

# The Attitude of the Japanese Colonial Government Towards Religion in Korea (1910-1919)

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In the course of history religion has often been used by governments as an effective tool of control. In fact, institutionalized religion has more often than not served the interest of the ruling class, and it has readily accepted the role as "spiritual policeman" in society at large. While this model is commonly encountered in the Christian history of Europe, i.e., in the relationship between the Roman Church and the governments in the countries dominated by Catholicism, it can be seen as a fixed pattern in East Asia, where religion at the practical level was designed to safeguard the interests of the state. Confucianism, which has dominated the structures of societies of East Asia for millenia, is perhaps the best example of this. While on the one hand it provided the ideological and practical structure for a distinctly ranked, but ordered society, in which the nation allegedly would flourish, it also was the safeguard of the privileges of the ruling classes, and in a sense guaranteed that society basically remained static in terms of social mobility. With its primary focus on patriarchal lineage, a close-knit family structure, and a rigid social moral-codex, its influence remained undisputed on the every-day level of the commoners, while it essentially constituted the entire super-structure of government. From the Han dynasty (B.C. 206 - A.D. 220) and onwards Confucianism as a state ideology has been intimately linked with Legalist ideals of punishments and rewards, in accordance with which the government decrees were implemented. As such Confucianism has been, and to a certain extent still is, the perfect instrument for controlling the populations in East Asia. Although a number of other religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, and of late

Christianity, gained a great influence in the East Asian societies, and at times even have eclipsed Confucianism in terms of practical religious importance and influence, they have nevertheless always been forced to incorporate basic Confucian values in order to gain optimal popularity. Thus, when we speak about religion in East Asia, we are always dealing with some form of Confucianism, whether directly or indirectly.

When the Western colonial powers were dividing the world into "zones of interest", Christianity was a servile ally towards this end. Christian missionaries were among the first colonizers on the shores of the "new lands", and they generally did not spare themselves in serving the colonial cause because they saw it as being identical with the divine cause as decreed by Christ to his followers in Matt. 28:26-20: "Go therefore and make all the nations my disciples." In the case of Korea, missionaries were employed by all the colonial powers trying to gain a foothold in the kingdom, including the United States, France, England, and last but not least Japan. While the Western powers with considerable success used the various brands of Christianity as a means of gaining influence in Korea, the Japanese used Buddhism, a religion which had a fifteen hundred years old history in both countries, and with which they felt comfortable.

The purpose of this paper is to throw light on the relationship between the Japanese colonial government and the major religious groups in Korea with special emphasis on Buddhism, Christianity, and indigeneous, syncretic religions in the initial period from 1910 to 1919. Special attention will be given to the mechanisms employed by the Japanese in trying to make the religions in Korea actively co-operate with the imperial cause, and if that did not work, to control or otherwise suppress them into submission. The strategies employed by the Japanese towards this end were manifold and, as discussed below, encompassed a full set of methods ranging from encouragement, education, economic support, media manipulation, coercion, swindle, infiltration, and as a last measure, to violence.

## **Korean Society and Religion at the End of the Chōson Dynasty**

After more than three decades of gradually undermining the sovereignty of the state of Chōson (1392-1910) the Japanese formally annexed Korea in 1910 by setting up a full-fledged colonial government in Seoul.<sup>1</sup> The road towards the Japanese colonization of Korea had run through a series of treaties forced upon the floundering Korean monarchy, and after the Japanese army in 1895 had both crushed the Tonghak Rebellion and defeated the Chinese imperial army in the Sino-Japanese War, Korea had been rendered virtually powerless.<sup>2</sup> In 1905 Japan had forced the Korean puppet government to sign a protectorate treatise, in accordance with which the powerful eastern neighbour was given full control of the nation's foreign policy and national economy. King Kōjong (1864-1907), Korea's last ruling monarch, was forced to abdicate in 1907, and the Japanese placed his son Sunjong (1907-1910) as their puppet on the throne. Only three years later they finally abolished the monarchy and declared Korea a Japanese colony with full blessings from the Western powers.

The fifteen years from 1895 and up to the annexation in 1910 were in many ways a significant period for Korea. It was during these years that Western civilization and culture became firmly embedded in Korean society, at least in the large cities, chiefly through the efforts of the many Christian missionaries of all the major denominations working in the country. Christian-run schools, hospitals, and charity institutions were established with great alacrity, and the number of native converts grew rapidly.

During the same period Buddhism, Korea's largest indigeneous religion, had embarked on a renaissance, partly fuelled by local developments, and partly due to positive stimulus from the Japanese, who saw Buddhism as a highly useful way of winning the Korean populace over to their cause.<sup>3</sup> After all, Buddhism was the largest and most powerful religion in Japan. In 1895, the Japanese had enforced the repeal of the centuries old anti-Buddhist law promulgated by the Confucian dominated Korean government, and this immediately led to renewed interest in Buddhism on the part of the population.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, a number of respected Korean

Buddhist monks came out of the woodwork, and engaged in nation-wide revival through lecture-tours, and the rebuilding of temples.<sup>5</sup> Despite various political problems arising over Japanese attempts at interference in the re-organization of Korean Buddhism, it appears that there was a general sympathy towards Japan on the part of the *sangha* in Korea. In any case many Korean monks took over Japanese Buddhist norms, even to the point of changing their traditional monastic garbs.

The subsequent success of both Christianity and Japanese Buddhism in Korea essentially hinged on three major factors. The first being the moribund Confucian government of Korea, which had lost the ability to govern the country, and which had proven unable to reform itself in the face of a rapidly changing world. The second factor was the incoming wave of modern civilization (read: Westernized culture) and technology, something which both Japan and the Western powers represented. The third determining factor was the attitude of the Korean intelligentsia. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Confucianism had long since lost its appeal as the elite ideology. This meant that those with sufficient education, something which both the Japanese and the Christian missionaries readily provided, were less apt to join the ranks of officialdom. By the late 1880s many Korean intellectuals, including the nationalists, looked towards Japan and the West for inspiration and guidance, and therefore they were essentially sympathetic towards the foreign powers. Even staunch nationalists were ambivalent at best, but rarely directly anti-foreign like the adherents of the Tonghak Movement. Moreover, the anti-foreign sentiments in Korea chiefly rested with conservative elements among the Confucians of the declining *yangban* class, and to some extent the traditionalist Buddhists. However, they were clearly unable to come up with an alternative solution to the problems facing Korea, and their attempts at maintaining *status quo* was proving fruitless. In a sense we may speak of a strong deteriorating and fragmentating force within Korea itself causing the loss of national and cultural unity, and an overwhelming influence coming from the colonial powers. These factors in combination paved the way for the demise of Korea as an independent state. Lastly, the severe control and open persecution,

to which the Christians were subjected, provided a great stimulus for growth, which may be referred to as the "martyr effect."

## Buddhism

The Buddhist Revival in Korea gained in momentum after the Japanese missionary priest of the Nichiren School, Sano Jenrei (1864-1917), had successfully made the Korean government revoke its anti-Buddhist decrees in 1895.<sup>6</sup> Buddhist temples were repaired throughout the country, and the number of ordainees increased sharply. By the late 1890s the Japanese Buddhist denominations working in Korea had made many converts among the Korean population, and established both temples, hospitals and schools in competition with the Christian missionaries.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the colonial period the Japanese Buddhist schools operating in Korea were always dominated by Japanese adherents; however, they chiefly served as inspiration for the Korean Buddhists, and influenced them in numerous ways such as organization, education, clothing, and propagation of the faith.

Korean Buddhism was slowly recovering from nearly six hundred years of suppression under the Confucian-dominated Korean government, and was still relatively disorganized by the end of the 1890s. In order to provide a frame for organizing the Korean Buddhist *sangha*, and its temples, sixteen main temples in the country were selected as the core around which the new Buddhism would center. In 1899 the government set up an office, the *Sasa Kwalli So* (Office for the Control of the Association of Temples), in Wŏnhŭng Temple outside the East Gate of Seoul as the headquarters for organizing Korean Buddhism. In 1902 the first Buddhist law for the regulation of the temples, the *Kuknae Sach'al Hyŏnse Chuk* (Law for the Operation of the Temples in the Country), comprising thirty-six articles, was put into effect. During this time the Japanese Buddhist missionaries were actively soliciting Korean monks for their cause by offering them status and wealth. By 1904 the *Kuknae Sach'al Hyŏnse Chuk* had ceased to function properly, and this left the Korean *sangha* to fend for itself. A leading pro-Japanese monk Yi Hoegwang (1840-ca. 1925) set up his own school of Korean

Buddhism, the Wŏn School in 1906 (officially established two years later). By making use of his political connections, Yi together with priests of the Japanese Sōtō Zen School worked covertly with the purpose of inducing the Korean temples to accept the sovereignty of this Japanese Buddhist School. However, the plan was exposed and it came to naught. The whole affair resulted in a polarization of the Korean Buddhist community, which henceforth consisted of a pro-Japanese faction, and a conservative, anti-Japanese faction.<sup>8</sup> Here it is important to note that there is no direct evidence that the Japanese government as such was involved in the scheme of Yi Hoegwang and the Sōtō School, which may indirectly indicate that internal affairs relating to Korean Buddhism was largely left alone by the authorities prior to the annexation.

At the time of the takeover in 1910 Korean Buddhism, both the pro-Japanese and the anti-Japanese factions, represented by the Wŏn and the Imje schools respectively, had been greatly revitalized, and a general feeling of optimism prevailed among the members of the Buddhist community. However, with the implementation of the Temple Ordinance of 1911, the so-called *Sach'al Yŏng* (in Japanese *Jisetsu Rei*), greatly changed this mood. Thirty temples were selected as the main Buddhist institutions in the country. Under the new temple law the governor-general in Seoul had the sole mandate to appoint the abbots of the Korean temples, and he was free to interfere as he pleased in their economy and landholdings.<sup>9</sup> The result of this was that only declared pro-Japanese abbots were appointed for the temples, a move which estranged the majority of the Korean *sangha*. Traditionally abbots of important temples were chosen in a semi-democratic forum from among the spiritual worthy, but henceforth the positions were taken up by purely political appointees. While the abbots enjoyed the trust of the colonial administration, and sometime amassed considerable wealth, they were often in opposition to the other monks in their temples. In time power struggles between the two factions erupted with the result that the anti-Japanese monks were expelled from many of the large monasteries in the country, and were often forced to live in small hermitages and run-down temples deep in the countryside.

The revival in Korean Buddhism brought about a number of changes. Among these changes was the appearance, from 1911 to

1921, of a series of high-quality Buddhist journals written in Korean by renowned monks as well as distinguished scholars.<sup>10</sup> An interesting feature of these journals is their boards, which were composed of members from both the pro- as well as the anti-Japanese Buddhist factions, including Yi Hoegwang, Pak Hanyöng (1870-1948), Yi Nünghwa (1869-1943), and Han Yöngun (1879-1944). Despite this the journals partly served as organs for the colonial government, and many of the issues featured addresses given to the Korean Buddhist community by the Japanese governor-general.<sup>11</sup>

Another significant change was brought about by allowing the monks to marry. One of the main problems concerning having married priests instead of celibate monks, as is traditional in Buddhism, was that the focus of the temples and large training monasteries to a larger extent had to change from ascetism and intense practice, to a family enterprise with a steady income. This inevitably affected the laity, who previously had been wont to donate food and other necessities to the monks. As the married priests did not keep the precepts they were no longer eligible to receive the offerings of the faithful, and hence were forced to look elsewhere for means with which to support themselves and their families. It became necessary for married Buddhist priests to engage in small-scale business such as turning the temple into a holiday resort, restaurant, or even to sell off parts of the temple lands. In the temples where both celibate monks and married priests lived, frictions arose over the interpretation of doctrinal matters, and deep-rooted problems relating to authority erupted frequently. During the 1920s and 1930s the Japanese had shifted to a more sophisticated strategy of religious control, a control which was carried out by the Koreans themselves as part of the temple organization.

One of the most significant developments occurred in 1915 when the Korean Buddhists were united in a single Buddhist national association, which controlled the affairs of the thirty main temples in the country. It was based in Kakhwang Temple, the former seat of the office for Buddhist affairs from 1899. In this connection, ten of the main temples opened their own schools for the education of novices and young monks.<sup>12</sup> These institutions were modelled on modern Japanese Buddhist schools.

The attitude of the colonial administration towards Korean Buddhism was one of a relatively firm, but benevolent rule, combined with economic support. Of course, the Korean Buddhists were annoyed with the strict control imposed on the temples, but they were rarely sufficiently patriotic, or united, to do much about it. While securing the cooperation of the abbots of the large monasteries through a wide range of measures, including decrees and gifts, the abbots on their part served the Japanese government with fidelity. At the customary meeting of the Korean abbots at the house of the Japanese governor-general each New Year, mutual pledges of support and cooperation were exchanged.<sup>13</sup>

The change in the Japanese colonial administration following the disturbances of the March 1 Independence Movement, also had its effects on the Japanese Buddhist schools operating in Korea. The number of Korean followers in these denominations decreased sharply through the 1920s, reaching an all time low during the mid 1930s. Some of the schools simply ceased to have Korean adherents altogether. A brief revival was seen in the early years of the Pacific War, but by 1945, the number had again fallen dramatically. No doubt the renewed number of Koreans joining the Japanese Buddhist schools has to be seen against the background of the government's desperate attempt at controlling religious activities at that time.<sup>14</sup> However, even after the liberation of Korea in August 1945, Japanese Buddhist concepts and material aspects continued to remain in Korean Buddhism. Furthermore a number of the new Buddhist schools that emerged, had their roots in the Japanese Buddhist missions in Korea. These aspects clearly show the extent and depth of the Japanese Buddhist influence on the country's native tradition.<sup>15</sup>

## **Korean Christianity**

The Catholics were the first Christians to operate in Korea, but throughout most of the nineteenth century the missionary priests had been forced to work undercover due to severe persecution by the government.<sup>16</sup> Protestant missionaries chiefly from the United States and Canada started evangelization in the country from the

late 1880s, and rapidly succeeded in gaining a solid footing among the general populace. The Korean government was essentially two-faced in its attitude to the missionaries. To a certain extent it saw their presence in the country as a threat to the old Confucian world-order, however, they were also seen as a sort of guarantee from the Western nations against the Japanese, whom the king rightly feared. On their part the missionaries were basically indifferent, and some even saw the demise of the conservative Korean monarchy as a good opportunity to effectuate the spread of Christianity even further as we shall presently see.

As regards the growing Japanese influence in the country after 1895, the missionaries generally appear to have taken a positive attitude. There were some, who reacted to the high-handed Japanese overtures in the country with disdain, and openly expressed their sympathies for the plight of the maltreatment of the Koreans; even so, they were, however, ambivalent, as can be seen in the writing of F. A. McKenzie, who has an interesting observation on the general attitude of Western missionaries to the Japanese occupation of the country. Reporting on the situation some six years before the official annexation he writes:

When the Japanese landed in Korea in 1904, the missionaries welcomed them. They knew the tyranny and abuses of the old Government, and believed that the Japanese would help to better things. The ill-treatment of helpless Koreans by Japanese soldiers and coolies caused a considerable reaction of feeling. When, however, Prince Ito became Resident-General the prevailing sentiment was that it would be better for the people to submit and to make the best of existing conditions ...<sup>17</sup>

This clearly shows that even at this time the missionaries saw a greater evil in the ailing Korean monarchy than in the Japanese, who, although they were an occupying force, still were credited with the introduction of modern civilization. I am not indicating that there was any great love as such for the Japanese Empire on the side of the missionaries, but they saw the colonial government as a guarantee for political and social stability, which again would ease their work of evangelization. In any case the Japanese were

clearly on the side of modernity and technological development as praised by the Christians. On his side the Japanese Resident-General Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909), the notorious effectuator of the Protectorate Treaty of 1905,<sup>18</sup> did his best to play up to the Christians, and McKenzie quotes him saying:

In the early years of Japan's reformation, the senior statesmen were opposed to religious toleration, especially because of distrust of Christianity. But I fought vehemently for freedom of belief and religious propaganda, and finally triumphed. My reasoning was this: Civilization depends on morality and the highest morality upon religion. Therefore religion must be tolerated and encouraged.<sup>19</sup>

Itō's eloquence combined with his schrewed statesmanship and a good understanding of the foreigners apparently convinced the majority of the missionaries in Korea of the benevolent intentions on the part of the Japanese colonial power. That McKenzie was fully taken by the Resident-General is abundantly clear elsewhere in his writings:

Every one who came in contact with him felt that, whatever the nature of the measures he was driven to adopt in the supposed interests of his Emperor, he yet sincerely meant well by the Korean people.<sup>20</sup>

Itō played the role of a friend to the Christians well, and he succeeded to a high degree in making them cooperate with the Japanese colonial interests. In one of his speeches to the Methodists in the northern part of the country, he said:

While I am taking unsparing pains to repress wrong doing among the Japanese, I rely on you for your hearty cooperation toward the same end among the Koreans, in so far as it lies in your power as their teachers and leaders.<sup>21</sup>

As is well-known Itō was assassinated in 1909, and his cunning scheme to have the missionaries and the Christians work for the Japanese cause eventually tapered off. Despite the fact that the official attitude on the part of the missionaries was one of non-

political involvement,<sup>22</sup> they nevertheless would seem to have reluctantly cooperated with the Japanese, as is indicated in the following passage:

The missionaries strongly believe, with the Boards at home, that all respect should be paid to the lawfully constituted civil authorities, but special care should be observed not to needlessly embarrass them, that the laws of the land should be obeyed and that it is better for disciples of Christ to patiently endure some injustice than to carry Christianity in antagonism to the government under which they labour.<sup>23</sup>

Again we see that the "martyr syndrome" is a decisive factor behind the Christian rationale for acceptance of Japanese rule. In the apologetical writings of L.G. Paik, which provide a good insight into the Christian view of Korea under Japanese rule, we find a rather precise analysis of the almost insurmountable problems which the missionaries faced. He says:

The missionary's relations with the new rulers were equally critical and difficult. The problem of the missionaries was to win the confidence of the Japanese and at the same time to hold the faith and trust of the Koreans, who declared the Japanese to be their enemies. The Japanese knew that the missionaries had been kindly disposed toward the Korean court, and in some instances had defended the rights of the Korean people. On account of the nature of their work, the missionaries were more closely associated with the Koreans than with the Japanese. Then, after all political organizations and other so-called religious sects, such as the Tong Haks, had been crushed, there alone remained the Christian Church.<sup>24</sup>

Evangelization was the primary goal for the missionaries, and although they occasionally had dealings with the members of the Korean court, they do not seem to have cared much for Korean independence as such. In any case very few of them sided publicly with the Koreans, while several spoke out openly in favour of the Japanese, including Bishop M.C. Harris of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Another missionary, Wade Koons, who wrote the following tract in 1908, said:

As to the political matter, we have done what we believe to be right, and we are free to say that our policy is not that of the Methodist Mission, at least of those who come particularly in contact with Prof. [George T.] Ladd. We have not opposed the Japanese, and their officials of all grades, from police sergeants to Prince Ito, himself, have repeatedly said that they all rely upon us as their friends in these trying times. Yesterday the American Consul-General told me that he felt we had behaved with great wisdom and discretion. We have assured the people that their duty was to obey the Japanese and to do so with a "sweet mind" and not to work for independence, and we have in no way tried to discredit or hamper them in their reforms. I have spent hours explaining to the church officer and teaching men advantages of Japanese rule, and I cannot think of one who has been kept from it.<sup>25</sup>

However, after the takeover in 1910 many of the missionaries would greatly change their opinion, and eventually a considerable anti-Japanese sentiment would start to emanate from the majority of the Christian missionary schools. However, it must be understood that the Western missionaries in general did not react until they felt personally mistreated by the Japanese. Basically they cared little for Korean independence.

The Japanese on their part were relatively careful in their relationship with the missionaries up to the annexation in 1910, although they did occasionally commit outrages against the Korean Christians in an effort to intimidate them into submission. Clearly they did not want to have any interference with their designs on Korea from any of the Western nations. Even after Japan (illegally) had concluded the Protectorate Treaty in 1905 with Korea, and in effect already controlled the government, the economy and the military, they still acted with caution towards the missionaries. Despite this, the Japanese were beginning to be suspicious of the activities undertaken at many missionary schools. A number of Korean students at these places of modern learning were openly against the Japanese, and many saw Christianity as a model for equality, democracy and national sovereignty. Many became estranged from the missionaries, when they realized that they

would not support them openly in the struggle against the Japanese.<sup>26</sup> The missionaries were of course painfully aware of this, but somehow avoided becoming entangled in the growing spirit of independence that preoccupied the minds of intellectual and patriotic Koreans.

Furthermore, throughout 1903-1907 there had been a general drive for mass conversion by the missionaries and their Korean adherents. Although this movement, which is commonly referred to as "The Great Revival" or the "Million Movement", was strictly religious in nature, it caused a considerable stir in both the Korean population as well as in the colonial government.<sup>27</sup> According to Christian sources conversions in the thousands were made, and people thronged the churches and mission-schools. Naturally the Japanese authorities were concerned, and perhaps even jealous at the apparent success of the Christians. In any case the large number of converts caused problems for the local authorities, who saw all this as a threat to sole Japanese control of the Korean society.

Another important point to make here concerns the status of the Christian churches under Japanese colonial rule. Fundamentally, the highest authority of the faithful was not of this world, i.e., God, and on the temporal plane they were largely controlled by Western bishops or evangelists, who had essentially no loyalty to the Japanese regime. As the churches and the mission-schools were non-governmental, and as they furthermore taught a doctrine, which was not related to Japan in any way, and therefore non-committed to the cause of the greater Japanese empire, they could essentially not be trusted, according to Japanese reasoning. Once the Christian churches and mission schools were singled out by the colonial authorities as potentially subversive, or as places where Korean patriotic sentiments were nurtured, the persecution began to gain momentum.

The first serious blow was directed against the Northern Presbyterian Church in P'yönyang and Sönc'h'ön in the early part of 1911. It took the form of a trumped-up accusation against the local Korean Christians for allegedly having participated in the abortive assassination of the first Japanese governor-general to Korea, Terauchi Masatake (1852-1919), in December of 1910. This incident is usually referred to as the "Conspiracy Case".<sup>28</sup> Although

the case was never officially resolved as far as the Christians were concerned, the Japanese eventually released the falsely accused after diplomatic protests from the United States.

Although it was the members of the quasi-religious Ch'öndogyo movement who constituted the organizational core of the March 1 Independence Movement, the Christians also took a major part in this crucial patriotic and nationalistic demonstration. Buddhist participation was very small, in fact it only consisted of a handful of intellectual monks, including the dubious patriot Han Yöngun (1878-1943). Some five thousand Christians were arrested in the aftermath of the demonstrations, and, in the eyes of the Japanese authorities, this definitely framed them as the chief culprits of the Independent Movement.<sup>29</sup> As a result of the efforts of the Independence Movement, the Christian groups would eventually be subjected to an even harsher treatment by the government than before 1919 although the Japanese changed their colonial government, and tried to implement more humane policies.

## **Confucianism under the Japanese Rule**

Confucianism was the official creed of the collapsing Chosön dynasty, and when the Japanese finally abolished the monarchy, its political influence was all of a sudden gone. As late Chosön Confucianism was not a religion with a fixed institution apart from its leading role in the government bureaucracy, there was no need for the Japanese to exert a heavy ideological control over it. When the last Korean king was forced to abdicate, the Confucian officials had no longer their natural symbol to rally around, and their ideology ceased to play any meaningful role. The Japanese first abolished the old Korean Confucian academy, and then re-organized and re-established it in the very same building it had occupied under the Chosön. The social value of Confucianism, especially the teachings on loyalty, and an orderly society, was of course fully appreciated by the Japanese. Hence they saw Confucianism as a highly useful tool for controlling the Korean population, and generally they encouraged classical learning and education. However, a state-sponsored Confucian ideology without

any political role had little effect on the lives of the common Koreans, and was essentially an artificially upheld anacronism.

Partly inspired by contemporary Chinese intellectual developments, and the Korean Christians, as well as other nationalistic groups, around the year 1914 there was an attempt at a Korean Confucian revival along more religious lines heralded by the academician Yi Pyŏnghŏn (1870-1940). Although he formulated a modernized Confucian religious philosophy, the movement he represented was not successful. Yi's rather radical interpretations of Confucianism alienated him from the Korean Confucian scholar-community in general, and his overly academic scope made it impossible for common people to grasp. Hence his efforts did not have any real impact in Korean society of that time.<sup>30</sup>

## **New Religious Groups under the Japanese Rule**

The early years of Japanese colonial rule saw a virtual boom in new religions in Korea. Essentially most of these "new religions" grew out of the doctrinal context inherited from the deceased Tonghak Movement, although some were less syncretic in nature.<sup>31</sup> The strongest and most influential among these new religious sects was the Ch'ŏndogyo, the Teaching of the Heavenly Way. It appears that the Japanese government initially was unaware of the Tonghak background of the sect, and initially they supported this highly nationalistic religion. Like the Tonghak, the Ch'ŏndogyo was against influence from the West (and Japan), and the Japanese wrongly thought that they could use them against the massive influence from the Western missionaries. The colonial government thought they could make the adherents of Ch'ŏndogyo work for the imperial cause, and tried several times to have them cooperate.<sup>32</sup>

The Ch'ŏndogyo, however, was not only a religious sect, but also a political party with a strong nationalistic weft. The Japanese had already entertained this suspicion about the Tonghak Movement, and we find these words from the late nineteenth century diplomat Mutsu Munemitsu (1844-1897) on the nature of the Tonghak Rebellion:

A wide divergence of opinion has existed both in Japan and throughout the world as to what the Tonghak of Korea actually stands for. Some have regarded the Tonghak as a type of religious group, imbued with a mixture of Confucianism and Taoism. Some have considered them to be an association of political reformers. Others have seen them merely as a lawless gang spoiling for a fight.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note that it was basically leading members of the Ch'öndogyo, who organized the peaceful, anti-Japanese resistance leading up to the Independence Declaration of March 1, 1919, and it was also they who suffered most as a whole during the Japanese crackdown following it.<sup>34</sup>

In the period 1910-1919 there was a boom in new religious movements, and we have the names of more than eighty different sects.<sup>35</sup> Like the Ch'öndogyo the teachings of these new religions were often derived from the Tonghak Movement, and otherwise shared general characteristics such as teaching a hybrid doctrine consisting of elements from Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Shamanism, and in some cases even Christianity, being strongly nationalistic, being based in the countryside, having charismatic leaders, seeking to establish an earthly paradise, etc. As many of these new religions had millinarian tendencies, the Japanese for obvious reasons did not look positively on their activities. Despite the obvious religious character of these new movements, the Japanese were often reluctant to recognize them as such, and instead they were labelled as "nationalistic", or "political" groups, and were treated accordingly. There are scattered references of persecutions, and even executions related to some of these sects, however, as the number of their adherents was relatively modest, and their influence among the Korean population was relatively insignificant, they did not pose any serious threat to the colonial authorities. Furthermore, most of the new religious sects were based deep in the countryside far from the population centres, and they were generally left to themselves as long as they did not provoke the authorities.

Among the new religious groups, which succeeded in avoiding any confrontation with the Japanese colonial government, was Wön

Buddhism, a syncretic movement founded by the charismatic Pak Chŏngbin (1891-1943).<sup>36</sup> The strategy of the Wŏn Buddhists was to adapt what they conceived as a modern approach to the spread of their teachings. In form and content many of Pak's ideas went along with the Japanese Buddhist ideas of a married priesthood, modern education, and a full submission of religion to the secular authorities. Furthermore, the Wŏn Buddhists adopted Japanese inspired clerical robes, and paraphernalia. Hence, the movement was allowed to develop its doctrines, and expand its missionary activities, without any visible interference from the government. While the stance of the Wŏn Buddhists may not have been typical for the majority of the new religious groups that arose during the Japanese colonial period, it shows an example of active submission on the outside, without actually allowing the government to meddle in its internal affairs.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the control, and structural changes forced upon it by the colonial government, it was Buddhism, which of all the religions, clearly, benefitted most from the Japanese occupation of the country. Several of the imposed changes, such as the allowance for monks to marry, the centralized administration of the temples through the appointed abbots, as well as general economic control, were all factors that caused considerable problems for the Korean *sangha*, not only during the occupation, but also later. However, when seen against the historical backdrop of several hundred years of Confucian persecution under the Chosŏn dynasty, the Korean Buddhists had not only been liberated from a heavy burden, but had been revitalized and stimulated to embark on a revival that can still be seen today. It is no exaggeration that modern Buddhist organization, scholarship, education, and health care, owe much to the influence of the Japanese. Despite the traumas of being under the dictatorial control of the colonial government, Korean Buddhism was never seriously impeded in its development or impaired, quite the contrary.

There are a number of reasons why the relationship between the colonial government and the Christian community soured shortly after the official annexation of Korea. First of all the Japanese did not act skilfully enough in their attitude to the Christians. They started out by treating them high-handedly, and with suspicion, and constantly maintained a close surveillance of their activities, as well as hampering them in every way. One of the central problems evolved around the freedom of speech, and the general individual spirit encouraged by Christianity. For example, the early press in Korea was largely controlled by Christian groups, and they were not at all prepared to let the Japanese dictate the contents of their news. The Japanese on their part were utterly unable to understand the so-called liberal spirit cherished by the Christians. Concepts of individual freedom, and democratic ideals as taught in the missionary schools were totally alien to the Japanese (and to some extent still are), and hence they felt threatened. The idea that you could openly disagree with government politics, but nevertheless still be a law-abiding citizen, was both incomprehensible and impossible from their point of view. And lastly, religious freedom was not something to be taken for granted. Religious freedom was something that was bestowed on you by the government as long as there was full cooperation between the two parties.

The Japanese colonial government in Korea, during the first ten years of the occupation, utilized a wide range of tactics in order to promote loyalty and cooperation from the religious groups. Whenever it was possible they sought to influence, and change the individual religions in a congenial manner, so that they were better suited for these purposes. However, when resistance was too strong, or, as in the case of the majority of the Christian groups and many of the new religious movements, they did not refrain from using false accusations, or even violence, in order to get their way. The seemingly great stress on control over the Korean population through religion, is not something the Japanese invented. The great imperialist powers of Europe and United States employed exactly the same tactics with considerable success when bringing the populations in their colonies in line, and it is no wonder that the Japanese should have learnt this lesson as well. In fact, we have

evidence that the Japanese did indeed copy the Western powers in this regard.

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## NOTES

- 1 For studies on the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910-1945, see Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea 1868-1910* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960); W. G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 41-54, 85-100, 142-55; Michael E. Robinson, "Colonial Publication Policy and the Korean Nationalist Movement," in Ramon H. Meyers and Mark R. Peattie, Eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 312-43; E. Patricia Tsurumi, "Colonial Education in Korea and Taiwan," in *ibid.*, pp. 275-311; and the two popular books by F. A. McKenzie: *Korea's Fight for Freedom* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969) and *The Tragedy of Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969).
- 2 For a useful study of this crucial period in the history of Korea, see Synn Seung Kwon, "Korean-Japanese Relations, 1894-1904 (I)," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1981), pp. 12-25. See also Lew Young-ick, "Japanese Challenge and Korean Response, 1870-1910: A Brief Historical Survey," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 12 (1985), pp. 36-51.
- 3 See Kang Sökchü and Pak Kyonghün, *Pulgyo künse paek nyöñ* (Buddhism in the past one hundred years) (Seoul: Chungang shinso 71, 1980), pp. 13-87. See also the compilation of important articles in Pulgyo sahak hoe, ed., *Kündae Hanguk pulgyo sa non* (Essays on the history of modern Korean Buddhism) (Seoul: Minjök sa, 1988).
- 4 Concerning the Japanese part in the Korean Buddhist revival, see Henrik Hjort Sørensen, "Japanese Buddhist Missionaries and Their Impact on the Revival of Korean Buddhism at the Close of the Chosön Dynasty," Arne Kalland and Henrik H. Sørensen, eds., *Perspectives on Japan and Korea* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 1991), pp. 46-62. See also, Pak Kyöng-hun, "Buddhism in Modern Korea", *Korea Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 8 (1981), pp. 32-40.
- 5 For a study of a Sön monk, who did much to effect the renaissance of Korean Buddhism, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Life and Thought of the Korean Sön Master Kyönghö," *Korean Studies* Vol. 7 (1983), pp. 9-33. See also, Sok Do-ryun, "Modern Son Buddhism in Korea," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 5, No.1 (1965), pp. 26-30, *Korea Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1965), pp. 27-32, and *Korea Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1965), pp. 17-22.
- 6 Chöng Kwangho, "Ilje üi chonggyo chöngch'æk kwa sikmin chi pulgyo" (The Japanese imperial administration of religion and the colonization of Buddhism), *Kündae Hanguk pulgyo sa non*, pp. 69-101 (esp. pp. 70-82). For a Japanese account of Sano Jenrei, see Takahashi Toru, *Richö*

- bukkyō* (Buddhism of the Yi Dynasty) (Seoul: 1927), reprint: 19, pp. 890-91.
- 7 For a discussion of the influence of the Japanese Buddhist schools working in Korea, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "Japanese Buddhist Missionaries and Their Impact on the Revival of Korean Buddhism at the Close of the Chosŏn Dynasty," pp. 146-61. For the primary sources see, *Hangŭk kundae pulgyo paeknyŏn sa*, Vol. 4 (Seoul: Minjŏk sa). No year or place given, pp. 1-48.
- 8 Sŏ Kyŏngsu, "Ilje ūi pulgyo chŏngch'aek" (Imperial Japan and the administration of Buddhism), *Kŭndae Hanguk pulgyo sa non*, pp.103-40. See also Yŭ Pyŏngdŏk, "Ilje sidae ūi pulgyo" (Buddhism during the Japanese imperial period), in Sungsan Pak Kilchin paksa hwagap kinyŏm, *Hanguk pulgyo sasang sa* (The history of Korean Buddhist thought) (Iri: Wŏngwang taehakkyŏ ch'ulp'an kŭk, 1975), pp. 1159-87.
- 9 For the full text of the 1911 temple edict, see U Chŏngsang and Kim Yŏngt'ae, *Hanguk pulgyo sa* (The history of Korean Buddhism) (Seoul: Chinsu Tang, 1970), pp. 175-89.
- 10 For an introductory study of these Buddhist journals, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "Korean Buddhist Journals during Early Japanese Colonial Rule," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1990), pp. 17-27. The journals in question are:
- 1) *Chosŏn pulgyo wŏlbo* (Korean Buddhist monthly), February, 1912 to August, 1913.
  - 2) *Haedong pulbo* (The Korean Buddhist magazine), November, 1913 to June, 1914.
  - 3) *Pulgyo chinhŭnghoe wŏlbo* (Buddhist Chinhŭng Association monthly), March to December, 1915.
  - 4) *Chosŏn pulgyo kye* (The world of Korean Buddhism), April to June, 1917.
  - 5) *Chosŏn pulgyo ch'ongbo* (Korean Buddhist digest), March, 1917 to January, 1921.
  - 6) *Yushim* (Mind only), September to December, 1918.
  - 7) *Ch'wisan porim chapchi* [Ch'wisan Porim Gazetteer], March to October, 1920.
- 11 For examples of this, see, *Chosŏn pulgyo wŏlbo*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1912), p. 4, and *Chosŏn pulgyo ch'ongbo*, No. 14 (1919), p. 206.
- 12 These temples were: 1) Kŭmryŏng Temple, 2) Unhae Temple, 3) Koun Temple, 4) Sŏnam Temple, 5) Haein Temple, 6) Taehŭng Temple, 7) T'ongdo Temple, 8) Songgwang Temple, 9) Paekyang Temple, 10) Pŏmŏ Temple. Yŭ Pyŏngdŏk, "Ilje sidae ūi pulgyo" (Buddhism under Japanese imperial rule), *Kŭndae Hanguk pulgyo sa non*, pp. 141-81.
- 13 For examples of this, see *Chosŏn pulgyo ch'ongbo*, 14 (1919), p. 206, and *Chosŏn pulgyo wŏlbo*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1912), p. 4. Parts of these speeches can be found translated in Henrik H. Sørensen, "Korean Buddhist Journals during Early Japanese Colonial Rule," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1990), pp. 23-24.
- 14 For these figures, see Kim Duk-Hwang, *A History of Religions in Korea* (Seoul: Daeji Moonhwa-sa, 1988), pp. 252-55. See also the statistics in *Hanguk kŭnse pulgyo paengnyŏn sa* (The history of Korean modern Buddhism in the last hundred years), Vol. 2, part 3 (Seoul: Minjŏk sa (n.d.)), pp. 36-48.
- 15 See Mok Chŏng-bae, "Korean Buddhist Sects and Temple Operations," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (1983), pp. 19-27. See also Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 21-36.
- 16 Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (Seoul: Ilchŏkak, 1984), pp. 257-58, 262-64. For a brief historical survey of the introduction of Catholicism in Korea, see Chŭ Myŏngjŭn, "Ch'ŏnjŭ kyo ūi sŭ nansa" (The history of the troublesome reception of Catholicism), in Sungsan Pak Kil-chin paksa kohui kinyŏm, *Hanguk kŭndae chonggyo sasang sa* (The history of

- contemporary religious thought in Korea)(Iri, 1984), pp. 701-12.
- 17 F. A. McKenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969), p. 210.
  - 18 Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, pp. 309-11.
  - 19 F. A. McKenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, p. 211.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
  - 21 Quoted in L. George Paik, *The History of the Protestant Missions in Korea 1832-1910, 1927*, reprint (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1970), p. 414.
  - 22 This is also the conclusion reached by Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea Under the Japanese Rule*, Studies in Asian Thought and Religion 5 (Lewiston & Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), pp. 14-15.
  - 23 L. George Paik, *The History of the Protestant Missions in Korea 1832-1910*, p. 350.
  - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 353.
  - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 415.
  - 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 350-51.
  - 27 *Ibid.*; and Spencer J. Palmer, *Korea and Christianity: The Problem of Identification with Tradition*, Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch Monograph Series 2 (Seoul, 1986), pp. 82-88.
  - 28 This case is described in detail elsewhere, and I shall not go into further discussion of it here. See Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea Under the Japanese Rule*, pp. 16-21.
  - 29 It is interesting to note that the Catholics played a minor role in the Independence Movement, and only some fifty-seven of them are reported to have been arrested. See Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under the Japanese*, p. 25. The Presbyterians appear to have borne the brunt of the punishment meted out by the Japanese afterwards. *Ibid.*, 25-26.
  - 30 Keum Jang-tae, "The Confucian Religion Movement in the Modern History of Korean Confucianism," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (1989), pp. 4-12.
  - 31 For a study of the origin of the Tonghak movement, see Benjamin B. Weems, *Reform, Rebellion and the Heavenly Way* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1964); see also Shin Yong-ha, "Establishment of Tonghak and Ch'oe Che-u," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 3 (1990), pp. 83-102.
  - 32 Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under the Japanese*, pp. 74-80.
  - 33 Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95*, ed. and transl. by G.M. Berger (Tokyo: Princeton University Press & University of Tokyo Press, 1982), p. 5.
  - 34 Wi Jo Kang, *Religion under Politics in Korea Under the Japanese Rule*, pp. 69-80.
  - 35 For a series of articles on these movements see, *Hanguk kundae chonggyo sasang sa*, pp. 887-1060. Included among these is Chang Pyönggil, "Kang Ilsün üi chönggyo sasang" (The religious thought of Kang Ilsün), *ibid.*, pp. 887-99.
  - 36 Chung Bong-kil, "What is Won Buddhism?", *Korea Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (1984), pp. 18-32.
  - 37 For a useful introduction to the history of Wön Buddhism, see Mark Cozin, "Wön Buddhism: Origin and Growth of a New Korean Religion," in Laurel Kendall and Griffin Dix, eds., *Religion and Ritual in Korean Society*, Korea Research Monograph 12 (Berkeley: UC Berkeley, 1987), pp. 171-184. Although in many ways a fine article, I disagree with its author that orthodox Buddhism plays a central role in the cardinal teachings of the founder.