members of committees for rural revitalization, police officers were just as likely as township leaders, school principals, and members of financial cooperatives to attend local ritual ceremonies to encourage proper compliance with state recommendations.<sup>111</sup> Korean newspapers commonly reported cases of such police involvement. In Yech’on county, North Kyōngsang province, police officers accompanied township officials on their rounds to personally “inspect” (*kamsi*) marriage ceremonies.<sup>112</sup> Ungjin county police in Kyōnggi province intervened even more heavy-handedly. According to the *Maeil Sinbo*, in May 1935, police officers took it upon themselves to confiscate unauthorized “spirit seats” (*yōngjwa*) from people’s homes. While the *Guidelines* stipulated that Koreans remove spirit seats after the first death anniversary (*sosang*) of the deceased, Ungjin residents evidently preferred the traditional custom of maintaining them until the second death

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<sup>109</sup> For more on the responsibilities of the *kyohwa jusa*, see Kim, “Chosŏn ch’ongdokpu chejōng ‘Ŭiryechunch’ik,’” 176-178.

<sup>110</sup> “Wŏnnaegaek ū sangju myōnhoe kkaji kyohwajusa ka kōjol,” *Tonga Ilbo*, July 11, 1935.

<sup>111</sup> The South Ch’ungch’ong provincial governor, for instance, repeatedly emphasized the importance of coordination between local bureaucrats and police officers in implementing the *Guidelines*. See Chūsei Nandō, *Kyōiku yōkō* (Ōta: Chūsei Nandō, 1937), 633-637.

<sup>112</sup> “Molsō,” *Tonga Ilbo*, February 21, 1936.

anniversary (*taesang*).<sup>113</sup> The police found 48 overdue spirit seats from Uljin township, 35 from Kŭnnam township, and 42 from Siphae townships. In the name of “sweeping clean” the “evil customs of the past,” county police collected and destroyed a total of 275 spirit seats.<sup>114</sup>

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The *Guidelines on Ritual Practice* represented a watershed in the trajectory of ritual change in colonial Korea. To be sure, many of its ideas were not new. Its authors incorporated familiar discourses against ostentation and waste. They also adopted measures and strategies previously tested out through village revitalization associations during the 1910s and 20s. But the *Guidelines* also inaugurated significant changes. State interventions into Korean ritual life became more systematic and far broader in scope. Colonial officials also backed changes to existing customs in ways that anticipated wartime needs. They promoted Confucian customs, but in drastically altered forms amenable to Japanese assimilation. They also set out to circumscribe the flurry of ritual innovations sweeping Korean society, especially those spearheaded by religious communities like the Protestants. In effect, the Government-General claimed that ritual reform could only properly take root under state direction, though civilian deputies would play important supporting roles. The notion that the government should determine the meaning of rites—through heavy-handed means if necessary—left significant legacies in Korea. It paved the way for the Shinto Shrine Controversy, discussed in the next chapter,

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<sup>113</sup> Considering Koreans traditionally presented daily meal offerings before the spirit seat (on which the spirit tablet was placed), the *Guidelines* likely stipulated the accelerated removal of the spirit seat in order to shorten this period of daily meal offerings.

<sup>114</sup> “Tasu yōngwi ch’ōlp’ye: Ūiryē chunch’ik yōhaeng,” *Maeil Sinbo*, May 14, 1935.

as well as post-colonial reform initiatives, such as Park Chung-hee's own *Family Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (1969) in South Korea.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **“To their own Master They Stand or Fall”**

### **Protestants and the Shinto Shrine Controversy**

September 18, 1932 marked the first anniversary of the Manchurian Incident.

During the intervening year, Japanese media coverage whipped up war fever among the public with stories of Chinese aggression, valiant soldiers on the frontier, and the prowess of imperial military forces.<sup>1</sup> The anniversary was commemorated with due pomp throughout the empire. The Tokyo Imperial Soldiers’ Support Association, Reservist Soldiers’ Association, and Patriotic Women’s Association hosted an impressive ceremony for fallen soldiers at the Yasukuni Shrine. Guests of honor not only included two hundred bereaved military family members, but also high-ranking officials, including the Minister of War, the Minister of the Navy, and the Minister of Justice. In Fengtian (J. Hōten), the city where the Manchurian Incident had taken place, local government and civic groups organized a full day of memorial events. Twenty thousand people gathered at Hōten Shrine. School children marched through the city streets waving Japanese flags, while the women’s association hosted an evening lantern festival.<sup>2</sup> Korea was no exception. Cities across the peninsula—Seoul, Taegu, Hamhung, Kwangju, and P’yōngyang—observed special memorial rites (*ireisai*) at Shinto shrines in honor of departed soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on media coverage of the Manchurian Incident see Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> “Shihen kinenbi no Hōten,” *Keijō Nippō*, Sept. 21, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> “Shihen isshūnen wo mukae senbyōshi shōshi ireisai,” *Keijō Nippō*, Sept. 18, 1932; “Shihen kinenbi no kakuchi de shikkō,” *Keijō Nippō*, Sept. 19, 1932; “Manju sabyōn ilchunyōn,” *Tonga Ilbo*, Sept. 20, 1932.

One group in P'yōngyang, however, conspicuously did not participate in commemorative events that day. While South P'yōngan provincial governor Fujiwara Kizō specifically instructed students from the city's public and private schools to attend the Heijō Shrine *ireisai*, pupils from ten mission academies had not complied. Their absence did not go unnoticed. Japanese members of the P'yōngyang Reservists' Association, who had organized the ceremony, called for swift retribution. In their eyes, abstention from shrine rites represented a brazen show of disrespect.<sup>4</sup> Long-time Presbyterian missionary George S. McCune scrambled to explain his community's actions. McCune maintained that as the principal of the Sungsil Boy's Academy, as well as the President of the Union Christian College, he simply could not consent to Christian students participating in the rites of another religion. Not only did Christian doctrine forbid it, but so did the Presbyterian General Assembly, which had recently passed a resolution on the matter.<sup>5</sup> McCune's response hardly mollified the Reservists' Association, whose members went on to raise the matter with Japanese-language dailies, provincial officials, and the Government-General itself.<sup>6</sup> Within three years, this local dispute grew into an explosive peninsula-wide conflict.

The Shinto shrine controversy has received no shortage of scholarly attention. For many historians, the conflict is emblematic of the state coercion that characterized the wartime mobilization years. The late 1930s witnessed the introduction of "imperialization" (*kōminka*) policies, whereby the Government-General intensified its efforts to transform Koreans into proper Japanese subjects. Assimilation policies took

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<sup>4</sup> "Ex-Soldiers Association Resolution," in *Sinsa ch'amiae munjae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 1, ed. Yi Man-yǒl (Seoul: Han'guk kidokkyo yōksa yōn'guso, 2003), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Yang-sōn, *Han'guk kidokkyo yōksa yōn'gu* (Seoul: Kidokkyo munsa, 1971), 177.

<sup>6</sup> "Dō yori genjū kaichoku," *Keijō Nippō*, Nov. 22, 1932.

aim at key components of Korean identity. Korean-language instruction ceased in public schools. Many families were pressured into adopting Japanese surnames. Christianity encountered “subjugation” as “Korea’s most active and influential religion.”<sup>7</sup> Presbyterian missionaries shuttered their schools, while over two thousand Korean pastors and lay leaders faced years behind bars.<sup>8</sup> Prevailing narratives of religious persecution, however, do not tell the whole story.<sup>9</sup> Colonial officials indeed viewed the Christian community as subversive, but not for its nationalist sympathies, as many scholars have suggested.<sup>10</sup> By rejecting shrine rites, Protestants once again highlighted the vexing political problem of religious difference, this time for the colonial state. They refused to adopt patriotism as their highest moral value. Instead of submitting to the paramount truth claims of the state, Christian dissidents insisted on interpreting rites according to their own religious teachings, as they always had, long before Japanese annexation.

This chapter examines the Shinto Shrine Controversy that unfolded during the 1930s and 40s to explore how debates on shrine ceremonies raised deep-rooted questions on the relationship between rites and religion. I begin by tracing the perspective of

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<sup>7</sup> Wan-Yao Chou, “The Kominka Movement in Taiwan and Korea: Comparisons and Interpretations,” in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945*, eds. Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 45-48.

<sup>8</sup> See Kim Yang-sŏn, *Han'guk kidokkyo yōksa yōn'gu*, 201.

<sup>9</sup> For many scholars, especially church historians, colonial officials’ harsh response to Protestant abstention from shrine observances resulted from their long-held perception of Christianity as an anti-colonial religion. According to this view, forcible shrine worship was no different from the targeted arrest and torture of Korean Christians during the 1911 Conspiracy Case or wholesale slaughter of Christians during the 1919 March First Movement. See Jai-Keun Choi, *The Korean Church under Japanese Colonialism* (Seoul: Jimoodang, 2007); James Grayson, “Christianity and State Shinto in Colonial Korea: A Clash of Nationalisms and Religious Beliefs,” *DISKUS* 1:2 (1994).

<sup>10</sup> As previously noted, the Korean Protestant community largely distanced itself from anti-colonial nationalist activities. During the 1920s and 30s, Protestants were frequently critiqued by nationalist intellectuals for their insufficient involvement in social and political issues. See Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 146-148.

colonial administrators. While officials strictly delineated between state Shinto and religion, the task of promoting Shinto rites entailed significant shifts in colonial understandings of religion. Proper religions would do more than simply stay out of (anti-colonial) political activities. Now, they would actively promote reverence for the Japanese emperor and his imperial forebears. Protestants struggled to adapt to these new terms of engagement. Presbyterian missionaries in particular chafed at the extraordinary powers claimed by the government, seemingly determining the meaning of religion at will. Presbyterian educators chose to recuse themselves from instructional work rather than concede to state demands. Korean believers had far fewer options. Some chose to suffer for their conscience' sake. Many more relented in the face of violence, imprisonment, and loss of livelihood. In the discussion that follows, I analyze the controversy within the broader trajectory of ritual change in Korea to better attend to the complex and fraught choices that Protestants faced during the final years of Japanese colonial rule.

### *The Making of Pious Patriots*

The arrival of autumn stirred anxiety in the hearts of many P'yōngyang missionaries. Not only was it a time of renewed busyness, as students streamed back into Christian classrooms for a new academic term, but it was also the high season of public holidays, days for Shinto shrine observances. The *Shūki Kōreisai* took place each autumn equinox to pay tribute to the memory of imperial ancestors. *Kannamesai*, which fell in October, was the day when the Japanese emperor made an offering of the first fruits of the year's harvest. The following month, on *Niinemesai*, the emperor gave thanks for

another bountiful harvest.<sup>11</sup> Ever since provincial authorities began mandating shrine attendance for all schools in 1932, autumn became a tinderbox. Tensions rose with each government dispatch requesting the attendance of Christian students at shrine ceremonies. On November 14, 1935, George S. McCune and fellow Presbyterian missionary Velma L. Snook, the principal of the Sung'ui Girl's Academy, pushed hostilities to a tipping point. While attending a province-wide conference for school principals, the educators flatly refused to participate in observances at Heijō Shrine, turning away the official car sent for them.<sup>12</sup>

This act of defiance set off a firestorm between colonial administrators and the Northern Presbyterian Mission. McCune received a stern warning from the Director of Education, Watanabe Toyohiko. According to Watanabe, McCune had misunderstood several fundamental facts. First and foremost, shrine rites were not religious in nature. The Japanese Constitution, he emphasized, made a “clear distinction” (*setsuzen kubetsu*) between state shrines and religion. Shinto ceremonies constituted instead a matter of morality. By honoring imperial ancestors, as well as those who gave their lives for the sake of the nation, students would learn the supreme ethical values of patriotism and loyalty to the Japanese emperor. And cultivating “national morality” (*kokumin dōtoku*), Watanabe reminded McCune, represented the chief purpose of education. He chided that even a “cursory glance” at any textbook published by the South P'yongan provincial government or the Japanese Ministry of Education would make this abundantly clear.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a full list of the Japanese national ritual calendar, see Hardacre, *Shinto and the State*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> George S. McCune, “Letter to C.B. McAfee,” December 20, 1935, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 14, PHS.

<sup>13</sup> Ethics textbooks published during the 1930s indeed emphasized the deep “moral significance” held by shrine observances that transcended religion. See, for instance, Chōsen sōtokufu, (*Kani gakkō*) *Shūshinsho: Kyōshiyō* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1935), 174.

Instructors had a solemn obligation to encourage participation at shrine rites, whether they served at public or private schools. It was a pity, Watanabe wrote, that McCune and his colleagues in P'yōngyang “confused” (*kondō*) education for religion, persisting in a gross dereliction of their duties as teachers.<sup>14</sup>

McCune soon received yet another government missive, this time from the South P'yōngan Chief of Internal Affairs, Kōno Setsuo. Kōno's message covered largely similar terrain, echoing the now familiar refrain distinguishing state Shinto from religion. He also underscored colonial administrators' steadfast commitment to religious freedom. Fully aware that freedom of conscience remained a cornerstone of modern law in Western countries, Kōno maintained that government officials did not harbor “even the slightest intention” to “interfere” (*kanshō*) in individuals’ “spiritual lives” (*shinkō seikatsu*). They recognized the “freedom of religious belief” (*shinkyō no jiyū*) long guaranteed by the Japanese constitution. Kōno maintained that fellow bureaucrats in fact hoped for the continued “flourishing” (*hanei*) of religion throughout the peninsula. Religious adherents of all stripes, especially those involved with education, had a key role to play in the “moral improvement of people’s hearts” (*shakai minshin no kyōka*). They could help clarify the “true meaning” of state shrines, lead students to participate in shrine observances, as well as dispel any misguided “anxieties” about state interference in religion. Kōno urged McCune to do likewise, instead of stubbornly asserting his own singular, “dogmatic interpretation” (*dokudanteki kaishaku*) of Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Watanabe Toyohiko, “Sūjitsu kakkōchō Makyūn ni kansuru keikoku yōshi,” Dec. 30, 1935, CJA0004831, National Archives of Korea.

<sup>15</sup> Kōno Setsuo, “Jinja fusanpai mondai ni tsuite,” 1936, CJA0002454, National Archives of Korea.



Fig. 5.1 Postcard of Heijō Shrine.  
SOURCE: Pusan Kwangyok Silip Pangmulgwan.

Kōno's assurances notwithstanding, state intervention had long circumscribed Koreans' spiritual lives. The Meiji Constitution prescribed narrow parameters for religious liberty. It guaranteed the freedom of belief—not practice—and only those beliefs that did not contravene public peace and order. The state also reserved the right to determine what constituted proper religion. Sect Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity held legal status as religions, while all others existed as “pseudo-religions” (*ruiji shūkyō*), subject to marginalization and occasionally, violent suppression.<sup>16</sup> In truth, Koreans did not fully enjoy even these limited protections. As colonial subjects, they did not possess constitutional rights. Koreans were subject instead to the 1915 Regulations on Religious Propagation, which remained silent on individual conscience. The statute merely stipulated protocols to surveillance official religions, requiring faith groups to report detailed information on their clergy, material assets, methods of proselytization, number

<sup>16</sup> Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 236-241.

of followers, and locations of their houses of worship.<sup>17</sup> De facto freedoms that Koreans exercised in their devotional lives hinged on the benign neglect of colonial administrators, rather than legal guarantees. So long as religious organizations disavowed anti-colonial nationalist activities, officials largely refrained from interposing in doctrinal matters.<sup>18</sup>

The Shinto Shrine Controversy in fact coincided with the systematic expansion of state intervention in religious affairs. In 1935, the Government-General launched the Spiritual Cultivation Movement. If we recall, the initiative promoted three primary qualities: a clear understanding of the “national body” (*kokutai*), a spirit of “gratitude and self-reliance,” and “reverence for gods and ancestors” (*keishin sūso*).<sup>19</sup> Officials deployed various strategies to advance this last, and arguably most important, objective. They encouraged filial piety through Confucian rites. They mandated shrine attendance for private school students. They also endeavored to “nurture faith” (*shinkōshin keibai*).<sup>20</sup> Recalcitrant Christians, it turned out, did not represent the only obstacle to state Shinto in Korea. Since the 1920s, socialists increased rapidly in number, especially among educated youth.<sup>21</sup> Government administrators critiqued that in addition to advocating anti-capitalist ideologies, leftists espoused a subversive form of historical materialism

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<sup>17</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, “Jinja jiin kisoku,” *Chōsen sōtokufu kanpō*, Aug. 16, 1915.

<sup>18</sup> In cases where colonial officials did perceive meddling in anti-colonial nationalist activities, they intervened heavy-handedly. The most notable examples are the 1911 “Conspiracy Case,” in which numerous prominent Korean Protestants were arrested for a supposed assassination plot on then Governor-General Terauchi Masatake, as well as the 1919 March First Movement, during which a disproportionate number of Christians were rounded up.

<sup>19</sup> Imaida Kiyonori, “Shinden kaihatsu ni kansuru ken.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Starting in 1927, colonial officials used the Peace Preservation Law to dissolve socialist organizations. By the early 1930s, they engaged in forced conversion (*tenkō*) to make leftists renounce their views. For more on the experiences of Korean leftist intellectuals under colonial coercion, see Sunyoung Park, “Everyday Life as Critique: Kim Namch’ǒn’s Literary Experiments, 1934-43” *Journal of Asian Studies* 68.3 (Aug. 2009): 861-893.

(*yubutsu shikan*).<sup>22</sup> They denigrated all spiritual notions as “opiates,” including the “reality” (*jitsuzai*) of the emperor’s divinity, his unbroken lineage from the sun goddess Amaterasu, and Japan’s unique status as the “land of the gods” (*kami no kuni*).<sup>23</sup> In the face of such radical atheism, the Spiritual Cultivation Movement underscored the importance of faith, rendering belief in the divine a key component of patriotism.

The Government-General went as far as to encourage faith through religion. According to officials, the menace of atheistic socialism owed in part to the limited inroads of organized religion in Korean society. Director of Social Affairs Ōm Ch’ang-sōp lamented Koreans’ apparent lack of religiosity. A government survey conducted in 1934, he pointed out, reported that only 880,675 people—just over four percent of the total population—identified with sect Shinto, Buddhism, or Christianity, the three legally-recognized religions. Others presumably adhered to pernicious “pseudo-religions,” superstitions, or no beliefs at all.<sup>24</sup> To remedy this state of affairs, the Spiritual Cultivation Movement thus added another watchword to its repertoire: “religious revival” (*shūkyō fukkō*).<sup>25</sup> Colonial officials hoped that the expansion of religious organizations would help quell the “confusion” (*konran*) and “anxiety” (*fuan*) caused by radical ideologies. In 1936, Vice Governor-General Imaida Kiyonori penned a directive outlining this new religious policy. He called upon provincial governors to help increase the number of ordained clergy, enlarge religious endowments, and make houses of worship more conveniently located. Imaida likewise underscored the need for more public

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<sup>22</sup> Watanabe Toyohiko, “Shinkōshin no keibai ni tsuite,” *Chōsen shakai jigyō* 33 (March 1935), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Tatsugaru, *Tairiku jinja taikan*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Ōm Ch’ang-sōp, “Chōsen ni okeru shūkyō no gaiyō,” *Chōsen* 239 (April, 1935), 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Kuga Jikō, “Shūkyō fukkō to ifu koto ni kansuru kanshō,” *Chōsen oyobi Manshū* 329 (April 1935), 48-49.

lectures, films, radio broadcasts, as well as newspaper and magazine articles that featured religious themes.<sup>26</sup>

As part of their efforts to expand the public presence of religion, government administrators advocated religious instruction in public schools. This step represented a dramatic reversal of previous colonial policies.<sup>27</sup> Since the earliest years of Japanese rule, the Government-General had strictly separated the two,<sup>28</sup> even banning religious teaching from private schools from 1915 to 1920.<sup>29</sup> Kanezuka Tasuku, a bureaucrat at the Department of Education, explained this shift in an essay for the journal, *Research on Korean Education* (*Chōsen no Kyōiku Kenkyū*).<sup>30</sup> He maintained that while policy-makers initially differentiated education from religion to avoid the sectarian strife that ensnared Western countries, they inadvertently gave rise to students who “forgot” about spiritual matters or fell into “excessive materialism” (*butsujitsu henchō*).<sup>31</sup> Even as the Director of Education publicly chided missionaries for “confusing” education and religion, the Spiritual Cultivation Campaign pushed for their closer integration. Colonial

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<sup>26</sup> Imaida Kiyonori, “Shinden kaihatsu ni kansuru ken.”

<sup>27</sup> Discussions on including religion in public school education in fact predated the Spiritual Cultivation Movement. As early as May 1932, the Government-General convened a nation-wide conference of middle school teachers to develop a plan for religious education. See Hikasa Mamoru, “Gakkō oyobi katei ni okeru shūkyō kyōiku,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Jan. 1936), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Colonial officials explained this policy as a matter of religious pluralism, to prevent schools from encroaching upon their students’ freedom of belief. See *The Seoul Press*, April 3, 1916.

<sup>29</sup> In 1915, the Government-General promulgated the Revisions in Regulations for Private Schools, which mandated that all teachers undertake Japanese language study, schools possess sufficient endowments, and that even private schools cease religious teaching or ceremonies. See Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea* (New York: International Press, 1926), 160.

<sup>30</sup> *Chōsen no Kyōiku Kenkyū* was the official journal for the Seoul Normal Academy (*Keijō shihan gakkō*), which trained instructors for public elementary schools.

<sup>31</sup> Kanezuka Tasuku, “Shūkyōteki shinnen ni tatsu kyōiku no sakkō,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Dec. 1935), 6. The previous year, North Kyōngsang educational committee published a study of ethics education in public schools across the province. In its survey of 521 elementary school students, officials found that nearly half expressed worrisome understandings of gods, ranging from atheism, “self-centered” perceptions, to “materialistic” viewpoints. See Keishō hokudō kyōikukai, shūshin kyōiku no kenkyū: Keihoku no kyōiku tokubetsugō (Taikyū: Keishō hokudō kyōikukai, 1934), “373-376.

educators emphasized special pedagogical training on religion,<sup>32</sup> the inclusion of religious topics in textbooks, as well as new approaches to science instruction, whereby teachers would highlight the “movement of deities” (*kamibutsu no ugoki*) in the natural world.<sup>33</sup> Kanezuka argued that religion represented such a fundamental part of students’ holistic development, that its exclusion from public schools constituted “discrimination” and a grave “distortion” of educational principles.<sup>34</sup>

What exactly did colonial officials have in mind for religious instruction? According to education reformers, public school teachers above all had an obligation to cultivate “religious sentiment” (*shūkyōteki jōsō*). Educators would begin by introducing students to the general conceptions (*daitai no gainen*) of religions in Korea.<sup>35</sup> They provided reference materials on various faiths, invited eminent religious leaders to give talks,<sup>36</sup> helped students form study groups,<sup>37</sup> as well as encouraged visits to local temples and shrines.<sup>38</sup> Government administrators made clear, however, that schools would not engage in religious indoctrination. As Hikasa Mamoru, an instructor at the Keijō Normal Academy, explained, teachers should avoid lessons on the specific tenets (*kyōri*) of Buddhism, Christianity, or any other established religion. Nor should they teach on sacred texts (*kyōten*).<sup>39</sup> Such precautions purported to preserve pluralism in the classroom, ensuring that educators did not privilege one group over another.<sup>40</sup> Colonial

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<sup>32</sup> Some expressed concern over the ability of bureaucrats and educators to foster religiosity, especially when many themselves did not subscribe to religious views. See “Shinden kaitaku shijō zadankai.”

<sup>33</sup> Kanezuka, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>35</sup> Watanabe Shinya, “Shinden kaihatsu to kyōiku,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Sept. 1935), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Hikasa Mamoru, “Kakkō oyobi katei ni tsukeru shūkyō kyōiku,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Jan. 1936), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Watanabe Shinya, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Kanezuka, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Hikasa, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Kanezuka, 6.

officials also emphasized the importance of shared commonalities between faiths for cultivating religious sentiment. “Broad religiosity” (*kōgi no shūkyōshin*), Kanezuka Tasuku maintained, “transcended” sect.<sup>41</sup> What mattered most were the shared values of “faith,” “love,” and “gratitude” toward God.<sup>42</sup>

Downplaying the differences among faith groups formed a central part of colonial discourses on shrine rites. State Shinto represented a form of supra-religion, not just “national morality.” Each religion might reveal versions of the “absolute truth of the universe” (*uchū no zettai jinri*), government administrators maintained, but state Shinto embodied its “totalistic essence” (*fuhenteki seishitsu*).<sup>43</sup> Writing for the journal *Chōsen Kōron*, long-time contributor Tobisawa Kyōyū further expounded on the relationship between state Shinto and religion. He contended that all religious teachings were “fundamentally the same,” converging and coming to fruition through the “august mind of the emperor.”<sup>44</sup> Diverging from this unity posed myriad dangers. Focusing myopically on “worship services” (*reihai gongyō*) or waiting endlessly for the “second coming” of Buddha, Christ, or Confucius kept faith communities mired in the past.<sup>45</sup> Misguided dogmatists—“adopted children of Buddha” or “slaves of Christ”—divisively claimed that their God alone merited praise.<sup>46</sup> Taken to an extreme, religious sects staked their own exclusivist claims to “ultimate truth,” challenging the vaunted place of state Shinto. Tobisawa warned that such offenses constituted “superstition” (*meishin*) and “heresy” (*jashin*)—the first step toward “national ruin.”<sup>47</sup> As Hikasa Mamoru remarked, true

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>42</sup> Hikasa, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Oyama Fumio, *Jinja to Chōsen*, 196.

<sup>44</sup> Tobisawa Kyōyū, “Nihon seishin ni tōitsu seyo,” *Chōsen Kōron* 216.6 (June 1938), 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 41.

“religious conviction” (*shūkyōteki shinnen*) entailed submission to the sovereignty of the Japanese emperor.<sup>48</sup>

A small but active community of Japanese Christians in Korea set out as exemplars of nation-centric piety.<sup>49</sup> Since the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident, Japanese settlers contributed significantly to spiritual mobilization initiatives, encouraging local schools, community organizations, and businesses to participate in shrine ceremonies.<sup>50</sup> Niwa Seijirō, a graduate of Kyōto’s Doshisha School of Theology and founder of the Japanese YMCA in Seoul,<sup>51</sup> did his part as well.<sup>52</sup> Just one month after George S. McCune and Velma L. Snook took their stance, Niwa penned a two-part editorial in the *Keijō Nippō* to help allay their misgivings. He expressed sympathy with missionaries, who had left their homes to toil in a faraway land. It came as no surprise that such devout individuals would balk at what they perceived as the rites of another faith. But however much Shinto ceremonies might resemble religious observances, Niwa emphasized, they expressed “deep reverence” for imperial ancestors, not “worship.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, he argued that shrine rites not only conformed to Christian beliefs, but they also

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<sup>48</sup> Hikasa Mamoru, “Gakkō oyobi katei ni okeru shūkyō kyōiku,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Jan. 1936), 13.

<sup>49</sup> The Christian community in Japan proper also adopted similar views. When Presbyterian missionary T. Stanley Soltau visited Tokyo in 1934, he remarked that “the Church in Japan” “has given in almost entirely.” The principal of the Kwansei Gakuin, a middle school founded by the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, informed Soltau that shrine ceremonies represented “purely patriotic and not religious” practices. Soltau received similar responses from nearly everyone else he met, ranging from the Anglican bishop Peter Yonetaro Matsui, General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan Ebisawa Akira, to Presbyterian missionary A. K. Reischauer. See T. Stanley Soltau, “Notes on the Shrine Problem,” in *Sinsa ch’ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, ed. Yi Man-yol (Seoul: Han’guk kidokkyo yōn’guso, 2004), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*, 346-353.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 348. For more on Niwa Seijirō’s activities in Korea see Michael Isaac Shapiro, “Christian Culture and Military Rule: Assimilation and its Limits during the First Decade of Japan’s Colonial Rule in Korea, 1910-19,” PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Niwa Seijirō became an outspoken advocate of the Spiritual Cultivation Movement, frequently attending roundtables as a representative of the Christian community. See, for instance, “Shinden kaihatsu zadankai,” *Chōsen no kyōiku kenkyū* (Jan. 1936).

<sup>53</sup> Niwa Seijirō, “Jinja fu sanhai mondai to ichibu senkyōshi no gokai (ue),” *Keijō Nippō*, Dec. 13, 1935.

helped enhance them. Honoring God and honoring one's parents went hand in hand. By revering the emperor's forebears, Niwa claimed, Christians lived up to God's commands. Faithful believers were also devoted patriots.<sup>54</sup>

Colonial officials refused to budge from their hardline stance on mission schools. By the time Yasutake Tadao became South P'yōngan provincial governor in 1935, he had years of experience promoting state Shinto in Taiwan.<sup>55</sup> More significantly, the Spiritual Cultivation Movement set into motion wide-ranging initiatives to invalidate Christians' conscientious objections. Not only did government administrators repeatedly emphasize the civic nature of shrine rites, but they also advanced new, state-centric understandings of religion. It was no longer enough that faith groups stayed out of anti-colonial political activities. According to officials, religious organizations had a paramount duty to facilitate state Shinto. The truth claims of the state trumped those of individual religions, rendering excessive devotion to doctrinal tenets politically suspect. Faith groups that failed to venerate the Japanese emperor or his deified ancestors were "course," "vulgar," and "anti-national" (*hikokkateki*)—not proper religions that merited legal protection.<sup>56</sup> The Presbyterian schools under Yasutake's jurisdiction became a test case for the colonial government. Considering South P'yōngan province (and P'yōngyang in particular) represented the center of Korean Protestantism, how Yasutake responded would have lasting effects across the peninsula.<sup>57</sup> The provincial governor informed

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<sup>54</sup> Niwa Seijirō, "Jinja fu sanhai mondai to ichibu senkyōshi no gokai (shita)," *Keijō Nippō*, Dec. 15, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> Prior to his appointment as the South P'yōngan provincial governor, he had spent three years in Taiwan as the chief of cultural and educational affairs.

<sup>56</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, (*Kani gakkō*) *Shūshinsho: Kyōshiyō*, 77.

<sup>57</sup> According to data collected by Presbyterian missionaries between 1932-33, South P'yōngan province boasted over 350 churches and nearly 50,000 attendees at weekly Sunday services. See *Annual Report of the Pyeongyang Station of the Chosen Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. for the Year 1932-1933*, 24.

McCune and Snook in no uncertain terms that continued intransigence would result in their termination and the closure of their schools.

### *Debating Shinto*

Presbyterian missionaries did not immediately grasp the magnitude of changes underway in colonial religious policies. McCune continued to defend his actions as matter of conscience, putting together a case for the “religious significance” of shrine rites. He pointed out that not only were many of the major shrines in Korea dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu, but shrine observances appeared like acts of worship, not mere expressions of respect.<sup>58</sup> His Presbyterian missionary colleagues likewise compiled a lengthy list enumerating all such qualities. The Japanese term for shrine, *jinja* (神社), comprised of Chinese characters denoting “spirit temple.” Shrine structures notably included a “sacrificial altar.” Missionaries also argued that ceremonies performed at shrines included components that would be “wholly devoid of meaning” if they were not in fact religious, such as “exorcising other spirits, the calling and dismissal of spirits, offerings and announcements to someone or something.”<sup>59</sup> McCune explained to Governor Yasutake that he believed bowing or paying obeisance at state shrines constituted “a sin against God.” By honoring spirits other than the Christian God, the practice contravened the first and second commandments, the most fundamental tenets of his faith.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Untitled.” in *Sinsach’ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 62.

<sup>59</sup> “Untitled.” in *Sinsach’ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 62.

<sup>60</sup> George McCune, “Letter to N. Yasutake,” Dec. 19, 1935.

Decades of church teachings in Korea complicated matters further. When missionaries first arrived in Korea during the late nineteenth century, they approached indigenous customs with the very same yardstick they used to evaluate Shinto observances. Did the practice appear to engage with the spirit world? Shamanism, divination, and geomancy were all deemed religious, and hence, impermissible to converts. That many Korean Christians perceived parallels between shrine observances to traditional *chesa* only confirmed the impermissibility of the rite for believers. Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries had long banned ancestral veneration as idolatry. The *Rules for the Native Church in Korea* (1894) codified the prohibition as a prerequisite for baptism. Violators faced the threat of church discipline, including excommunication.<sup>61</sup> Abstaining from ancestral veneration became a foundational part of Korean Protestant identity. Stories of converts suffering persecution for renouncing ancestral rites filled hagiographies of the early church.<sup>62</sup> Many families had not observed *chesa* for generations. According to McCune, Korean Protestants viewed Shinto practices such as “preparing food, calling back the spirits, bowing before them, and sending them back” as no different from their “habit of worship before they became Christians.”<sup>63</sup>

Considering this connection between ancestral veneration and Shinto ceremonies, many missionaries feared that yielding to government authorities would cause lasting damage to Protestantism in Korea. Condoning shrine rites required the church to “reverse” fifty years of “its former teachings and acts,”<sup>64</sup> causing Christians to return to

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<sup>61</sup> Robert E. Speer, *Report on the mission in Korea of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions* (New York: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1897), 16.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Mattie Wilcox Noble, *Sūngni ūi saenghwal* (Kyōngsōng: Chosōn Kidokkyo Ch'angmunsa, 1927).

<sup>63</sup> George S. McCune, “Letter to C.B. McAfee,” December 20, 1935, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 14, PHS.

<sup>64</sup> Bernheisel, *Forty One Years in Korea*, July 1937.

“that which they have given up as sin.”<sup>65</sup> Missionaries maintained that this about face would effectively blur the distinction between Christianity and “heathenism,” both in the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. “[O]nce the habit of shrine attendance had been accepted by the Christian people,” one missionary remarked, “it would not be long before... the outward posture and bearing of Christians” became “identically the same as the others.” Christian consciences, “inured” to shrine attendance, would soon “los[e] their perspective on the issue involved” entirely.<sup>66</sup> Worse still, Christians would have undermined the “witness of the Church to the non-Christian population” for the foreseeable future, perhaps for good.<sup>67</sup> Outsiders who witnessed such inconsistency and moral decline could hardly be expected to find Christianity attractive. “If we say now this is right,” Korean church leaders reportedly told William N. Blair, “nobody in Korea will believe in our sincerity anymore; we will have no more power to preach the Gospel.”<sup>68</sup>

Anxieties for the future of the Korean Church weighed especially heavily on George S. McCune. Many Protestant missionaries, McCune included, were not interested in education for its own sake.<sup>69</sup> Institutions like Sungsil Boys’ Academy and the Union Christian College served the greater purpose of Christian expansion. As J. F. Goucher put it, the goals of Christian education were threefold: “to train native helpers,” “to bring the non-Christian youth of the community under systematic religious influences,” and “to assist in the development of self-supporting and self-propagating

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<sup>65</sup> “Untitled,” *Sinsa ch’ambae yǒngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 65.

<sup>66</sup> “What are the Facts? And What are We to Do?” Box 17, Miscellaneous Folder, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>67</sup> “Report of the Board’s Commission to Chosen Regarding the Shrine Question,” *Sinsa ch’ambae yǒngmun charyojip*, vol. 1, 145.

<sup>68</sup> William N. Blair, “Statement by Dr. William N. Blair presented to the Board,” n.d., RG 140, Box 12, Folder 32, PHS.

<sup>69</sup> For more on his views on Christian education, see, George S. McCune, “What is a Christian College?” Box 4, Folder 102, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

churches.”<sup>70</sup> Mission schools focused overwhelmingly on religious instruction. At Union Christian College, students’ schedules included daily chapel time and Bible study.<sup>71</sup> Courses such as “The Works of Christ,” “Acts of the Apostles,” “Old Testament History” were required for all enrolled students.<sup>72</sup> During the summer months, students from the Boys’ Academy and the College formed preaching bands that went out to evangelize provinces across the peninsula. Graduates of mission schools went on to diverse professions, but they were especially well positioned to careers in ministry. Nearly one third of the entering class at the Union Theological seminary in 1932, for instance, consisted of graduates of the Union Christian College.<sup>73</sup> For McCune, deciding on shrine observances did not concern his individual conscience alone, it would directly impact the spiritual character of generations of Korean Protestant leaders to come.

As they expounded upon their conscientious objections, missionaries simultaneously redoubled their professions of loyalty. McCune emphasized to Governor Yasutake his “profound respect and deep loyalty towards His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor, the Imperial Household and towards those Great Personages whose memory the state so rightly cherishes.” “As a Christian,” he vowed to continue leading students to do likewise.<sup>74</sup> Missionary educators also touted their “willingness and readiness” to

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<sup>70</sup> J. F. Goucher, “Missions and Education,” *Gospel in all Lands* 26 (August 1901), 314.

<sup>71</sup> “Schedule,” April 15, 1931, Box 10, Folder 274, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>72</sup> “Sūjitsu Gakkō yōran,” May 1, 1935, Box 10, Folder 274, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>73</sup> *Annual Report of the Pyengyang Station of the Chosen Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. for the Year 1932-1933*, Box 19, Folder 6, Samuel A. Moffett Letters and Papers, Moffett Korea Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>74</sup> George McCune, “Letter to N. Yasutake,” Dec. 19, 1935, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 10, PHS.

participate in patriotic ceremonies “in any way that our Christian conscience will allow.”<sup>75</sup> Early on, T. Stanley Soltau proposed four possible alternatives:

1. That the Christian schools while attending, be allowed to stand at one side and take no part in the ceremonies and be excused from making a bow.
2. That the authorities be requested to remove all religious elements from the ceremonies.
3. That the Christian schools be allowed to hold their own patriotic ceremonies at the monuments at a different time...
4. That the Christian schools be permitted to have their own patriotic memorial services in their school buildings.<sup>76</sup>

Missionaries reasoned that if shrine rites indeed represented civic observances, any of these propositions should serve just as well in fostering dutiful Japanese subjects.

Negotiations with government officials, however, went nowhere. With McCune’s resignation in January 1936, missionaries debated whether they would permit shrine attendance going forward or close mission schools altogether. The issue produced deep fissures across denominational lines, with every mission body except the (American) Northern and Southern Presbyterian missions acquiescing to government directives. Dissent emerged among the American Presbyterians as well.<sup>77</sup> A vocal minority argued against any contradiction between shrine attendance and Christianity. Horace H. Underwood, President of the Chosen Christian College, emerged as one of the most prominent advocates for compromise.<sup>78</sup> He granted that shrine observances might appear “strange and perhaps objectionable” to fellow believers. After all, ceremonies at state shrines “borrowed from religious Shintoism and still retain[ed] many seemingly religious

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<sup>75</sup> “Statement Concerning Our Attitude Toward Patriotic Ceremonies,” in *Sinsa ch’ambae yǒngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 32.

<sup>76</sup> T. Stanley Soltau, “Letter to Dr. McAfee,” in *Sinsa ch’ambae yǒngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 10.

<sup>77</sup> The Northern and Southern Methodist Episcopal missions, Australian and Canadian Presbyterian missions, Seventh-day Adventist mission, Anglican mission, and Roman Catholic mission all consented for their students to participate in shrine ceremonies.

<sup>78</sup> Horace H. Underwood was also the son of pioneer Presbyterian missionaries Horace G. and Lillias Underwood.

features.” While Underwood himself did not view the ceremonies as religious, he argued that even for those who did, merely attending or bowing at shrines should not offend their conscience. “No genuflection or prostration,” “rubbing of the hands,” or other “distinctly religious act” was required. Those in attendance simply had to “mak[e] a slight inclination of the head and body” as an expression of respect.<sup>79</sup>

Henry W. Lampe, a Presbyterian educator based in Sǒnch’ǒn, north P’yōngan province, proposed yet another approach. He agreed with his colleagues that Christians should not cede to unbelievers the power to define the meaning shrine observances. “[L]et us not even seek their interpretation,” Lampe insisted. As Christians, their “law [was] the Word of God.” But rather than defending missionaries’ prerogative to view Shinto ceremonies as religious, he urged his colleagues consider the opposite. Protestant doctrine taught that no God existed apart from the Christian God. Believers knew that “there are no spirits in the shrine,” that “no one is able to order the spirits to come or go, nor can they hear or answer prayer.” Lampe maintained that Christians could bow at Shinto shrines with clear consciences. He went even further, suggesting that believers Christianize the rite in their own hearts. “[I]n order to keep our minds and hearts right,” Lampe remarked, missionaries and students could turn the shrine observance into an opportunity for Christian intercession, “offer[ing] a prayer in our hearts to the God of all life and the Ruler of all nations and princes, that He bless the emperor, all his household, and all his subjects.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “The Korea Shrine Question: A Debate,” *The Presbyterian Tribune*, Jan. 20, 1938.

<sup>80</sup> Henry W. Lampe, “Letter to the Mission,” 1937, Box 63, Folder 4, Korea Materials (1936-1941) - 1937, Moffett Korea Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

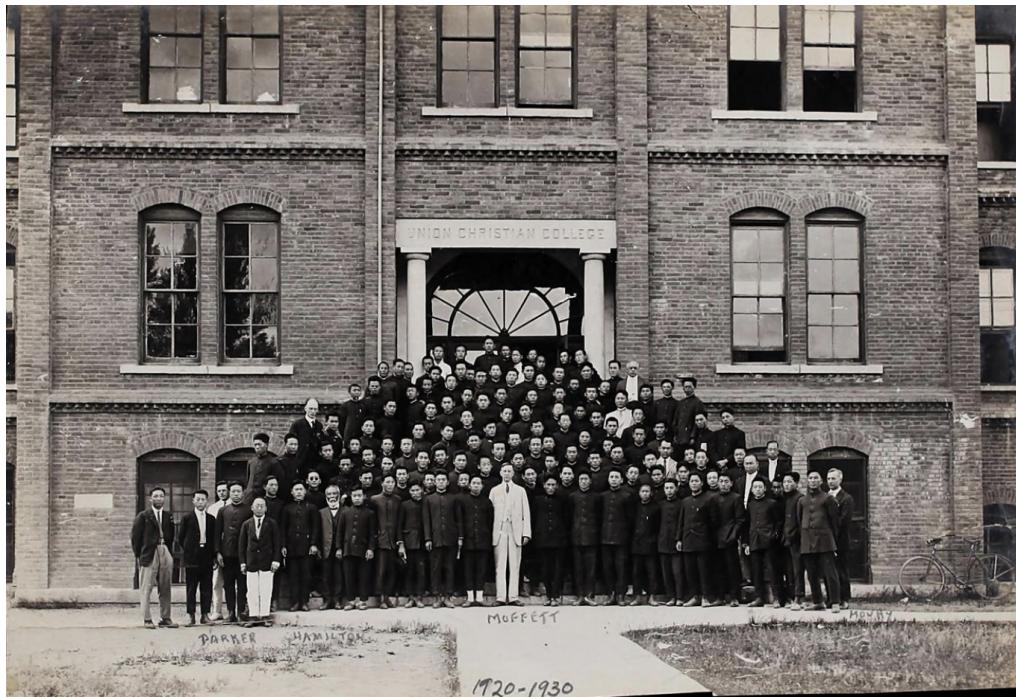


Fig. 5.2 Union Christian College, P'yōngyang, 1930.  
SOURCE: Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Moffett Korea Collection.

It was no coincidence that many of the loudest voices in defense of shrine attendance came from missionary educators. McCune had felt duty-bound to shield his students from betraying their religious convictions. Underwood, Lampe, and McCune's own successor E. M. Mowry felt equally obligated to try to save Christian schools from closure. Continued intransigence spelled the end of their life's work. It also meant the premature cessation of fifty years of Protestant educational endeavors in Korea. Mission schools had come a long way since pioneer missionaries established the first boys' and girls' academies in Seoul during the late nineteenth century. James Fischer, a professor at the Chosen Christian College, offered the following description of missionary-affiliated institutions in 1926:

These schools represent an investment in land, buildings, and equipment of about \$10,000,000; they employ the time of between two and three hundred missionary educational workers, and about 2,500 Korean and Japanese teachers, and have

annual budgets totaling half a million dollars.<sup>81</sup>

Nearly a decade later, missionaries had even more to lose. The Northern Presbyterian mission operated six designated high schools, two undesignated high schools, and three colleges in cooperation with other denominations.<sup>82</sup> By 1932, P'yōngyang alone boasted 3,500 students enrolled in mission institutions, 2,200 of whom attended Presbyterian schools.<sup>83</sup>

The dissenting Presbyterian minority viewed their cause as nothing short of a moral mandate. Horace H. Underwood understood full well the dangers associated with consenting to shrine observances. The choice would be “unpopular” among certain missionary colleagues, as well as benefactors in America. It might even lead some Korean Christians “into error” concerning “family ancestor worship.”<sup>84</sup> Underwood opted to take the risks. Just like his hardline colleagues, he feared for the future of Protestantism in Korea. Without mission schools, would-be church leaders could no longer receive their education in Christian settings. Many families would have to send their children to government schools, where they would not only have to attend shrine ceremonies, but they would also have to confront “too frequently anti-Christian” influences.<sup>85</sup> The only other choice was for believers to go without schooling altogether, which boded no better for the Korean Church. “[I]f we can without violation of conscience comply with [government] requirements,” Underwood maintained, “our

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<sup>81</sup> James E. Fischer, *Democracy and Mission Education in Korea* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1928), 1.

<sup>82</sup> William R. Langdon, “Letter to Edwin L. Neville,” in *Sinsa ch'ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 1, 100.

<sup>83</sup> *Annual Report of the Pyeongyang Station of the Chosen Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. for the Year 1932-1933*.

<sup>84</sup> Horace H. Underwood, “Letter to McAfee,” in *Sinsa ch'ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 99.

<sup>85</sup> Henry W. Lampe, “Letter to the Mission,” 1937. Box 63, Folder 4, Korea Materials (1936-1941) - 1937, Moffett Korea Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

responsibility both to the church at home and the church here requires us to do so.”<sup>86</sup> He refused to “claim the luxury of ‘martyrdom’ and retire from the field (on a pension),” while Christian youth struggled to forge a path forward on their own.<sup>87</sup>

Whatever their stance, missionaries grappled over whose definition of religion ultimately mattered. Even the most outspoken critics of shrine ceremonies recognized that “the state may or must exercise some control of religion.” What alarmed missionaries was the scope of state power, which seemed to make and remake the bounds of religion at will. “The very terms of the phrase ‘religious liberty,’” one missionary noted, were “no longer fixed.” “What is the ‘religion’ which is to be allowed freedom?” he asked. Did it merely entail “speculation” concerning the “origin and end of the universe,” or did it also extend to “the body of moral ideas and sanctions” that “govern[ed]… men and nations?”<sup>88</sup> The shrine controversy increasingly made clear that officials envisioned the former, not latter. The state further insisted that patriotism reigned “supreme,” accommodating religion only so long as it respected “the claims of such a patriotism.”<sup>89</sup> McCune and likeminded missionaries refused to accept such a narrowly circumscribed view of religion. They challenged the notion that the state had the authority to define religion by “official fiat.”<sup>90</sup> “We have not been willing to allow a non-Christian government to interpret for us what is and what is not religion,” Charles F. Bernheisel remarked. “That question,” he insisted, “must be decided by ourselves.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Horace H. Underwood, “Letter to McAfee,” in *Sinsa ch’ambae yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 99.

<sup>87</sup> “The Korea Shrine Question: A Debate.”

<sup>88</sup> “Some Notes on Religious Liberty,” in *Sinsa ch’ambae munje yōngmun charyojip*, vol. 2, 7-8.

<sup>89</sup> “What are the Facts? And What are We to Do?”

<sup>90</sup> “Confidential Letter,” Feb. 4, 1936, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 18, PHS.

<sup>91</sup> Charles F. Bernheisel, *Forty One Years in Korea*, Feb. 14, 1936, Box 34, Folder 2, Korea Missionary Files, Moffett Korea Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

Advocates of compromise adopted a different approach to the issue. Instead of demanding greater accommodation from government officials, which they saw as a lost cause, they called for greater toleration from their fellow missionaries. Underwood in particular emphasized each believer's freedom of conscience. He insisted that Christians could consent to shrine observances in good faith, and that those who bowed at state shrines were not apostates. After all, "many, many thousands of Japanese Christians... [felt] they [could] attend."<sup>92</sup> "To their own Master they stand or fall," another missionary echoed. Only "God Himself" had the "right" to judge.<sup>93</sup> Underwood complained that only majoritarian beliefs appeared to carry weight in his mission. A vote of 69 to 16 decided the fate of all Northern Presbyterian missionaries, barring them from all further educational work.<sup>94</sup> When it appeared likely that mission schools would shutter completely, he lamented, "Shall we at this time... jeopardize our whole work and abandon the Korean young people" simply because "some individuals conceive[d] a bow to be worship?" Underwood resented that matters of conscience were "dictat[ed]" according to "majority rule."<sup>95</sup>

In the end, critics of shrine ceremonies had the final say. The Northern Presbyterian mission decided that continuing mission schools under the given circumstances contravened Christian principles. Institutions that consented to Shinto ceremonies, it maintained, had no claim to Christian values. "[A]ny educational system which has made an essential compromise with truth... is already null and void as a

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<sup>92</sup> "The Korea Shrine Question: A Debate," 9.

<sup>93</sup> John A. Mackay, "The Board of Foreign Missions and the Chosen Question." Box 17, Miscellaneous Folder, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>94</sup> Bernheisel, *Forty One Years in Korea*.

<sup>95</sup> "The Korea Shrine Question: A Debate," 10.

system of real education,” C. L. McLaren declared. Without the “discipline of truth,” he insisted, “the school is no longer, and Christian it certainly is not.”<sup>96</sup> William N. Blair suggested that believers simply educate children themselves, in their own homes.<sup>97</sup> For opponents of Shinto rites, the search for compromise was futile. “[I]f shrine worship is apostasy, if it be contrary to God’s commands,” J. Gordon Holdcroft maintained, “there is but one thing for any Christian to do, he must obey God.” Christians had to obey, “even though Boards and Churches lose every school they have, though no child can obtain a Christian education, though Christians cannot exist, but suffer martyrdom.”<sup>98</sup> In May 1938, Presbyterian missionaries resolved to close all mission schools in P’yōngyang.

### *Rites under Total War*

On September 9, 1938, the West Gate Church in P’yōngyang, one of the oldest and largest in the city, hosted a meeting of the General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church. The Assembly convened its members to decide on a matter of great urgency. According to a document circulated among delegates the previous week, the Church needed to deliberate on Shinto shrine observances once and for all.<sup>99</sup> Recipients of the missive understood that no real discussion would take place that day. Clergymen who arrived at the church found policemen everywhere. Uniformed officers stood guard at the entrance to turn away spectators, while plainclothes police lined the walls inside

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<sup>96</sup> C. L. McLaren, “The Crisis Facing the Christian Church in Korea,” RG 140 Box 12, Folder 20, PHS .

<sup>97</sup> William N. Blair, “Statement by William N. Blair Presented to the Board,” RG 140 Box 12, Folder 32, PHS.

<sup>98</sup> J. Gordon Holdcroft, “Is Shrine Worship Apostasy?” *The Presbyterian* 30 (July 1940), 3.

<sup>99</sup> By the time the General Assembly convened in September 1938, 17 out of 38 presbyteries of the Korean Presbyterian Church had already been pressured to consent to Shinto shrine observances. Choi Jae-Keun, *The Church under Japanese Colonialism*, 128.

the sanctuary. The provincial governor himself appeared promptly at the start of the meeting to offer remarks on the importance of cultivating national spirit during the present time of crisis. As expected, when the General Assembly moderator brought up the issue of shrine ceremonies, the motion passed. Shrine observances were declared strictly “patriotic,” thereby biblically permissible and proper for all.<sup>100</sup> To make this point even clearer, the Presbyterian leaders moved to set an example for rank and file church members. Once the meeting adjourned, the assembly delegates went together to pay their respects at Heijō Shrine.<sup>101</sup>



Fig. 5.3 Presbyterian General Assembly Representatives at Heijō Shrine, 1938.

SOURCE: *Chosōn Ilbo*, September 12, 1938.

From the start, the issue of shrine observances elicited diverse responses from Korean Protestants, as it did among the missionary community. Some staunchly refused.

<sup>100</sup> Chosōn yasogyo changnohoe, *Chosōn yasogyo changnohoe ch'onghoe che 27hoe hoeüirok* (P'yōngyang: Chosōn yasogyo changnohoe, 1938), 9.

<sup>101</sup> “An account of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea held at Pyongyang from September 9th, 1938 insofar as it relates to action on the question of obeisance at national shrines,” RG 140 Box 12, Folder 27, PHS.

When McCune and Snook first refused to attend shrine observances, members of P'yōngyang's clergy stood in solidarity. Many agreed that Shinto rites constituted idolatry tantamount to traditional ancestral rites.<sup>102</sup> After the General Assembly decision, a coalition of pastors and lay leaders surreptitiously set out to organize an anti-Shinto resistance movement. In 1939, Presbyterian pastor Chu Ki-ch'ol and evangelist Yi Chu-wōn outlined a plan of action for South P'yōngan province. Christians would stop enrolling their children in schools that participated in shrine rites. They would work to dissolve churches that capitulated to state demands. Sunday worship services would take place in private homes. That same year, Pastor Han Sang-dong proposed a kindred strategy for South Kyōngsang province, appending several additional clauses. He advocated that Christians refuse baptism from pastors who attended shrine rites, provide mutual assistance to dissident believers, as well as create an alternative network of presbyteries. Before long, Protestant leaders in North Kyōngsang, South Chōlla, and Manchuria attempted to follow suit.<sup>103</sup>

Many more, however, chose to acquiesce to government demands. The issue of Christian schools unsurprisingly weighed more heavily on Korean Protestants than it did on missionaries. Parents did not relish the idea of shrine attendance, but neither could they cut off their children from all educational opportunities. In 1937, when missionaries decided to recuse themselves from instructional work, church-goers rallied to keep the mission schools open. One option they pursued was transferring the institutions to local

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<sup>102</sup> A group of P'yōngyang Theological Seminary professors, for instance, maintained that missionaries could not publicly endorse sin by operating schools that consented to shrine observances. "Letter to McCune," March 28, 1937, Box 19, Folder 489, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>103</sup> Kim Yang-sōn, *Han'guk kidokkyo yōksa yōn'gu* (Seoul: Kidokkyo munsa, 1971), 195-199.

oversight. If missionaries would not teach their children, perhaps Koreans could take their place. Prominent Protestants like Cho Man-sik, O Yun-sŏn, and Ko Han-gyu threw themselves into finding new financial benefactors,<sup>104</sup> eventually convincing two wealthy Koreans, Yi Ch'un-sōp and Han In-bo, to pledge a one-million-yen endowment for the Girls' and Boys' Academies, as well as the Union Christian College.<sup>105</sup> Supporters then initiated a petition campaign to appeal directly to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Signatories included 29 faculty members of Union Christian College, 41 local pastors, and 67 elders, not to mention numerous cultural and social luminaries.<sup>106</sup> The mission board ultimately rejected this proposal, but not for want of Korean Christian backing.<sup>107</sup>

Even more than their concern for Christian youth, Korean church leaders experienced enormous pressure to adopt the official line on shrine rites. Colonial officials virtually stifled all public debate. Not long after George S. McCune and Velma L. Snook took their stance, the police bureau deployed the Peace Preservation Law to prohibit Christians from discussing Shinto ceremonies, whether in public or private settings.<sup>108</sup> Colonial administrators also carefully orchestrated the General Assembly session to ensure their desired outcome. Not only did the meeting take place under the watchful

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<sup>104</sup> “Sasimnyön yoksa rül kajin Sungchön, Sunjung, Sungui ui t'ongbihan ch'oechu,” *Kidok Sinbo*, Feb. 10, 1937.

<sup>105</sup> “Sungchön, Sungui ryanggyo e 70 man wön ül tamdang, Yi Ch'un-sōpssi nün Sungsil wihae 3 man wön,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Feb. 28, 1937.

<sup>106</sup> “Petition,” March 5, 1937, Box 19, Folder 489, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>107</sup> This initiative largely failed due to the objections of hardline Presbyterian missionaries in Korea. They doubted whether the Protestant character of their schools could be preserved under the present circumstances, regardless of the solemn vows Yi Ch'un-sōp and Han In-bo made to continue religious instruction for students. See “Papers attached to the transferring application of the Union Christian College and the Soong-eui Girls' Academy Presented by Mr. I. P. Han.” Box 19, Folder 489, George Shannon McCune Collection, University of Hawaii Hamilton Library.

<sup>108</sup> “Kyöngmuguk esodo tanyon kang'ap hal t'aedo,” *Choson Ilbo*, Dec. 10, 1935.

eyes of the police, but anticipated trouble makers were barred from attending in the first place. Police officials paid visits to each delegate ahead of time, making clear that only those promising to vote affirmatively, or at the very least, refrain from voicing opposition, could be present.<sup>109</sup> When Kim Sǒn-du, a pastor from North Hamgyōng province, insisted on making his grievances heard, the police intercepted him en route, detaining the minister until the meeting adjourned.<sup>110</sup> Such harassment only continued after the General Assembly gave official sanction to shrine observances. Clergymen who refused to sign statements affirming the practice faced removal from ministry (and subsequent loss of livelihood), threats against their children's educational and professional opportunities, not to mention imprisonment.<sup>111</sup>

The colonial police rounded up recalcitrant Christians as dangerous agitators. Nearly two thousand pastors and lay leaders fell under arrest.<sup>112</sup> Son Yang-wǒn,<sup>113</sup> a Presbyterian pastor from Kwangju, South Chǒlla province, was one such case.<sup>114</sup> In 1940, he was charged with disturbing the public peace, having denounced shrine observances before members of his congregation. Under custody, Son faced a barrage of questions regarding his religious views. What was his understanding of the Bible? What comprised the main doctrines of the Church? How did he understand the nature of God?<sup>115</sup> Such

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<sup>109</sup> Clark, *Living Dangerously in Korea*, 218.

<sup>110</sup> William Blair and Bruce Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings which Followed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 92-93.

<sup>111</sup> C. L. McLaren, "The Crisis Facing the Christian Church in Korea, 1938," RG 140 Box 12, Folder 20, PHS.

<sup>112</sup> The anti-Shinto resistance movement did not get very far on account of the arrest of its key leaders. Chu Ki-ch'ǒl, Yi Chu-wǒn, and Han Sang-dong each served multiple prison sentences. See Kim Yang-sǒn, *Han'guk kidokkyo yǒksa yǒn'gu*, 198-199; Chung-shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 156.

<sup>113</sup> In accordance with the colonial name-change policy, Son Yang-wǒn had adopted the Japanese name, Ōmura Tadamoto (大村良源).

<sup>114</sup> According to one estimate, over 2,000 Korean Protestants were arrested for their opposition to Shinto shrines. See Kim Yang-sǒn, *Han'guk kidokkyo yǒksa yǒn'gu*, 201.

<sup>115</sup> "Son Yang-wǒn sinmun chosǒ," in *Sinsa ch'ambae munje charyojip*, ed. Kim Sǔng-t'ae, vol. 3 (Seoul: Han'guk Kidokkyo Yǒksa Yǒn'guso, 2014), 31-36.

inquiries had become standard practice during wartime. Interrogators suspected that Christians' rejection of Shinto rites represented just one of many subversive ideas rooted in their fundamentalist beliefs. Son proved them right. He declared that all gods besides the Christian God constituted idols. The Japanese imperial ancestress Amaterasu fell under the dominion of God. The emperor was a mere mortal. Perhaps most troubling of all, Son subscribed to millenarian tenets.<sup>116</sup> He claimed that all nations, including Japan, would soon come to an end, making way for Christ's kingdom on earth.<sup>117</sup> According to the prosecutor, these views were tantamount to support for political revolution. The court sentenced Son to eighteen months of imprisonment.<sup>118</sup>

Korean Christians paid dearly for persisting in their opposition against Shinto observances. Many, including Son Yang-wǒn,<sup>119</sup> encountered what one observer called "crude and refined cruelty."<sup>120</sup> An anonymous letter penned in June 1938 provided a particularly detailed account of prisoners' afflictions:

One man last fall was laced tightly in a leather jacket, lowered into a well to soak up the leather, and they then placed him on a hot Korean floor to dry out, till he was almost strangled. Pepper water was forced down his nose to strangle him and then hypodermic injections given him to bring him back from unconsciousness. When his stomach was tightly distended with this pepper water, men jumped up and down on his stomach. Pepper was forced under his fingernails to make them fester, and he was beaten day after day for thirty days, but refused to worship at a shrine.

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<sup>116</sup> Colonial officials showed especial interest in ascertaining Christians' millenarian views. In 1943, the Holiness Church and the Seventh Day Adventists were disbanded for their emphasis on Christ's second coming, even though the latter had consented to sending their students to Shinto shrine observances. See Kim, *Han'guk kidokkyo yōksa yōn'gu*, 202.

<sup>117</sup> "Son Yang-wǒn sinmun chosō," 35-39.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>119</sup> For an account of Son Yang-wǒn's experiences in prison, see Son Yang-wǒn, *Sarang ūi sun'gyoja: Son Yang-wǒn Moksa okchung mokhoe*, Son Tong-hŭi, ed. (Seoul: Poisûsa, 2001).

<sup>120</sup> William N. Blair, "Letter to Dr. Hooper," Jan. 4, 1940, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 33, PHS.

The author did not expect many to continue resisting police orders, “for the sufferings are too terrible for words.” The circulation of such “torture tales,” he noted, effectively rendered people “too terrorized to stand out against the police.”<sup>121</sup>

Under such conditions, church communities began conforming to colonial officials’ vision for Korean Christianity, actively advancing state agendas. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the Government-General redoubled its efforts to foster loyalty, now under the banner of the *kōminka undō* (imperialization movement). Koreans were now required to recite the “Oath of Imperial Subjects” (*kōkoku shinmin no seishi*). Primary schools increased their emphasis on Japanese-language instruction, relegating Korean-language classes from required coursework to electives.<sup>122</sup> With the inauguration of the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (*kokumin seishin sōdōin undō*), Korean churches were directly marshalled to support the war effort. The Presbyterian and Methodist denominations each formed spiritual mobilization associations, while local churches organized patriotic associations (K. *aegukpan*, J. *aikokuhan*). Much like their village- and town-level counterparts, church patriotic associations resolved to promote the imperial spirit (*teikoku seishin*), unity of Japan and Korea (*naisen ittai*), reform of everyday life, thrift, and diligence.<sup>123</sup> In P’yōngyang, twenty-eight churches adopted a more specific program to establish flagpoles in churchyards, display patriotic slogans at the front of church buildings, and collect freewill patriotic offerings.<sup>124</sup> As a matter of course, Christians attended shrine ceremonies.

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<sup>121</sup> “Dear friends letter,” June 6, 1938, RG 140, Box 12, Folder 25, PHS.

<sup>122</sup> For more on the *kōminka* movement, see Chou, “The *Kōminka* movement in Taiwan and Korea.”

<sup>123</sup> “Aikokuhan no genkyō,” 1938, CJA0003903, National Archives of Korea.

<sup>124</sup> “The Present Situation in Korea,” *Sinsa ch’ambae yōngmun charyoip*, vol. 2, 364.

Government intervention in religious life only continued to intensify. In November 1940, the Presbyterian General Assembly adopted a plan to reorganize the church to better reflect “pure Japanese Christianity.”<sup>125</sup> This new Christianity had several key characteristics. For one, it would no longer depend on Western resources and personnel. Korean Presbyterian leaders pledged to reject foreign funding for church activities, as well as remove missionaries from leadership positions. Pure Japanese Christianity also prioritized the “national body” (*kukch’e*) above all. Much like other Koreans, church members would regularly attend shrine observances, raise the national flag, and recite the Oath of Imperial Subjects. Presbyterian leaders resolved take special measures to ensure this national orientation. The General Assembly would set the standards for ordaining ministers, presumably limiting clergy to those who proved themselves sufficiently patriotic. The Assembly would also review church doctrines, policies, and rites for any impropriety, revising hymns and Christian texts as necessary to conform to the national spirit. Bibles and hymnals produced by foreign missionaries as a matter of course would cease to be used during church services. Lastly, the plan emphasized that Korean Christians would continue to forge close ties with their Japanese brethren, both in the peninsula and in the metropole.<sup>126</sup>

At the height of war, boundaries that once defined rites as civic or religious, public or private effectively collapsed. Some church leaders began to publicly advocate ancestral veneration under pressure from colonial officials.<sup>127</sup> In 1939, Kang Paek-nam,

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<sup>125</sup> The Korean Methodist Church adopted a similar proposal in October 1940. See Choi Jae-Keun, *The Korean Church under Japanese Colonialism*, 157-158.

<sup>126</sup> “Ilbonjök Kidokkyo ro paljok,” *Maeil Sinbo*, November 10, 1940.

<sup>127</sup> To be sure, colonial efforts to promote ancestral rites among Christians began much earlier in 1934, with the promulgation of the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice*. According to *An Explanation of Rites*, the official commentary, *chesa* represented the “the great duty of humanity,” “wholly different from so-called idol worship.” After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, however, colonial administrators began to censor

penned a two-part essay titled, “Ancestral Veneration is not Idolatry.”<sup>128</sup> The Methodist pastor did not dispute the importance of the first and second commandments. God’s injunction against worshiping other gods, as well as creating false idols, represented the foundational tenets of Christianity. Compelling Christians to transgress these commands, he pointed out, was no different from “taking their very lives.” Kang insisted that ancestral veneration hardly constituted idolatry. The *chesa* ceremony did not entail the worship of celestial bodies or man-made figures. It simply enabled Koreans to “cherish” the memory of their “parents’ benevolence.”<sup>129</sup> To malign this practice as idolatry represented a heinous offense, utterly “intolerable” in human society. Public critiques against *chesa* abstention—even from within the Protestant community—were hardly new. But at the height of wartime mobilization, Kang took up this familiar discourse not for the sake of the Korean nation, but to promote loyalty to the Japanese empire. He charged that overzealousness with regard to the first and second commandments led Christians to violate God’s fifth commandment to honor their parents, not to mention their duty to venerate the imperial ancestors at Shinto shrines.<sup>130</sup>

Colonial officials intervened more heavy-handedly in religious wedding ceremonies as well.<sup>131</sup> In August 1940, the Korean League of National Spiritual

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Protestant critiques against ancestral veneration. In 1938, when *The Korea Mission Field* suggested rejected chesa as idolatry, denying the continued presence of ancestral spirits after death, the colonial police promptly censored the essay as contrary to public peace. See Chōsen sōtokufu, *Girei Kaisetsu*, 49-50; “Shitsumu sankō shiryō - Ōmun kankei - ‘Sosen sūhai,’” *Chōsen shuppan keisatsu geppō* 122 (Oct. 1938).

<sup>128</sup> Wartime pressures prompted others to change their minds on ancestral veneration as well. Later, in 1944, Yi Kwang-su penned an essay titled, “The Heart of Bowing” (*Chōl hanūn maūm*), in which he emphasized the paramount moral duties of *chesa* and Shinto shrine observances. See Yi Kwang-su, “Chōl hanūn maūm,” *Sinsidae* (July 1944), 24-28.

<sup>129</sup> Kang Paek-nam, “Chosang sungbae nūn usang i anim (1),” *Ch’ōngnyōn* 9 (Feb. 1939), 7-8.

<sup>130</sup> Kang Paek-nam, “Chosang sungbae nūn usang i anim (2),” *Ch’ōngnyōn* 9 (March 1939), 19.

<sup>131</sup> In 1937, North Kyōngsang provincial officials presaged this shift by calling for the Confucian rites of passage (*kankonsōsai*) to be infused with “religious ceremonies” (*shūkyōteki gishiki*) as a part of the Spiritual Cultivation Movement. See Chōsen sōtokufu, *Dōchiji kaigi jimon tōshinsho*, 95.

Mobilization (J. *Kokumin seishin sōdōryoku*) had issued the *Revised Standard for Wedding Ceremonies*.<sup>132</sup> Wartime exigencies called for updates to the 1934 *Guidelines on Ritual Practice*. The new directive included added austerity measures, ranging from excising floral décor to prohibiting alcohol consumption. It also promoted Shinto observances in unprecedented ways. Formerly, Shinto weddings had been categorized as religious rites, the official purview of sect shrines like the Seoul Shrine,<sup>133</sup> rather than the monumental state-run Korea Shrine (*Chōsen Jingū*) atop Namsan (South Mountain).<sup>134</sup> The *Guidelines* had included sect shrines as acceptable wedding venues alongside other houses of worship. The *Revised Standard* advocated Shinto weddings—now held at state shrines—as a civic duty. It mandated that all ethnic Japanese opt for shrine nuptials,<sup>135</sup> while strongly encouraging Koreans to do likewise, though one's home, Confucian shrines, Buddhist temples, and community centers remained acceptable venues.<sup>136</sup> At a time when most people in metropolitan Japan continued to perform marriage rites in their own homes, the Government-General in Korea transformed the Shinto wedding ceremony into a vehicle of imperialization.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> “Konrei sōgi no kijun seitei,” *Kokumin sōryoku* vol. 3, no. 8 (1941).

<sup>133</sup> The Seoul Shrine, which was founded in 1898, represented a religious institution primarily for Japanese settlers. The Government-General established the Korea Shrine in 1925 to serve as a civic space for Japanese settlers and Koreans alike. See Henry, *Assimilating Seoul*, 42.

<sup>134</sup> Todd Henry notes that the performance of marriage rites became a point of contention between the priests of the two shrines. While government officials discouraged priests at Korea Shrine from conducting weddings, to preserve the separation of sectarian and civic Shinto shrines, many Korea Shrine priests persisted anyway, largely because of their reluctance to give up the income generated by performing wedding rites. *Ibid.*, 69-72.

<sup>135</sup> The *Revised Standard* included two separate instructions on wedding rites, one for ethnic Japanese and another for ethnic Koreans. The creation of ritual directives for Japanese settlers represented a significant expansion of colonial intervention, considering the *Guidelines* was written largely for Koreans. While private Government-General documents suggest that colonial officials hoped Japanese settlers would simplify their own ritual customs as well, public campaigns focused almost entirely on reforming Korean customs. See Watanabe, “Girei junsoku no shushi fukyū ni kan suru ken,” Dec. 4, 1934, CJA27798, National Archives of Korea.

<sup>136</sup> “Konrei sōgi no kijun seitei.”

<sup>137</sup> According to Barbara Ambros, the Shinto wedding ceremony was a modern invention that emerged in the late 19th century among the families of Shinto priests and Sectarian Shinto groups, at a time when



Fig. 5.4 Japanese Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1930s.  
SOURCE: Tongguksa Private Collection.



Fig. 5.5 Korean Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1940s.  
SOURCE: Tongguksa Private Collection.

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Buddhist and Christian marriage rites started to grow in popularity. Ambros notes that while Shinto weddings had spread from Tokyo to other urban centers like Osaka and Kyoto by the 1930s, the majority of Japanese continued to perform marriage rites at home. See Barbara Ambros, *Women in Japanese Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 125-129.

The *Revised Standard* altered the discourse on religious rites in yet another way. Once thinly-veiled colonial critiques against Protestant wedding ceremonies grew strident. The updated list of acceptable wedding venues, for instance, conspicuously left out Christian churches. The *Revised Standard* also prohibited practices commonly associated with new weddings. Grooms could no longer wear frock coats. Brides were prohibited from putting on white *hanbok* or wedding veils, nor were they allowed to carry floral bouquets. Couples would don simple, colored, everyday attire for their nuptials.<sup>138</sup> The new ritual guideline further banned walking down the aisle to the music of the Wedding March, exchanging rings, as well as tossing celebratory confetti.<sup>139</sup> The vernacular press, of course, did not frame these changes as hostility against Christianity or the Protestant community. State-directed media organs like the *Maeil Sinbo* effaced the religious origins of new weddings, reframing the meaning of the rites entirely. The proscribed customs were not just wasteful or ostentatious, grossly inappropriate during wartime. They were Anglo-American practices of the enemy. Editorialists reminded readers that dutiful Japanese subjects did not “worship” (*sungbae*)<sup>140</sup> or “imitate” (*mobang*) Western ways.<sup>141</sup>

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During the 1930s and early 40s, when the hope of liberation remained dim, the issue of Shinto shrines was mired in uncertainty. Colonial officials claimed that shrine

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<sup>138</sup> “Chōsi kyōlhon sinch’aejae tokpon (2),” *Maeil Sinbo*, Sept. 21, 1940.

<sup>139</sup> “Konrei sōgi no kijun seitei.”

<sup>140</sup> “Kwanhonsangje e che iltan: sangga sō sun kuch’uk, ch’agwa ro kyōlhonsik,” *Maeil Sinbo*, Aug. 30, 1940.

<sup>141</sup> “Kyōlhonsik ūi chōnsi ch’aejae puminkwan ūn sinsik e hanhaesōman pillinda,” *Maeil Sinbo*, June 1, 1943.

rites represented merely patriotic, civic practices obligatory for all Japanese subjects. Meanwhile, this characterization flew in the face of long-established Protestant teachings. The question of what constituted religion, as well as who should decide weighed heavily on missionaries and Korean Christians alike. Many conceded to state authority under pressure, unwilling to withhold educational opportunities from Korean youth or see church doors shuttered. A small minority stubbornly insisted that the meaning of religion remained strictly the domain of the individual conscience. Soon enough, the porous boundaries distinguishing the religious and the secular became nakedly apparent. The secular became a shorthand for the public (national) interest, which, during wartime, extended its reach further and further into people's beliefs and practices.

On August 15, 1945, obligatory Shinto shrine observances ended abruptly in Korea. Japan surrendered to Allied forces, relinquishing its acquired territories across East Asia and the Pacific. It was a heady time in the newly-liberated peninsula. Young and old spilled out onto the streets, delirious with the prospect of freedom. Community groups organized in preparation for democratic self-rule, a dream that proved elusive. Roving bands—especially in the northern provinces—reduced Shinto shrines to ashes and rubble, at least what remained of them after Japanese administrators preemptively decommissioned the once-hallowed sites.<sup>142</sup> The end of colonial rule also brought a period of reckoning. Among Protestants, much like the rest of Korean society, finger-pointing abounded. Those who died in prison for their resistance to state Shinto became

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<sup>142</sup> In August 1945, Koreans destroyed 136 out of 1,141 Shinto shrines that existed in the peninsula. The remaining shrines were dismantled by Japanese officials to prevent their desecration. Motokazu Matsutani, "US Occupation Policy on Shinto in Postliberation Korea and Occupied Japan," in *Belief and Practice in Imperial Japan and Colonial Korea*, ed. Emily Anderson (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 206-209.

revered as martyrs.<sup>143</sup> Meanwhile, countless church members, lay leaders, and clergy confronted accusations of national betrayal, or worse, apostasy, for their complicity in Japanese wartime mobilization. The task of rebuilding the Church in the shadow of Shinto shrines would divide Korean Protestants for decades to come.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> For instance, Chu Ki-ch’ǒl, who died on May 18, 1945, became one of the most revered Korean pastors of the early twentieth century. Kim Yang-sǒn, *Han’guk kidokkyo yoksa yon’gu*, 198.

<sup>144</sup> For more on the effects of the Shinto Shrine Controversy on Korean Protestantism after liberation, see Kim Yang-sǒn, *History of the Korean Church in the Ten Years Since Liberation (1945-1955)*, trans. Allen D. Clark (Seoul: Changnohoe Sinhak Taehakkyo Pusǒl Han’guk Kyohoesa Yon’guwǒn, 1993); Jung Il Kim, “Haebang hu chaegōn kyohoe ūi t’ansaeng paegyōng yon’gu,” *Han’guk kaehyōk sinhak* 46 (2015): 178-205; Jang Sukman, “Historical Currents and Characteristics of Korean Protestantism after Liberation,” *Korea Journal* 44.4 (2004): 133-156.

## CONCLUSION

In 1917, an essayist for the *Kidok Sinbo*, a Protestant weekly, recounted an uncomfortable social encounter. He was traveling to a neighboring town to pay respects to a dear friend who had recently died. Having arrived on the Sabbath, the writer thought better of paying a visit straight away, deciding instead to give his condolences to the bereaved family the following day. Down the street, he caught glimpse of a young man dressed in a high-collared Western suit and a bright blue necktie. Upon closer inspection, the author realized the dapper youth was none other than the son of his late friend. An eldest son customarily marked his father's passing—the “agony of the heavens crashing down” (*ch'ǒnbungjit'ong*)—by donning course mourning garb. This brazen youth, with his father not yet buried in the ground, wore nothing of the sort, instead appearing en route to the park for a stroll. Stunned by the young man’s nonchalance and his necktie blithely flapping about in the wind, the writer even forgot to inquire into his family’s welfare, managing only to exchange bland pleasantries before parting ways.<sup>1</sup>

The young man featured in the *Kidok Sinbo* embodied the dramatic transformations in Korean ritual customs underway during the early twentieth century. Matters once dictated by Confucian tradition—the manner in which one got married, buried the dead, or commemorated ancestors—became open to diverse alternatives. Historians had long viewed this cultural shift as part and parcel of Korea’s transition to modernity. With the end of the Chosŏn dynasty and Japanese annexation in 1910, Neo-Confucianism ceased to function as the dominant ideology of state and society. New

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<sup>1</sup> “Chonggyo wa yeūi,” *Kidok Sinbo*, June 27, 1917.

schools of thought, whether social Darwinism, Western liberalism, or socialism, began to circulate widely among educated elites. But ritual change in Korea did not simply result from modernization, nor was it inevitable. This dissertation has emphasized the outsized influence of religion, especially Protestant Christianity, in catalyzing ritual change. Protestants adopted their own church ceremonies starting in the late nineteenth century, which not only helped construct distinct Christian identity, but also spread the notion that ritual obligations ought to depend on one's religious affiliation. The *Kidok Sinbo* writer may have expressed shock over the young man's iconoclasm, but his own faith community played a leading role in the fragmentation of Confucian rites in Korean society.

Before long, ritual reform became a political flashpoint, raising broader questions on the proper place of religion in society. Though themselves sharp critics of Confucian values and practices, Korean cultural nationalists viewed the spread of Protestant customs with growing alarm. Christians' rejection of ancestral veneration as primitive idolatry relegated their compatriots to the lowest rungs of the civilizational ladder, while the rapid popularization of church weddings threatened to turn Korea's youth into vain, fad-chasing, counterfeit Christians. Intellectual elites attempted to counter this dangerous overreach of religion with ritual innovations of their own. Newspapers and magazines overflowed with proposals for creating new secular customs for the modern nation, defining rites less as matters of individual conscience and more as matters for societal intervention. By tracing these conversations on rites, I have shown that Korean cultural nationalists and the Protestant community had a far more fractious relationship than many scholars have previously maintained. Intellectuals subscribed to the principle of religious

freedom, but religion, in their mind, was subordinate to the nation. Religion should serve the nation, or, at the very least, not run counter to its interests.

Colonial administrators likewise came to view ritual ceremonies as urgent public concerns, though they decidedly placed the state at the helm of reform. During the 1930s, as global depression decimated the Korean countryside and war with China appeared imminent, the Government-General dramatically expanded its ritual interventions. The 1932 Rural Revitalization Campaign re-organized villages in ways that enabled close surveillance. Local administrators and their civilian allies went door-to-door, dictating just how much households could allocate to ceremonial expenditures. In 1934, the colonial state promulgated the *Guidelines on Ritual Practice*, simplifying and re-orienting Confucian rites toward wartime needs. New colonial standards emphasized a shared East Asian morality. It also laid the foundations for fostering reverence for the Japanese emperor and his imperial ancestors. The following year, the Shinto Shrine Controversy turned explosive. Protestants' protestations in defense of their conscientious beliefs produced little effect. Government officials not only insisted that Christians participate in shrine observances, but they also began to emphasize emperor veneration as the paramount duty of all bona fide religious organizations. Missionary detractors shuttered their schools, while Korean dissidents suffered imprisonment or worse. Wartime made patently clear that rites were the battlegrounds where competing groups vied to negotiate the boundaries between the religious and the secular spheres.



Fig. 6.1 Korean Wedding at Kunsan Shrine, circa 1940s.  
SOURCE: Tongguksa Private Collection.

The story of ritual reform also reveals insights into the limits of colonial power. There are many examples of the state penetrating deep into Koreans' lives, compelling them to adopt one type of ceremony over another. But officials also confronted resistance and foot-dragging at every step. Many Koreans showed little interest in abiding by the Guidelines. Some Protestants chose death rather than acquiesce to Shinto shrine observances. Moreover, even compliance to colonial dictates took forms that were not ideal. Take, for example, the photograph of a wedding that took place at Kunsan Shrine in North Cholla province, most likely after the Korean League of National Spiritual Mobilization established the 1940 *Revised Standard for Wedding Ceremonies*.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> Shrine ceremonies never became a widespread cultural phenomenon. Kyōnggi provincial police records indicate that neither the Seoul Shrine nor the Korea Shrine witnessed an appreciable increase in nuptial ceremonies during the first year after the promulgation of the *Revised Guidelines*. The combined number of Shinto wedding ceremonies at the Korea Shrine and Seoul Shrine never exceeded 165 between August 1940 and August 1941. A possible explanation for the lackluster interest in shrine nuptials among Japanese settlers might be the continued popularity of weddings at hotels and restaurants. The Kyōnggi police also recorded that wedding receptions at expensive hotels in Seoul did not decrease appreciably during the same

groom and groomsman appear in “national uniform” (K. *kungminbok*, J. *kokuminfuku*), hewing closely to the recommendations of the Revised Standard.<sup>3</sup> The women were a different story. One woman standing to the far right shows off a sumptuous fur stole, conspicuously out of place at the height of wartime austerity. The bride and bridesmaid both wear white hanbok, while the former goes as far as to don a wedding veil—attire emblematic of the much-maligned Protestant “new weddings.”<sup>4</sup> Even in wartime, Japanese colonial officials found it extraordinarily difficult to get young people to do as they were told.



Figure 6.2 Pamphlet Promoting *Family Guidelines on Ritual Practice*, n.d.

SOURCE: National Museum of Korea.

period. See Keikitō keisatsu buchō, “Kokumin sōryoku undō ni kan suru ken,” March 25, 1941. National Institute of Korean History.

<sup>3</sup> The “national uniform” was first promoted in Korea in 1939, one year before it was promoted in the Japanese metropole. Considering its relatively high cost (approximately 16 yen), the uniform remained out of reach for many ordinary Koreans, while it was commonly adopted by local colonial administrators, teachers, and those in white-collar professions. See Yun Haedong, *Chibae wa chach'i*, 170-179.

<sup>4</sup> While few records of Korean shrine weddings remain, Western veils appear in other photographs as well. See, for instance, Andong Taehakkyo Pangmulgwan, *Sajin ūro ponūn kündae Andong* (Andong: Andong Taehakkyo Pangmulgwan, 2002), 102.

Despite these limitations, colonial reforms left legacies that long outlasted Japanese rule. Successive South Korean governments tried their own hand at top-down ritual transformation. On March 5, 1969, President Park Chung-Hee promulgated the *Family Guidelines on Ritual Practice* (*Kajōng ūiryē chunch'ik*) as part of his efforts at rapidly developing South Korea's economy. The regulations outlined detailed provisions for weddings, funerals, and ancestral rites, incorporating many of the same reforms that the Government-General had implemented during the 1930s and 40s. Koreans were to abstain from hosting large wedding banquets, limiting celebrations just to relatives and close friends. Instead of course hemp garb, appropriate funeral attire would now comprise Western suits or simple white or black *hanbok*. Families would perform *chesa* only for two generations of ancestors.<sup>5</sup> When South Koreans showed little interest in upholding these recommendations, much like the previous generation under colonial rule, the Park regime implemented even more stringent measures.<sup>6</sup> In 1973, one year after the establishment of martial law, the authoritarian government promulgated the Family Rites Act (*Kajōng ūiryē e kwanhan pōmnyul*), appending punitive consequences for violators. Individuals faced fines up to 500,000 won, while operators of wedding halls and funeral parlors faced up to a year's imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> Government attempts to reform Koreans' ritual lives would outlive even South Korean dictatorships, persisting in different forms throughout the 1980s and 90s.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ch'ongmuck'ō ūijōngguk ūijōnggwā, *Kajōng ūiryē chunch'ik (an)*, Feb. 21, 1969. BA0084559. National Archives of Korea.

<sup>6</sup> According to one estimate, during the years 1969-1973, compliance with the *Family Guidelines* reached only around five percent. Ko Wōn, "Pak Chōng-hŭi chōnggwōn sigi kajōng ūiryē chunch'ik kwa kündaeħwa ūi pyōnyong e kwanhan yōn'gu," *Tamnon* 201 9.3 (2006), 210.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Si-dōk, "Kajōng ūiryē chunch'ik i hyōnhaeng sangnye e mich'in yōnhyang," *Yōksa minsokhak* 12 (2001), 87.

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