

The role of christianity in modern korea term paper samples

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Abstract

The rapid growth of Christianity in Asia, including South Korea, is one of crucial trends in the modern development of different branches of modern Christianity (Jenkins 7). For a state the growth of a new religion means changes in different spheres of life, such as politics, social sphere, education and world outlook of the population. The assignment is aimed at exploring the role of Christianization and Christianity in Korean politics, social life, education and people's dimension. Complex consideration of these spheres' development with respect to the emergence and growth of Christianity in Korea is necessary to single out the role Christianity has played in the history of Korea, and get the general understanding of its potential for future changes.

Introduction

Despite a significant period of Christianity, existing in South Korea, its growth and wide distribution can be viewed as modern phenomena. Christianity began to be popular in Korea at the end of 18th century. At that time, Korea was stuck in a moral crisis. According to Park, Confucianism that has been a leading religion in Korea appeared to be too scholastic and far from the usual life of the people (" Protestantism and politics" 16-18). As opposed to clear theory of Confucianism, new-Confucianism was full of complicated constructions that prevented people from adhering to it. The spiritual need of finding new ideas led the prominent Korean thinkers to paying significant attention to the religious doctrines of other parts of the world. As opposed to the emergence of Catholicism in Korea, the development of Protestantism

there was associated with external influences, namely the activities of the missionaries.

The peculiarities of Korean Christianity are concerned with the significant role of Western scientific works in its development, as well as the quickness of its emergence and growth. However, a great role in the development of Protestantism in Korea belongs to the activities of the Western missionaries and governmental support for a new religion (Seok 147). Over the period of its history Christianity in Korea was strongly interrelated with the activities of the government, and exerted significant influence on the lives of the people as it brought Western ideas and values into education, the evolution of science and even routine relations between people. Let us start with exploring the role of Christianization and Christianity in Korea in political life of the country, paying special attention to the way Protestantism was becoming a state religion.

The role of Christianity in Korean politics

The issue of the different religious systems' influence on political life of society is topical and requires profound studying. Topicality of studying the role of religion in politics is concerned with the complication of interethnic and interreligious relations in the majority of states, and the formation of modern multicultural societies that are subjected to influence of multiple religions. The influence of Catholicism and other branches of Christianity on social and political life in Korea can be estimated as moderate due to the fact that Korean Catholicism coexisted with variety of religions and was incapable of getting a leading role among all of them.

As opposed to the role of Catholicism in Korean society, the case of the growth of Protestantism is often considered to be a miracle. Recent statistics shows that more than a quarter of Korean population is Protestant (“Protestantism and politics” 13). Furthermore, the Protestant church is growing, so that Protestant congregation in Korea has a chance to become world’s largest centre of Protestant faith.

In the very beginning of first Western missionaries’ activities in Korea, the people had a suspicious attitude towards them. However, after the victory of Japan in the war over Russia and the annexation of Korea, Koreans started to join the Protestant community due to a number of reasons (Seok 145-146). Firstly, the church had enough resources to provide its adherents with protection, livelihood and education. Furthermore, particularly Protestant church was viewed as a way for contacting other states that could potentially help Koreans get out of Japanese dependence. The colonized Koreans felt hopeless, facing the imperialism threat and, therefore, looked forward to finding the means to oppose it.

After Japanese annexation in 1910, the people were deprived of the rights to free speech, association and assembly, and only church provided them with the opportunity to gather together and express themselves. Up to early 1920s the anti-Japanese moods played an exceptional role in the growth of Protestantism, but then the role of Protestant church in political life underwent a significant change. The change was called forth by the fact that the imperialist government felt safe and granted limited freedom of assembly and speech to Koreans. In the result, a wide variety of non-religious organizations was formed as an opposition to the imperialist

regime. Furthermore, by the beginning of 1920s the church was led by well-educated people, who were reluctant to introduce major changes in their way of living by joining the Nationalist movement.

The situation Korea was changed by the events of the World War II. In December 1946 a special conference, dedicated to the future of South Korea was held in Moscow. It led to the establishment of the US-Soviet joint commission to control the activities of Korean government. The challenge lied in the lack of government, and the issue of the formation of the Korean national government was submitted to the UN General Assembly. After the establishment of the new government in Korea, all the branches of Christianity got a historic chance to develop without barriers. In the late 1940s, Christianity has got the features of state ideology. This moment represents the start of the second period of active mutual influence of Christianity and politics

. The appearance of the national government meant that lots of well-educated Christians got access to the leading positions in Korea. There were many Christian political emigrants, who returned from the West. Almost all of Korean leaders at that time had good relations with Western missionaries, who have brought Protestantism to Korea, and shared Western values of state-building, social and cultural life. So, those at power looked forward to the preservation of existing system and promoting Western values, especially the ones, propagated by the U. S. In the 1950s lots of missionaries from Western countries visited Korea and promoted not only religious values of Protestantism, but Europe- and the US-based science, education and lifestyle.

Protestant church played an important role in the reunification of Korea and getting rid of communist presence in the state. In December 1950, an association of Protestant churches sent a message to the U. N. Secretary General and the U. S. President, expressing its clear opposition to the Korean War truce, as well as adherence to driving Communist forces beyond the borders of Korea and establishment of a single Korean state. Despite the fact that the Church did not manage to play a decisive role in the truce-related issues, it has gained the position of the active supporter of Korean reunification and anti-communist player.

At the same time, it is impossible to state that the representatives of all the branches of Christianity were supportive of the national government, operating in Korea. As it was at the time of the Japanese rule, some of the Catholic churches remained the centers of the opposition and Catholics often expressed their critique in relation to the activities of the government.

At the second part of the 20th century, both major branches of Christianity played a vital role in the political life of Korea. Firstly, both of them were active players at both internal politics and external relations, creating a unique system of checks and balances at power. Secondly, the fact that the leading positions at power were held by the Protestants, led to the new U. S.-based orientation in Korean external policy and the inflow of Western missionaries, whose activities also exerted significant long-term impact on politics in Korea. The activities of the missionaries were concerned with changing the values and lifestyle of the people in Korea. Thus, the people started to express new requirements to those at power, and they became more capable of influencing the situation in the country. Last, but not least is

that the activities of the missionaries were not aimed at staying in Korea for a long time, but the preparation of Korean priests and specialists in Protestantism. The missionaries' work created the basis for the formation of a people's movement in Korea.

In the 1960s the Church persisted its anticommunist moods and became more institutionalized.

Over the period of the military rule in Korea, the church played a responsible role, taking the lead in promoting democratization and human rights.

However, their advocacy for human rights and democracy was continuously suppressed by the military government with regard to national security. In 1980s military government managed to exert significant influence on the activities of the church. The national division of Korea and strained situation in the country made the argument plausible and allowed to avoid active opposition of the population.

Apart from human rights and democratization issues, Korean Protestant church was also engaged into one of the major social conflict in Korea that took place between the 1970s and 1990s, namely the one regarding granting women legal equality. The Protestant laywomen were confronting the conservative men, advocating for more effective protection of women's rights and combating against domestic violence.

At the times of both Fifth and Six Republic the church has gone through one more period of growth, actively advocating for the promotion of human rights, democratization and reunification. Nowadays South Korea has a developed Christian community that outnumbers all other religious communities in the country. The church has a respected position in the

society and can exert significant influence upon the decision-making process. To conclude, let us reexamine the role of the church in South Korea at different stages of the state's history.

The introduction of Roman Catholicism was the event that broke the policy of isolationism that had existed in Korea for a long time due to the longevity of the Yi dynasty. At that time, the only country that had an access to Korea was China, so the introduction of Roman Catholicism can be also viewed as an important step to combating purely Chinese orientation in the external policy of Korea. The introduction of Protestantism in Korea was a final opening of this state for getting to know the values and attitudes of both Asian and European countries. Active operation of missionaries in Korea and its opening to the information from the other states facilitated the formation of the Nationalist movement and its combating against isolationism. Thus, the church played a crucial role in unifying the nation against both the inner dictatorship and Japanese colonization. Many Christian activists have participated in the resistance movement at colonization times, and managed to combat Japanese policies of oppression, cultural rule and war. When the nation was divided, the church still adhered to the reunification vector, advocating for the formation of the new government and independent policies. After the formation of the national government the church started to play an active part in the life of society, and helped Korea to establish new links with the United States and other Western countries and conduct reforms in different spheres of life. Under the circumstances of the military junta, the church stayed at conservative positions, promoting democracy and human rights.

In 1970s and 1980s Catholic Church acted as an opposition to President Park Chung Hee. The Christians led the movement for democracy and the assassination of the President. While at the times of the missionaries' activities in Korea, Christians supported the cooperation between the USA and Korea, during the rule of General Chun Doo Hwan they formed the Anti-American movement and advocated against excessive participation of the U. S. in the internal political life of Korea. In terms of its history Korean Christian Church supported the unification of Korea, as well as the movement for democracy and human rights.

Particular role in politics and decision-making of Korea was played by religious leaders. People recognized them as teachers and opinion-makers due to the fact that they based their ideas on Western values, different from the traditional ones, widely spread in Korea (" The protestant church as a political training ground in modern Korea" 55-56). The church became the basis for the upbringing of new political and social leaders, who learned the leadership experience of other states and state leaders, becoming capable of applying them to the Korean reality.

Furthermore, the Protestant churches and church-affiliated institutions can be viewed as reform agencies that both provided their members with new practical and social knowledge, and trained them new political values and ideas (Park 55-56). This statement is especially true for the early stage of Protestantism development in Korea as it was the only organized center, advocating for political reforms and the changes in a social system. As no other organizations concentrated on such activities, particularly Protestant churches played the role of the alternative to all other institutions. Even after

the Japanese annexation and under the circumstances of the military junta, the church continued to play an important role in the development and facilitation of the nationalist movement that have further become a basis for the establishment of the Korean nation-state.

The impact of the Christianization and Christianity on communication and education

Both the process of Christianization and the establishment of Christianity as one of the leading religions in Korea exerted significant influence on the development of education and social life in Korea (Kim, H. 230). At the very beginning of the introduction of Roman Catholicism, the state existed under the circumstances of isolation, and significant Chinese impact. The views of the vast majority of people and the system of education were based on the philosophy of Confucianism. The introduction of new religions and the activities of the missionaries meant a significant change in such spheres as communication, education and social life.

The process of Bible translation into Korean and its publishing had an important effect on the development of Korean language and communication between people. Hangeul (the first Korean alphabet) was created in 14th century as Chinese letters were considered incapable of capturing true Korean meaning of words. The early missionaries that visited Korea in 19th and 20th century paid significant attention to the development of Korean alphabet. They acknowledged the fact that the alphabet contained the elements of Chinese and Japanese written characters, but emphasized the fact that Koreans supplemented these characters with the unique pronunciation rules and cultural usage-related peculiarities (Lee 15). The

missionaries characterized Korean language as the one, specifically tackled for public speaking and very different from both Chinese and Japanese. The missionaries' support of Korean language and transfer from Chinese to Korean can be seen as a turning point of the transfer from a feudal society, significantly influenced by Chinese scholars, to the new democratic nation-based society. The most important thing is that the support of Korean language made it the common one for the representatives of all strata, alleviating the impact of stratification and empowering the nation.

Furthermore, the adoption of a common language created the basis for the formation of the education system that could be accessible by the people from different strata. Mastering this mission involved conducting the detailed socio-cultural study of Korea, as well as creating a wide variety of books and other printed materials in Korean. One of most important goals was translating the Bible, so that all the people in Korea could learn it. The process of the Bible's translation took place from 1887 to 1900. The Bible, other Christian books, education materials and the media helped Hangeoul to become the uniting power for Koreans. Particularly the power of the language was one of the forces that helped Koreans preserve their nation-state despite the events, associated with Chinese influence on the country, Japanese annexation and even its division. So, even the language-related activities of the missionaries exerted the influence not only on cultural and educational development of the state, but the politics.

The Hangeoul Bible influence on Korean culture goes far beyond the activities of the church and the missionaries. The Bible in Korea has become the important tool of communication and transfer of religious and cultural

traditions from one generation to another. The language and the Bible in Korean have become the important tools of preserving cultural and religious identity of the people under Japanese rule in annexation era. The Japanese acknowledged that Korea was badly digested by the Japanese Empire, and adopted a policy of assimilation, aimed at making the people forget their language and origin. Korean educational institutions were forced to adopt the unified curriculum, used all over the Empire, and remove the subject “Korean language”. However, it was still impossible to force Koreans speak Japanese at churches and use it for religious means. Furthermore, the opposition to the regime stemmed from groups and societies that have initially aimed at promoting Korean language and culture studies.

A great role in the development of Christian communication in Korea belonged to so-called “colporteurs” (the people, who distributed the Bible and other printed Christian books all over Korea). The spread of large numbers of Bibles and other religious books had significant impact on conversion and unification of people around the ideas of both Christianity and nationalism as reliable conversion networks were established (Kane&Park 400-402)

Christianity had a great impact on Korean mass communication. First Korean magazines and newspapers appeared particularly in Christian circles, especially with regard to the activities of organizations that promoted not only the Christian values, but political, social and economic ideas. The appearance of mass media allowed spreading common ideas all over Korea, including the most remote regions of the state.

As it was already mentioned above, the development of Korean language

and publishing played a great role in anti-Japanese movement at the times of the Korea's annexation of Japan. Lots of Christian publications were related to the Independence movement, and served not only as a source of information, but the stimulus for hope and inspiration. In other words, it may be stated that the Christian publications helped to unify the people around the idea of nation-state and independence, serving as a communication tool between potential leaders of anti-Japanese movement, as well as a platform for the leaders to share their thoughts and viewed with potential supporters. Newspapers and magazines helped to create social movements, and criticize the ideas of communism and socialism that started to be disseminated in Korea in the 1920s. Christian schools and societies were important centers of resistance in the era of Japanese imperialism and assimilation policies. Through the activities of the media and Christian societies people managed not only to preserve their language and traditions, but empower the nationalist movement,

With the end of the Second World War and the rebirth of the nation in 1945, political situation was favorable for the future development and growth of Christianity. After the war, new American missionaries came to Korea through newly established missions. The missionaries played the decisive role in the restoration of churches and the renovation of the infrastructure of Christianity. The important trend of that time lied in the fact that the missionaries participated not only in religious life, but started to become important actors in political and social dimensions of the life of Korea. Many Korean Christian leaders, who went to Western countries during the times of the Japanese annexation, came back and became the leaders of the renewed

Christian movement. Many of them were affiliated with American missionaries, who influenced Korean Christianity, so that it maintains the anti-communist and conservative views.

The short period between the Second World War and Korean War can be viewed as a preparation to the events of the chaos of the Korean War.

During the Korean War Christian leaders facilitated active communication and projects around the churches, as well as educational activities (Lee 130).

However, lots of churches were destroyed, and the activities of many social movements were stopped. In the post-war period, the church outlived the period of active reconstruction and the broadening of the Christian media network. The post-war times are characterized with the evolution of the Christian magazine culture. Nowadays the Church is an active user of the newest communication means.

Spreading of Protestantism in Korea had an exceptional impact on education.

The most wide-spread Christian education institutions were Sunday schools.

The history of these schools' development contains such stages as pre-federation of Chosun Sunday schools, post-federation of Chosun Sunday schools and associations for Korean Christian education. The first period is concerned with the launching of Christian mission schools followed by the establishment of Sunday schools. During the second period Christian education coexisted with the civic education, propagated by the Japanese occupation powers. At this time Christian education was developed in order to protect the people, especially children, from assimilation that was the key goal of the Japanese government. The third period is characterized by the freedom of Korean Christian education from the Japanese pressure, and the

establishment of the Korean Council of Christian Education. A number of studies of Korean Christian education, available at English, remains highly limited. However, it is evident that Christianization and activities of the missionaries in Korea have exerted a significant impact on the formation of the educational system and the level of literacy of Koreans (Kim, H. 220-22) (Kang 545-550).

The impact of the Christianization and Christianity on the daily life of Koreans and their values

The process of Christianization and the establishment of Christianity as the leading religious movement in Korea have exerted a notable influence on the daily lives of Koreans. First of all, it is necessary to mention that spreading of Christianity allowed people to refuse from the complicated system of Confucian values that did not always match each other. Traditional Confucianism was based on the faith in the force of a harsh hierarchy in all spheres of life. For instance, Confucian view of society represents stratifying people into four major classes (shi (scholars), nong (peasants), gong (workers) and shang (merchants). The people, who did not fall within these categories (e. g., soldiers, actors) were excluded from social relations. Confucianism also did not acknowledge the equality between a man and a woman, excluding women from social life. Thus, the introduction of Christianity can be viewed as a step towards liberalization of social relations, as well as promotion of equality and democracy.

As Christianization was based on speaking to Korean people at their own language, it called forth the diminishing the role of Chinese language in society. The growing role of Korean language promoted the development of

national self-consciousness and the ability of the people to oppose assimilation policies of China and Japan.

Christianity was an important unifying force in Korean society. Christian churches and affiliated institutions were the places, where people gathered together, discussed various issues and formed both social and political movements. Christian values, along with the value of the nation-state attracted people from different strata and allowed them to launch resistance movements. It is evident, that without Christian church, it would be far harder for people to ensure proper self-organization and make their voices heard.

Christianization and Christianity played a crucial role in the promotion of literacy, as well as the development of education and culture of Korea. The missionaries actively supported the formation of a unique Korean culture and made education and cultural services accessible for people from both cities and rural areas.

Finally, Christianization and the establishment of Christianity brought Western values into the daily lives of Koreans. The activities of missionaries provided people in Korea with the notion about the U. S. and European values and lifestyles. Furthermore, missionaries brought many scientific discoveries to the country. Over particular periods of the development of Korean Christianity the U. S. and European actors exerted a significant impact upon the activities of churches in Korea, being their only financial supporters. It is often claimed that the activities of the missionaries were the crucial step to the formation of multiculturalism in Korea (Kim, N. H. 230-231).

The introduction of Christianity made Korea more unified and more diverse simultaneously, combating Korean isolationism and making it more open to the world around it.

Conclusion

The process of Christianization and the establishment of Christianity as one of leading religious movements in Korea exerted significant impact upon various spheres of life in Korea, such as politics, social life, education and culture. Throughout the history of Korea Christian movement played an important role in all the political events, consolidating the people and supporting the formation of social and political movements. In Korea Christian Church has always been an active advocate for democratization, equality and human rights, as well as reunification of North and South Korea. The Church played an important role in the development of Korean language and its popularization, as well as the promotion of literacy and education in Korea. The opportunity to build a new society, basing on non-Confucian values, to use the native language and organize various social and political movements has significantly influenced the role of Korean people in politics, and was a serious barrier to assimilating the Koreans and destroying the idea of the nation-state. Furthermore, the introduction of Christianity made Korea more open to Western values, and brought an end to the policy of isolationism. Christianity is the thing that helped Korea develop its unique political, social and cultural potential, and promote active participation of its people in state-building processes.

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