

Communism and Capitalism, and Conservatism and Consumerism: Some Contexts and Contents of Korean Protestantism¹

Jaeshik Shin*

Abstract

The aim of his paper is to describe some characteristics of Korean Protestantism in relation to the external context of Korean Protestantism, providing a general survey of the religious landscapes in Korea. Communism, Capitalism, Conservatism, and Consumerism will be selected to depict the characteristics of Korean Protestantism. The two terms, Communism and Capitalism, represent the external factors which have paved the way to the rapid growth of Korean Protestantism. Other two words, Conservatism and Consumerism are

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* Professor of Honam Theological University and Seminary, Ph.D.

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other pairs of internal factors, which connote the features of Korean Protestantism.

With external and internal factors in Korean Protestantism, a term, megachurches, is another factor for understanding Korean Protestantism. Two types of megachurches have emerged through two stages after Liberation period in Korea. Each type of megachurch has a closely related to each pair of external and internal factors, respectively. The first type of megachurch was established by the refugees from North Korea between 1945 and 1950. Anti-communism is closely related with conservatism. Both are a twin rooted in same historical soil.

The second type of megachurch had emerged during the process of economic development from 1960s to 1990s. Those emerging megachurches in the second stage have their membership with new migrators from rural areas. Those megachurches, located with the newly planned resident areas, became a bearer and a subject of capitalism and consumerism. Embodying the business-oriented structure and operation, those megachurches have proclaimed the material success and consuming the blessing, so called, the gospel of prosperity.

- **Keywords**

Korean Christianity, Korean Protestantism, Anti-Communism, Capitalism, Conservatism, Consumerism, Gospel of Prosperity, megachurch.

Introduction

Korean Protestant Church is one of the youngest churches in the history of Christianity. Korean Protestant Church, however, with Korean Catholicism, has been one of the most dynamic churches during the second half of 20th century. Since the introduction of Catholicism in 1784 and of Protestantism in 1884, Christianity has grown up continuously and become the largest religion in Korea with over eleven million members and about 28 percent of the Korean population in a variety of denominations. Considering the comparatively short history of Korean Protestantism, the process of its growth could be viewed as a unique success in the history of Christianity.

Many discussions and researches have investigated the factors of the growth with its characteristics in Korean Protestantism, from various perspectives. There have been some key terms to present the features of Korean Protestantism, such as conservatism, anti-communism, pro-America, growth-oriented ministry, the Gospel of prosperity, and so on. Some of those terms are related to the contexts of Korean Protestantism, and the others reflect its contents. The former and the latter could be regarded as the external and the internal factors of Korean Protestantism. The aim of this paper is to describe some characteristics of Korean Protestantism in relation to the external context of Korean Protestantism. That is, some characteristics of Korean Protestantism will be delineated with the pair relationship between the external factor and the internal one.

To achieve the goal of this paper, the writer will choose four key words: Communism, Capitalism, Conservatism, and Consumerism. Communism and Capitalism have powerfully influenced on the for-

mation of Korean Protestantism directly and indirectly. These two terms, Communism and Capitalism, represent the external factors which have paved the way to growth of Korean Protestantism. The other two words, Conservatism and Consumerism are other pair of internal factors which connote the features of Korean Protestantism. The writer will deal with two pairs for describing the characteristics of Korean Protestantism respectively: Communism and Conservatism, and Capitalism and Consumerism. The relation between two terms in each pair could be considered as that of 'selective affinity' in a Weberian context.

With these external and internal factors in Korean Protestantism, another term, megachurch, is selected to draw the features of Korean Protestantism. During the rapid growth of Korean Protestantism, many megachurches have emerged and become a symbol of Korean Protestantism. Megachurches in Korea could be categorized into two types according to their emerging contexts: a refugee megachurch and an urban migrator megachurch. These two types of megachurch are consonant to two pairs of external and internal factors, respectively.

The first type of megachurches was resulted from some established churches by refugees from North Korea between 1945 and 1950. In this type of megachurch, an ideological anti-communism and theological-political conservatism were linked together and enforced to each other. The second type of megachurches had emerged during the period of economic development from 1960s to 1990s. As the Korean economy has been incorporated into global capitalism, a rapid migration from rural to urban area happened on a massive scale. New migrants from rural areas contributed to the increase of memberships of the new emerging megachurches. Those megachurches became a

bearer of the spirit of capitalism and consumerism, embodying the business-oriented structure and operation, and proclaiming the material success and consuming the blessing, so called, the gospel of prosperity. Younknak Church and the Yoido Full Gospel Church are the representatives of two types of megachurches, respectively.²

This paper consists of three main sections to describe some features of Korean Protestantism. Following this introduction, the geography of Korean religions is depicted in the second section, in which the transitional status of Korean Protestantism is exposed in relation to other religious traditions. Section three will deal with the ‘communism and conservatism’ in its formation of the first type of megachurches in Korea. Section four, entitled, ‘capitalism and consumerism’ examines the features of Korean Protestantism during the period of industrialization with a second type of megachurches. Finally, a Summary and prospect are described as a conclusion.

The Geography of Korean Protestantism: Past and Present

Current Religious Landscape in Korea

Korea has been a religious pluralistic society, which is a mixture of very different backgrounds: Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and other religious traditions. Shamanism, as a native religion, has lasted for 5,000 years in Korean history. Even Buddhism and Confucianism were both imported religions, they had been ex-

2 This paper follows the ‘Romanization Regulation of the Korean Language’ (July 7, 2000; the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), and names are given in the normal Korean sequence, except in footnotes.

tremely influential in ancient times as a national religion for 1,000 years and 500 years respectively. Considering those religions in Korean history, Christianity has a rather short history: Catholicism has 230 years and Protestantism 130 years.

Compared to the Western society in which Christianity once had been a dominant religion and is still functioning as a major influential religion, there is no major religious group in Korean society. Even though Christianity and Buddhism are two major religious groups alongside Confucian morals and Shamanistic traditions in Korea, more than half of Koreans have no religious affiliation.

According to 2015 statistics compiled by the Korean government, 56.9 percent of Koreans have no formal membership in a religious organization. Only 43 percent of Koreans express that they associated themselves with a certain religion.³ Within the religious people, there is a dominance of Protestantism, Buddhism, and Catholicism. The census shows that 19.7 percent of the population (about 9.7 millions)

Religion	1950-1962		1985		1995		2005		2015	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Christianity		5-8%	8,352,000	20.7%	11,390,000	26.0%	13,461,000	29.2%	13,566,000	27.6%
Protestantism		2-8%	6,487,000	16.1%	8,505,000	19.4%	8,446,000	18.2%	9,676,000	19.7%
Catholicism		2.2%	1,865,000	4.6%	2,885,000	6.6%	5,015,000	10.8%	3,890,000	7.9%
Buddhism		2.6%	8,059,000	19.9%	10,154,000	23.2%	10,588,000	22.8%	7,619,000	15.5%
Other		92.4%		2.1%		1.2%		1%		
No Religion				57.3%		49.6%		47.1%		56.1%

<Table 1>Demographic trends of the main religions in South Korea, per censuses⁴

3 South Korea National Statistical Office's 19th Population and Housing Census (2015): "Religion Organisations' Statistics". http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1PM1502&vw_cd=MT_ZTITLE&list_id=A11_2015_50&seqNo=&lang_mode=ko&language=kor&obj_var_id=&itm_id=&conn_path=E1. Retrieved 29 Oct. 2017.

4 This table comes from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_South_Korea. The numbers

belongs to Protestantism, 15.5 percent to Buddhism (7.6 millions), and 7.9 percent to the Catholic Church (3.9 millions). The rest adheres to various new religious movements including Won Buddhism, Cheondoism, and Jeungsando.

The results of 2015 census show a changing landscape of Korean religions. Some features of 2015 census could be summarized as follows: with the loss of about 3 million members Buddhism became the second largest religion in Korea followed by Protestantism; Korean Catholicism has lost about 1.1 million members and stopped its rapid growth between 1995 and 2005; Korean Protestantism has gained about 1.2 million new members after the 2005 census. Since the introduction of Catholicism in 1784, followed by the arrival of Protestant missionaries in 1884, Christianity has proceeded to become the largest religion in Korea.

One of the notable features of 2015 census was against an expected anticipation in general: the continuous stagnation of Buddhism, the rapid declination of Protestantism, and the rapid growth of Catholicism. Before the 2015 census, the Korean government had carried out the census every 5 years. The census had showed the shifting of each religion in Korea during the last 20 years (1985-2005). In particular, the years between 1995 and 2005 turned up the appearance of the changing religious geography in Korea. During the above period, the growth of Buddhism is 3.9 percent, while that of Protestantism was -1.6 percent, and the number of Catholics increased 74.4 percent. Considering the population had increased 5.6 percent, in fact, Buddhism had stagnated, Protestantism had declined, and Catholicism had rapidly

are compiled by the South Korean National Statistical Office and other resources. For the detailed other references, see footnotes in above site. Retrieved on 8 Dec. 2017

rushed upward. For Korean Protestantism, the crisis was evidently reflected on the 2005 census.

There have been a few different interpretations on the unexpected shift of religious demography depicted in 2015 census. Two factors need to be considered in relation to the 2015 census. One is the census method. Until the 2005 census, every census was a complete enumeration. However the 2015 census was a partial survey in which only 20 percent of population was selected as a sampling household. Moreover, 48.6 percent of the sampling survey responded via internet. The different method of census, which favors the young generation, could cause an unexpected result of religious trends in Korea. Even though 2015 census shows the growth of Protestantism, Korean Protestant congregations have lost their memberships continuously. Many Korean Protestants, considered themselves as Christians, have left local congregations and won't join the regular worship on Sunday. A research in 2017 shows that those unchurched Protestants represent 19.8 percent of Korean Protestantism. The number of unchurched Protestants is about 2 million and its percentage has increased from 10.4 percent in a 2012 survey.⁵

The Changing Landscape of Korean Protestantism: Growth and Stagnation

In 1900, Korean Christians was only one percent of the population.⁶ As Protestant missionaries had played a significant role in the mod-

5 This survey was conducted by The Research Center for Korean Churches on June, 2007. For the survey data see, http://www.tamgoo.kr/board/bbs/board.php?bo_table=b_resources_2_1&wr_id=7&wr_1=. Retrieved on 30 Oct. 2017.

6 For example, for the growth of Presbyterian churches in Korea, see the Table 9 in Sung-Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-*

ernization of Korea, they had achieved a remarkable success in the growth of its memberships. They established schools, universities, hospitals, and orphanages. During the early 20th century, Christianity, with their wide spectrum of missionary activities and programs, was identified with modernization and social reform. Presbyterian missionaries were especially successful over the 20th century.⁷ Another historical factor for the growth of Korean Protestantism is that Christianity is not a religion of imperialism but that of liberation. In neighboring countries, such as Japan and China, which have the smaller numbers of Protestants, Christianity is the religion of imperialism and that of enemy.

Since the early 1960s, when Korean Christians scarcely topped the one million mark, the number of Christians, particularly Protestants, has increased faster than in any other country, doubling every decade. Korean Protestantism grew exponentially in the 1970s and 1980s, and despite slower growth in the 1990s, caught up to and then surpassed Buddhism in its number. There are 100,000 pastors, over 60,000 churches and about 9 million Protestants making the South Korean church one of the most vital and dynamic in the world.

As can be seen from the below table and diagram, the quantitative

1915 (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013). The statistics are originally quoted from Charles A. Clark, *The Digest of the Korea Mission* (Seoul: Religious Book and Tract Society, 1918), 183-199.

7 For the growth and decline in Korean Protestantism between 1884-2005, see Byung Joon Chung, "A Reflection on the Growth and Decline of Korean Protestant Church," *International Review of Mission* 103 (2014): 319-333. He examines the factors of the growth and decline of Korean Protestantism with five periods: the early period of settlement (1884-1909), Japanese domination (1910-1945), recovery time (1945-1960), time of industrialization and urbanization (1960-1995), and after the time of urbanization (1995-2005).

growth of Protestantism continued since the Korean War, greatly increased in the 1960s, reached its summit in the late part of 1970s, decreased in the 1980s, and was discontinued after the mid-1990s.⁸

Year	Total Population	Protestants(rise / fall)	Percent to Total Population
1950	20,188,641(1949)	500,198*	
1960	24,989,241	623,072* 1,524,158(+)	
1970	31,435,252	3,192,621*	
1980	37,046,815	7,180,627**	
1985	40,419,652	6,489,282	16%
1995	44,553,710	8,760,336 (+35%)	19.7%
2005	47,041,434	8,616,438 (-1.6%)	18.3%

<Table 2> The Numerical Change of Korean Protestants (1950-2005)⁹

During the entire thirty years between 1960 and 1990, the number of Protestant churches had increased seven times. The rate of increase by ten-year unit was 175 percent between 1960 and 1970, 65 percent between 1970 and 1980, and about 69 percent between 1980 and 1990.¹⁰ During those periods, the increasing ratio of Korea Protestants has

8 For the growth and development of Korean Protestantism, see The Society of the History of Christianity in Korea, ed., *A History of Christianity in Korea Since 1945*, trans. by Jeong-II Moon (Seoul: The Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea, 2017), 98.

9 This table is revised to depict the growth of Korean Protestants from the table 13-1 in *A History of Christianity in Korea since 1945*, 98. As mentioned in the footnote 2 in p.98, it is difficulty to acquire the reliable statics of Korean religion and also they are not available prior to the 1960s, due to the tumultuous and quickly evolving post-war situation as well as to the fact that may individual churches and denominations exaggerated their membership numbers. Sources other than that of the National Statistical Office are as follows: **Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeonguso* [Korean Institute for Religion and Society], *Hanguk Jonggyo Yeongam* [The Yearbook of Korean Religions](1993); *+Hanguk Gidokgyo Gyoheo Heybeuihoe* [Korean National Council of Churches], *Gidokgyo Yeongam* [The Yearbook of Christianity: 1970]; ***Ministry of Culture and Communication, Jonggyo Beobinmit Danche Hyeonhwang* [The Present State of Religious Corporations and Groups](1980).

10 Ibid., 97. The number of churches increased from 3,114 in 1950, to 5,011 in 1960, to 12,866 in

been greater than that of churches. This implies that, during the process of quantitative growth, many Korean Protestants had concentrated into some individual congregations in metro-Seoul area. During the 1970s and 1980s those large numbers of churches became a group of mega-churches. In February 1993, *Christian World* reported that there were five Korean Protestant churches within the ten largest churches, and twenty three churches belonged to fifty largest churches in the world: Yoido Full Gospel Church is the largest one. South Korea had the third highest percentage of Christians in East Asia or Southeast Asia, following the Philippines and East Timor.

Korean Protestantism, however, could not enjoy its palmy days. After the mid-1980s, it had grown slowly, and in the 1990s Protestantism in Korea stopped its growth. The Protestantism in Korea is heavily dominated by four denominations: Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Pentecostals. These major denominations were not the exception of the stagnation. During the 1980s and 1990s, Korean Protestantism had fully mobilized its whole capacity, such as, human power, financial resources, and media, for church growth. Even though the material resources mobilized by Korean Protestantism for evangelism and mission had overwhelmed other competitive religions, mainly Catholicism and Buddhism, the growth of Korean Protestantism couldn't meet its expectation. It was in the 1990s when "the discourse of crisis" was raised both inside and outside of Korean Protestantism.

Then what made Korean Protestantism decline or stagnate? Usually, factors contributing to the growth of Korean Protestantism have been

1970, to 21,243 in 1980, to 35,819 in 1990. *Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeonguso* [The Institute of Korean Religions and Society], *Hanguk Jonggyo Yeongam* [The Yearbook of Korean Religion] (Seoul: The Institute of Korean Religions and Society, 1993). See footnote 1 in p. 97.

presented in two aspects: outside and inside factors of church. The former are socio-economic, political, and religious context, and the latter are all kinds of movements and programs within the Korean Protestantism for church growth. The decline and/or stagnation of Korean Protestantism would not be fully explained with outside factors of the church, because the other Korean religions had experienced the growth or stagnation differently under the same socio-economic and political situation during the same period. If the outside factors are not decisive, then the authentic factors of Protestant's decline/stagnation had been laid in the inside of Protestantism. From the early 1990s, there have been growing criticisms on the Korean Protestantism, especially its credibility and morality, for Protestants' unethical behaviors, aggressive attitudes toward non-Protestants, secularization, commercialization, growth-oriented ministry, and so on. Korea Protestantism faces harsh criticism that it has lost its spirituality, morality, commitment, and the awareness of community. This negative evaluation and the mistrust of Korean Protestantism are empirically confirmed by various polls which were carried out by the Korean National Association of Christian Pastors, Gallup Korea and the Christian Ethics Movement.¹¹ The issue of credibility is the key factor which could explain the root of the declination in Korean Protestantism.¹²

11 According to the survey of "Survey of Social Credibility for South Korean Churches," conducted by the Christian Ethics Movement (CEM) in 2017, only 20.2 percent of the respondents say they trust Protestant churches. 51.2 percent said that Protestant churches are not trustworthy, while 28.6 percent say they were ambivalent. Among Korean religions, Catholicism appears to be the most credible, with 32.9 percent, followed by Buddhism with 22.1 percent, and Protestantism with 18.9 percent. The statistical data can be acquired from CEM website (<http://cemk.org>). Retrieved October 29th 2017.

12 For more detailed examination of growth and declination in Korean Protestantism from its struc-

Communism and Conservatism

The Refugee Protestants from North Korea

Now we turn our concern to the detailed contexts and its contents of Korean Protestantism in accordance with two stages of its history. Anti-communism and conservatism are the most distinctive features of Korean Protestantism. Of course, since the Korean War, anti-communism has been a key dominant ideology in Korea, but the tendency of anti-communism in Korean Protestantism has been much more tense and stronger than other areas or groups in Korean society. It is generally said that the conservative attitude in Korean Protestantism was introduced by the early Western missionaries, especially by the missionaries from the US.¹³ The fusion of religious conservatism and ideological anti-communism had happened and reinforced in the context of modern history in Korea, especially after the liberation from Japanese occupation. Regarding the anti-communism and conservatism of Korean Protestants, two factors need to be considered: Protestant refugees from the Northwestern part of Korea, and the Korean War.

After the World War II, the allied occupied and divided Korea into two parts in 1945: the American-occupied South and the Soviet-occu-

ture and discourse, see Jaeshik Shin, “*Hanguk Gaesingyoui Hyeonjaewa Mirae* [The Present and Future of Korean Protestantism],” *Jonggyoyeongu* [Religious Studies] 68 (2012): 87-113; “*Hanguk Sahoeui Galdeug Hyeonhwangwa Gujo Tamgu* [Study on the Present Status and Structure of Religious Conflicts in Korea: Focused on the Korean Protestant Factors],” *Jonggyoyeongu* [Religious Studies] 63 (2011): 39-42.

13 For the early Protestant missionaries in Korea, see Dae Young Ryu, *Chogi Miguk Seongyosa Yeongu 1884-1910: Seongyosadeului Jungsancheungjeog Seonggyeogeul Jungsimeuro* [Early American Missionaries in Korea 1884-1910: Understanding Missionaries from Their Middle-Class Background] (Seoul: The Institute of Korean Church History, 2001).

pied North. After the occupation forces pulled out, in 1948 two governments were established both in South and North. In Seoul, Rhee Syngman, an American-educated Methodist, became the first president of the Republic of Korea under sponsorship of the United Nations. In Pyeongyang, Kim Il Sung, a Soviet-trained military officer, took charge of the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea. By 1948, Protestants in North Korea had been shattered and major churches and the Christian institutions of Pyeongyang had been experienced great difficulties and persecution. The communist government had been opposed to Christianity and its links to 'imperialism.' Leading Christians in North Korea had been arrested and some had gone missing. The communists ruling in North Korea led to a mass exodus of Protestants to South Korea. This mass exodus has drawn the radical shift of the Protestant demography and landscape in Korea.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Korean Protestant churches in the Northwestern part of Korea had grown rapidly and the area became a heart of Korean Protestantism.¹⁴ Before this massive exodus to South, more than half of total Korean Protestants had stayed in the northern half of the Korea. Especially Pyeongyang, the center of Northwestern part of Korea, had been called the Jerusalem of Korea. The Presbyterian Seminary, Pyeongyang Theological Seminary, was

14 Kyo-Seong Ahn describes, the rapid and disproportionate church growth in the Northwestern part of Korea, can be explained from the perspective of class. He considers Gwang-Rin Yi's view on this issue is highly persuasive. Yi argues that the lopsided growth of the Korean Church in the Northwestern part of Korea was brought by self-initiative of the middle class, particularly merchants. Ahn also conceives Yi's theory can also explain the correlation between unbalanced church growth and the success of self-support. Kyo-Seong Ahn, "The identity of the Korean Church and its Relationship with the Poor," *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 429 (2011): 124-125, footnote 9.

opened in Pyeongyang in 1901. The first meeting of the All-National Presbytery was held in Pyeongyang in 1907. Among the first seven Korean ordained pastors all but a missionary to Jeju Island, were placed in the North-western part in the same year. Also the inaugural meeting of the General Assembly was held in Pyeongyang in 1921. The number of Presbyterians in Northwestern area was about 40 per cent of Korean Presbyterians in 1910.¹⁵

When the Protestants from the Northwestern part of Korea came to South Korea, they accounted for about one-third of Protestant in South Korea. Due to their experience with communism in North Korea, they were already military anti-communists, and became a major background and a vanguard of right wings after Liberation period in South Korea. The Korean War exacerbated this tendency and hardened forever the enmity of Christians for the communist regime in North Korea. Many Christians in areas occupied by communist troops were often killed and other Christians were captured and taken away forcibly to North Korea during the Korean War.¹⁶

15 The total number of Presbyterians was 39,394 Baptized members and 140,472 Adherents in 1910, *The Fourth Minutes of the Presbytery of the Korean Church* (Seoul: N.P., 1910), 31. The more details statics of the Presbyterian churches in Korea, see the Table 12 in Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 331.

16 For the historical background between conservative Christian refugees and communists, see Timothy S. Lee, "evangelicals versus Communists," in *Born Again: Evangelicalism in Korea* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 60-83. There are some import works on the relationship between Christianity and Communism in Korea. The more detailed examination on the issue of Korean Protestantism and anti-communism confer, Incheol Kang, *Hanguk Gidokgyohoewa Gukgasiminsahoe 1945-1960* [Korean Christian Churches and State-Civil Society 1945-1960] (Seoul: The Institute of Korean Religions and Society, 1996); *Hanguk Gaesinkyowa Bangongjueui* [Korean Protestantism and Anti-Communism] (Seoul: Jungshim, 2006); Jungnan Yoon, *Hangukjeonjaenggwa Gidokgyo* [The Korean War and Protestantism] (Seoul Hanul, 2015).

After the massive Protestant refugees arrived in Seoul,¹⁷ they were filled with the passion for establishing their churches. There had been about 2,000 newly established Protestant churches in South Korea, about 90 percent of which were organized by the refugees Protestants from North Korea during the ten years after the Korean War. Some churches, founded by refugee ministers with other Protestants from North Korea, had become megachurches. The representative megachurches established by refugee ministers are Younngnak Church, Chunghyeon Presbyterian Church, Somang Church, and Gwangrim Methodist Church. Those newly established churches became the core of conservative rightwing movement and anti-communism in South Korea. Moreover, this group of refugee ministers has formulated and influenced on the conservative tendency in Korean Protestantism during the second half of twentieth century in Korea.

The Formation of Conservative Anti-Communism in Korean Protestantism

Those Protestant churches and their memberships from North Korea had acquired and monopolized the religious hegemony and power in South Korea with the support, protection and cooperation of United

17 The whole figures of Korean refugees to South Korea are at best estimates, especially with respect to Protestants. According to Incheol Kang, the number of all Koreans who migrated southward between 1945 and 1953 is estimated at between 1,014,000 and 1,386,000, about 10.7 to 14.7 percent of the average population (9,440,000) in North Korea between 1946 and 1949. In 1945 the number of northern Protestants was around 200,000 about 2.1 percent of the population. Of them, Kang estimates that 70,000 to 80,000 might have moved to the South Korea, constituting 35 to 40 percent of the Protestant population in North Korea and 6 to 7 percent of all northerners who migrated to South Korea. See, Kang, *Hanguk Gidokgyohoewa Gukgasiminsahoe 1945-1960* [Korean Christian Churches and State-Civil Society].

States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIC, here after the US military government). The US military government and the Korean rightwing conservative Protestants from North Korea engaged each other. The US military government preferred them, because they were the pro-American Christian elites who studied in the US and had the experiences of anti-communist struggles. They were provided a lot of privilege from the US military government and from the following Rhee Syngman's government.¹⁸

Moreover, the returning missionaries from the US were paternalistic at times and they were important to Protestant churches as supporters and protectors. The Korean War further increased the dependence the church on foreign assistance. Under the strong patronage of the American Protestant missionaries some of whom had served in the US military government in Seoul, the Protestant church, especially Presbyterian churches could easily enjoy an exclusive privilege. They obtained real estate that had been abandoned by the Japanese for building church and were disposed of confiscated Japanese property for establishing Protestants institution.

After its occupation, the US military government mobilized extreme rightists, especially North Korean refugees. The rightwing extremists interrogated, violated, and killed ordinary people under the pretext of a "Red Hund." Among the most notorious rightist groups, which took the lead in campaigns against communist, was the Northwest Youth Association (*Seobuk Chyungnyunheo*), named for the area where most of its members hailed from. The association was formed in November 1946 and dissolved in December 1948.¹⁹ Its membership

18 For the detailed description of the above process, see Kang's and Yoon's works.

19 For the more information about the Northwest Youth Association, confer Bong-jin Kim, "Para-

totaled about 300,000. It is noteworthy that the core members of the Northwest Youth Association were belongs to Youngnak church.

Youngnak Church is one of the representative Protestant churches in Korea. It was the model of the first type of Korean megachurch, of which major members were conservative refugees from North Korea, and has been the heart of anti-communism after its foundation. It was started by Han Kyung-chik in 1945 with 27 refugees, including his old church members from North Korea.²⁰ They became the core group of the Youngnak congregation. In 1946 Han got permission from the US military government to use the confiscated property of the Shinto sect of Tenrikyo for building his church. The growth of the church membership was about 10 percent per year, and despite the continual establishment of subsidiary “daughter” congregations in metro-Seoul area. In 1965, Youngnak Church became the first megachurch in Korea with its 10,000 members and finally 60,000 members. Han Kyung-chik, an alumnus of Princeton Theological Seminary, had been supported by the Presbyterian Church of the US. Han’s leadership within the Korean Protestantism lasted more than three decades.

Youngnak Church and Han Kyung-chik are typical of Korean conservative Protestantism in several ways. Han’s theology is conservative, stressing the will and power of God, the sinful state of human, the salvation of individuals through grace and redemption through Christ (i.e., being “born again”), and the communion of believers. His sermons focused on the Bible and on the Christian life as a spiritual

military Politics under the USAMGIK and the Establishment of the Republic of Korea” *Korea Journal* 43, Iss.2 (2003): 289-322.

20 For the background and development of Youngnak church, confer Han Kyung-chik, *My Gratitude: Kyung-Chik Han’s Oral Autobiography* (Seoul: KyungChik Han Foundation, 2017). It was originally published in Korean in 2010.

state. The major concern of churches was on caring individual members and on involving them in network of fellowship and mutual support within the church, rather than on involving socio-political issues outside of the church.

The refugee Protestants from North Korea has been the most conservative group, theologically and politically, in Korea. As they acquired a religious and political power after Liberation and the Korean War period, their influence on Korean society became stronger and stronger. The pro-government conservative ministers organized the Presidential National Prayer Breakfast in 1968 for the military dictator, Park Junghee. During 1970s and 1980s, leading refugee ministers organized mega-scale interdenominational crusades, which made a great contribution of the growth of Protestantism in Korea, with the wide cooperation and strong support of the military government. Anti-communism had been one of the key agenda of those mega-scale crusades. Among the mega-scale crusades were: the Billy Graham Crusade in 1973; the Explo Crusade in 1974; The National Crusade 1977; and the Mission Centenary Crusade in 1984. As the membership of conservative churches had increased, the conservative Protestants had become the majority of Korean Protestantism.

As an overwhelming majority, the conservative Protestants had criticized the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) which had led the Christian democratization movement during the military dictator's regime. When NCCCK adopted the "Korean Churches' Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula" (the so-called 88 Statement) in 1988,²¹ the refugee minister group, including

21 It was a first and historical statement with important reflection on the issue of reunification of Korea from a nongovernmental area. Until then the reunification issue had been monopolized

Han Kyung-chik, organized the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) in 1989, which became the largest conservative church organization and the center of anti-communism until 2010s. CCK had its primary concern on evangelization and on criticizing the human rights and democratization movement of the NCCK.

Theological and ideological conservatism in Korean Protestantism has a strong relationship with anti-communism. Conservatism and anti-communism had amalgamated within the special historical trajectory, that is, Liberation from Japanese occupation, the division of Korea, and the Korean War. The fusion of religion and ideology had been intensified when the conservative refugee Protestants from North Korea had a religious power and hegemony in Korea Protestantism. Anti-communism and conservatism in Korean Protestantism are twinborn in the historical context of modern Korea.

Capitalism and Consumerism

Urban Migrants from Rural Area

Capitalism and Consumerism could be other twin characteristics of Korean Protestantism. After taking power through a military coup d'état in 1961, Park Junghee's military government regime powerfully drove an industrialization policy. This policy changed the industrial structure, and resulted in decreasing the rural and agricultural population and increasing the urban population. While the urban population accounted for 28 percent of the total population in 1960s,

by the military government which did not allowed to discuss the issue in civilian level.

it increased to 74.4 percent in 1990, more than doubling.²² This massive migration in turn caused problems and brought about many negative effects. The gap between the rich and the poor became more noticeable and social anarchy ensued. It also resulted in creating large slum areas around cities. Moreover traditional extended family structure had been dissolved and destroyed. Many migrators from rural areas felt rootless and longed for intimate communal support.

Korean Protestant churches could have gradually sped up their growth with this shifting socio-economic context. The process of the industrialization provided a great opportunity for the growth of Protestant churches, because it was accompanied by the rapid and massive migration from rural to urban area. Korean Protestant churches promoted evangelistic activities and church planting in urban areas, and new suburbs mushroomed around the metro-Seoul area. The migrators from rural area were the large numbers of potential congregants for local churches. The Protestant churches provided a sense of community for urban migrators uprooted from rural hometowns.

Two notable phenomena could be observed at the core of the rapid growth of Korean Protestantism in the period between the 1960s and the 1980s, “the period of developmental dictatorship.” The one is the Pentecostal-type of worship and preaching, popularized by Cho Yonggi, which had a great vogue within Korean Protestantism. The other notable result of church growth in Korea is the emergence of many megachurches. In early 21th century, among the fifty largest churches in the world, twenty three of them were in Korea. There were

22 The Society of the History, *A History of Christianity in Korea since 1945*, 103 and see footnote 7 in p. 103.

fifteen mega-churches, each of which has more than ten thousands adult congregational members. Denominationally, the world's largest Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches are all found in Korea.²³ Most megachurches in Korea had shared the Pentecostal-charismatic tendency in worship and preaching. The growth of church up to the megachurch size has become the pursuing goal of ministry that most Korean medium or small-sized churches have been looking for.

Those megachurches became a bearer and a subject of capitalism and consumerism, embodying the business-oriented structure and operation, and proclaiming the material success and consuming the blessing, so called, the gospel of prosperity. The Yoido Full Gospel Church is a representative of the second type of Korean megachurch. However, it is not just a typical model of the second type, but rather a leading engine of capitalistic and materialistic Protestant church in Korea.²⁴ The Yoido Full Gospel Church started in a slum in Seoul with 5 members in 1958. Its membership grew to 600 in 1961; 3,000 in 1964; 18,000 in 1973; 100,000 in 1979; 200,000 in 1980; 500,000 in 1985; 700,000 in 1992, and 755,000 in 2007.²⁵ The growth had been exponential ever since, and it became one of the largest congregation in the world. It is

23 As for the definition of megachurch, there are some difference criterions among scholars. For an instance, in the United States, sometimes a congregation which has more than 2,000 adult church members is considered as a megachurch. In Korea, a megachurch is defined as a single congregation whose adult Sunday attendance is 10,000 and more. In this paper the megachurch refers more than 10,000 memberships in a local congregation.

24 For a brief information of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, see Young-hoon Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Theological Development* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2009), 93-110.

25 Church Growth International, *Church Growth Manual 7* (Seoul: Church Growth International, 1995), 145. Quoted from Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea*, 97.

worthwhile to notice that the growth rate accelerated after the church moved into Yoido in 1973, where government development plan started in 1967. With the massive apartment complexes nearby, the Yoido Full Gospel Church became a church for middle-class.

The founding pastor Cho Yonggi appealed to Koreans with the promise of spiritual salvation, physical healing, material blessings and prosperity in their life here and now. The church slogan is from the second verse of the third epistle of John: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul." This leads to the "triple-meter faith" in riches of the spirit, of the body, and in possessions. Much of the praying focuses on daily problems, and daily problems invariably involve money. Indeed, Cho's message is one that stresses God's material blessings in the present life. His message addressed exactly what the urban populace desired during the process of economic development. Cho's preaching, promising God's blessings in material terms, was often criticized for offering a cheap faith and grace. Even though Cho's message was entangled in the controversy over heresy, his materialized gospel offered irresistible attractions for the emerging middle-class Korean. With the remarkable growth of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, many conservative pastors began to take the church's worship service and its method of ministry as a model and accepted Pentecostal theology irrespective of the theological tradition of their own denomination. Finally Cho and his church have become a paragon in Korean Protestantism.

The Gospel of Prosperity in Korean Capitalistic Church-ism

Those newly emerged megachurches share some common charac-

teristics: the location of the church in the midst of apartment complexes, an individual church system in its structure, and the gospel of prosperity in its message. First of all, the second type of megachurch had emerged in those new urban resident areas. Most emerging megachurches in the second stage were established in or moved into newly constructed resident areas and urban towns. The residence of the new town was usually consisted of several apartment complexes, which were a new potential market for Korean Protestantism. Being located amidst or near a few apartment complexes, the churches easily attracted and absorbed the residents of apartment complexes, who were move from rural areas or an old resident area in Seoul.

Most megachurches of the second type, such as The Yoido Full Gospel Church, Somang Church, Myungsung Church, Gwangrim Methodist Church and so on, were founded within the apartment complexes newly planned resident areas. Even some of the first type of megachurches, of which refugees from North Korea were the majority, i.e., Chunghyeon Church, moved its church to newly planned apartment complexes. However, some first type megachurches, such as Youngnak Church and Seamunan Church, which did not move to a new resident area, had stopped their growth, as the church members moved to new resident areas. With its stagnation or declination of its membership, the first type of megachurch has continuously lost its influence on the Korean Protestantism and Korean society. The emerging megachurches within apartment complexes have replaced the status of first type of megachurch, and finally became a symbol of the Korean Protestantism with Minjung churches.²⁶

26 During the process of industrialization, Minjung churches have emerged. Even though Minjung churches have not influenced numerical growth in Korean Protestantism, they have worked for

Another feature of Korean Protestant churches could be described as so-called an individual church system. Contrary to an ‘empire-church system’, and a ‘state-church system’, in an individual church system, each congregation exercises the administrative rights in the process of personnel management, financial affairs, the formation of organization, and so on. In Korean Protestant church, especially in most megachurches, this individual church system has closely related with a charismatic leadership of church founder, and the Nevius method for economic self-sufficiency. Korean megachurches are resulted from the amalgamation of a selective affinity among those three factors.

Most megachurches accompany a strong leader orientation in each congregation whose loyalty to the pastor usually exceeds loyalty to the organized denomination. Most Korean Protestant churches are, even they are denominational churches, are actually congregational rather than denominational, focused on local congregational concerns rather than on denomination-wide projects, or issues of concern to society as whole. At the heart of an individual church, the primary concern is on its membership and its budget.

It is said that this kind of the autonomy of individual church in Korea is partly the result of conscious missionary policies, especially the Nevius method. The Nevius method is a program to foster self-propagation, self-government and self-support.²⁷ Of course, there are

victims and the marginalized and suggested the direction for the reformation of Protestant churches. For Minjung theology, see Madang Journal Editors, *Justice and Minjung: Theological Reflections in the Age of Global Empire* (Seoul: Dong Yeon Press, 2013), Session II. 1. Minjung Theology, 311-422.

27 The Nevius method, named for John L. Nevius, the Presbyterian China missionary who devised it. See Charles Allen Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods* (New York: Fleming

some arguments on the role of the Nevius method in the growth of Korean Protestantism, the Nevius method is credited for one of the main factors in spreading an individual church tendency throughout Korea. Ahn indicates this aspect as follows:

The tendency of the Nevius Method to equate economic self-sufficiency with ecclesiological autonomy, or ecclesiastical success, paved the way to a kind of plutocracy of the Korean church. On the one hand, church leadership, particularly eldership, gradually became equated with the status of affluence and influence. On the other hand, in many cases, the church satisfied itself with the achievement of economic independence, showing centripetal tendency, which was disinterested in the neighboring society.²⁸

Ahn also adds that early missionaries from the United States had the capitalism-oriented attitudes, based on the Ryu's argument.²⁹ He considers that the early version of the gospel of prosperity had already appeared in the early years of Korean Christianity. These arguments connote that Korean Protestantism already faced with the characteristic of capitalism in the pre-Liberation years.

This individual church system inspires an egoistic local church-ism

H. Revell Co., 1930).

28 Ahn, "The identity of the Korean Church and its Relationship with the Poor" 125.

29 For this capitalism-oriented attitudes of missionaries and critics on it, see Ahn, "The identity of the Korean Church and its Relationship with the Poor," 125-126, footnote 12 and 13. Dae Young Ryu, *Chogi Migug Seongyosa Yeongu 1884-1910: Seongyosadeului Jungsancheungjeog Seonggyeogjeul Jungsimuro* [Early American Missionaries in Korea 1884-1910: Understanding Missionaries from Their Middle-Class Background]. See also Fred H. Harrington, *God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean American Relations, 1844-1905* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1944; 1966), 106-107.

and leads the competition among Protestant churches. They tried to build church building as large and grand as possible to compete with newly built neighborhoods. They also developed bureaucratic system to earn better efficiency, and used the best technology to control the spirituality of the people, such as closed-circuit television service, Internet broadcasting station, satellite service and so on. Several megachurches expanded their territories by establishing daughter churches, charitable organizations, hospitals, educational institutions, newspapers, radio stations, cable channel broadcasting systems, both within and outside Korea. This kind of multi-tentacle approach is considered as the duplication of the business models of chaebol which is family-run corporate and super-national conglomerates in Korea. The prosperity and dynamism of megachurches are regarded as special gifts to their congregations, and achieved by the ability of charismatic founding pastors. Under the individual church system, many megachurch pastors had practiced or will carry out heredity like a church as a private property. The megachurch pastor is not a pastor of a congregation but rather a CEO of business enterprise.

Finally, the Korean Protestantism has been addicted to the gospel of prosperity. During the process of industrialization, the military government pursued the economic agenda at the expense of the political goal. Even Korean Protestantism could not exempt from the tsunami of capitalism. Rather than rejecting capitalism, Korean Protestant churches aggressively accepted its spirit and system. The majority of the church had been in line with the government's policy of economic growth, focusing on church growth. With the remarkable economic growth, the status of capitalism became more rock-solid.

After finishing the period of industrialization, Korean Protestantism

consolidated its characteristic as a middle-class church. As a capitalistic middle-class church, there were some favorite commodities in Korean Protestantism: The studies of church growth, positive thinking and the theology of success. The studies of church growth, conducted by Donald McGavran at the Fuller Theological Seminary were developed further by Peter Wagner. Also Robert Schuller's and Joel Osteen's positive thinking had been introduced and consumed with Korean Protestant pastors. The church became a trendy religious institution, and consumerism stole into the church, most notably in megachurches.

Megachurches, addicted with the message of health and wealth, are capitalistic entities covered with religious costumes. The gospel of prosperity was polished up into the gospel of blessed affluence. Each megachurch sells the gospel of prosperity and its own church as a brand. The size of church is understood as an evidence of success and God's grace. Church members consume the convenience and comfort from a megachurch with its brand. In the religious market, "religious institutions became consumer commodities."³⁰ As the Korean economy has been absorbed into global capitalism, the Korean Protestant churches become a bearer of capitalistic consumerism.

Conclusion

We have some characteristics of Korean Protestantism with three main sections. In section two, the growth of Korean Protestantism with

30 Yong-Gi Hong, "Encounter with Modernity: The McDonaldization and Charismatization of Korean Mega-churches," *International Review of Mission* 92 (2003): 242ff. Quoted from, Byung Joon Chung, "A Reflection on the Growth and Decline of Korean Protestant Church," 329, footnote 6.

a brief description of religious landscape in Korea. Even though Korean Protestantism is one of the youngest churches in the history of the Christianity, it has grown rapidly during the last 130 years, accompanied with growth of its population percentage, the emergence of megachurches, and its growing influence on Korean society. Considering Korean society is a religious pluralistic society, the growth of Korean Protestantism is remarkable. Especially the 1970s and 1980s had provided the fertile ground for megachurch cultivation. However, it has been stagnant from the 1990s. Until the 1990s, the evaluation on Korean Protestantism has been considerably positive. That is, Korean Protestantism has grown within amicable surroundings in Korean society. When Korean Protestantism, however, has become the most powerful religious group in Korea, it has misused its power, money, and influence within the Korean society where three-fourth are non-Christians. Those inappropriate behaviors resulted in the loss of its social credibility, with the impression of ‘an impolite Protestantism.’”

Session three and four had dealt with the characteristics of Korean Protestantism with for key terms: Communism and Conservatism, and Capitalism and consumerism. Communism and Capitalism have functioned as external factors in the growing process of Korean Protestantism. Conservatism and Consumerism are adapted to designate internal contents of Korean Protestantism as two consonant counterparts to communism and capitalism respectively. Both two pairs of ‘Communism and Conservatism’, and ‘Capitalism and Consumerism’ are related to two stages of Korean Protestantism. Each stage has its own type of an emerging megachurch: Youngnak Church and the Yoido Full Gospel Church are the representatives of two types of megachurch. The former was established, after Liberation period, by

refugee Protestants from North Korea. The first type of megachurch has a very conservative tendency both theologically and politically with an aggressive anti-communism. The latter type of megachurch has emerged during the period of industrialization. The new migrants from rural areas become the majority of the new megachurch members. This second type of megachurch became a bearer and subject of Americanized capitalism and consumerism, proclaiming the material success and consuming the blessing, so called, the gospel of prosperity.

With an introductory description of changing demography of Korean religions and Protestantism, we have looked over some contexts and contents of Korean Protestantism with two pairs of four terms: communism and conservatism, and capitalism and consumerism. This paper, however, could not cover various aspects of Korean Protestantism, such as historical, structural, cultural, and theological aspect. Still it needs many researches in relation to the issues dealt with in sections of this paper from other perspective, approaches, or framework. Especially critical analysis on the theological discourses in both types of megachurches would be a quite meaningful work.

After the second half of twentieth century, Korean Protestantism had grown with the refugees from North Korea after Liberation period and migrants from rural area during industrialization period. Considering the unfriendly attitude to Korean Protestantism within current Korean context, the future of Korean Protestantism is not so optimistic, unless Korean Protestant churches radically pursue a radical transformation. The first step for being an authentic Protestantism would depend on overcoming conservatism and anti-communism, and on being beyond from capitalism and consumerism.

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