3. Modern history of Korean religions

3.1. INTRODUCTION

As most Korean traditional religions had been established before Korea’s opening to the Western world (1876) and their religious essence has continued to exist one way or another in these modern days, we will sketch their religious substance and then survey their phenomena in the modern times as the background for pentecostalism. When we divide up the history of the main Korean religions, what we may call the prehistoric and early age was the period of original ethnic religion: Hananim (one god in heaven) faith and shamanism. During the time of the fifth to the fourteenth centuries, Buddhism was the leading religion. In the period of Choseon Dynasty, from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, Confucianism was dominant. However, all these religions in Korea were syncretic with other religions and when they lost their dominant power their religiosity were still deposited in the lowest stratum of Korean society. Nowadays Christianity has the greatest influence on Korean society. Koreans, therefore, have neither a longstanding state religion like the Islamic world and Western European countries, nor have they wholly lost their ancient shamanistic religiosity. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to see how the religiosity of Koreans in the shamanistic as well as syncretistic religious climate prepared the religious background for pentecostalism in the twentieth century. At the same time, theological discussion about the problem of contextualization/syncretism between Korean pentecostalism and traditional religions, especially shamanism, will be reserved in this chapter because we will deal with this in chapter 8.

This chapter is divided into three parts: traditional religions of Korea (3.2) dealing with Hananim faith and shamanism; foreign religions in Korea (3.3) about Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism; and modern folk religions (3.4). Because modern folk religions have little to do with providing the religious background for pentecostalism, we only introduce them very briefly.

The main sources for this chapter are The Christian Faith Encounters the Religions of Korea (1965) by Tong-Shik Ryu; Christianity and Korean Thought (1964) by Sung Bum Yun; Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions (1994) by Kyoung Jae Kim; the Traditional Religious Thought and Christian Thought: centering around Shamanism (1993) by Yung Han Kim; and “Religions and Religiosity in Korea: Problems of Presentation and Interpretation in Publications in German, English and French”(article, 1988) by Rudolf Kranewitter.

3.2. KOREAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

When we discuss Korean traditional religions, we are actually dealing with Korean religiosity because these religions did not have complete sets of religious elements.
of cult, doctrine, and organization. Consequently, there are different kinds of ways to study them and different interpretations for them. For example, in studying the foundation myth of Ancient Choseon, which offers an important clue in tracking the original Korean religiosity, scholars take different views according to their standpoints. Here, we briefly present the two representatives of Korean traditional religious elements: Hananim and shamanism.

3.2.1. Hananim (One God in Heaven)

Traditionally, the Koreans have been accustomed to the word and concept of Haneunim or Hananim (pure Korean word for one god in heaven). Conservative Christians in Korea tend to use the word Hananim while liberals and Roman Catholics prefer to Haneunim. The author takes the word Hananim. The Chinese equivalents for it can be ‘heaven emperor’ [천제: Cheonje: 天帝], or ‘above emperor’ [상제: Sangje: 上帝], or ‘heaven lord’ [천주: Cheonju: 天主], or ‘precious emperor above’ [옥황상제: Okhwang-Sangje: 玉黃上帝]. Generally, there are three views on Hananim according to the scholars. The first view is that it is the original unique Korean faith in a heavenly god (from an ethno-cultural, etymological, and religious perspective). The second view says that it is the highest god of shamanism (from a religio-sociological perspective). The third view is that it is the heliolatry of primitive Korean animism (the view of historians). The first and the second views are not entirely different in their recognition of one highest heavenly god. Besides, Kyoung Jae Kim thinks that the second view is the expression of the fusion of Hananim faith and shamanism. The first view awakes our interest because of associations between the original Korean religious tradition and Christianity. Here, we present some instances which bear testimony to the first view.

First, some foreigners who studied the faith of traditional Korean religions subscribe to this view. Homer B. Hulbert, who was a missionary in Korea for a time, described Korean religious belief in 1906 as follows:

Strange to say, the present religious notion which the Korean possesses today is the belief in Hananim, a being entirely unconnected with each of the imported cults and as far removed from crude nature worship ... pure Korean counterpart of the Chinese word ‘Lord of Heaven.’ He is entirely separated from and outside the circle of the various spirits and demons that infest all nature.5

---

2 Kyoung Jae Kim, Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions: Method of Correlation, Fusion of Horizons, and Paradigm Shifts in the Korean Grafting Process, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 1994. P.70. There are many ways to study it: from a religious point of view; from an ethno-cultural perspective; from a religio-social perspective; and from a historical point of view; opinions differ as to whether these two traditions (Hananim and shamanism) belong to religions or not.
3 Hananim has more emphasis on Hana which means one and great while Haneunim more on heaven (Haneul).
4 Kyoung Jae Kim, ibid., pp.59-73.
Missionary Gale, who worked in Korea for seventeen years, studied the belief of Koreans and formulated thus, “... Korean talks of God. He is Hananim, the One Great One ... so he is the Supreme Ruler for whom there is no image or likeness in heaven or earth or under the earth.” 6 The first missionary to Korea, Horace G. Underwood, asserted in his lectures at New York University in 1908 that “the earliest religion (of China, Japan, and Korea) was a monotheism and that the universal tendency of all peoples in religion which lacks divine revelation and assistance is downward and not upward.” 7 Rudolf Kranewitter asserts that Hananim, the God of Heaven, is not to be put into the pantheon of shamanistic spirits. Korea has an unbroken tradition of a belief in a God of Heaven, he argues, and illustrated this with many examples. He concludes that “the belief in Hananim provides the necessary link between the old Koreans’ way of thinking and the Christian concept of God ...” 8

Second, some Korean theologians share this view, the leading figure here being Tong-Shik Ryu, who stated that the characteristics of the Korean religious mind are ‘one, wholeness, greatness, and rightness’ (한: Han) and its personification is Hananim. 9 He explained this in connection with ‘wind flowing or elegant and poetical’ (풍류: Pungryu), which is, according to him, the substance of Han. He traced this idea from the record of the Unified Silla in the 7th century by Chi-Won Choe, which says, “There is a mysterious ‘way or truth’ (도: To) in our country. It is called Pungryu (풍류) ... It really includes the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) in itself and enlightens mankind ...” 10 He further traced the origin of Pungryu as follows: Pungryu may be the transliteration of the original Korean word for ‘fire, brightness or sun’ (불: Bur) into Chinese when the Koreans did not possess their written language; the son of Dangun (the founder of the Ancient Chosen) was called Buru (부루: Chinese transliteration of Korean word Bur); the first king of Silla (57 B.C.) was called Burgeoan (불거안); these Bur, Buru, and Burgeoan share the same root with Burkhan, a Ural-Altaic word which means heaven god. Therefore, Pungryudo implies that they had faith in a heaven god, he argues. 11 Sung Bum Yun also suggests that the Koreans originally adopted a concept of god (Hanunim or Hananim), but lost it and tended towards polytheism. He applies the degeneration theory of God to the Korean Hananim faith. At the same time, he tried to find the a priori of Korean culture which shares the same truth with Christianity in order to help Christian truth become established in

7 Lillias H. Underwood, Underwood of Korea, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1918. Reprinted in Seoul, 1983, pp.269-270. He also suggested the points of contact between the Eastern religions (Taoism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) and Christianity.
8 Kranewitter, ibid., p.377. There are also different views of foreigners. For example, the missionary to Korea Allen C. Clark saw Hananim as the head of the Koreans’ shamanistic pantheon and Frits Vos took Hananim as the first and foremost god of many gods, spirits, demons, and ghosts (Kranewitter, p.349).
9 The ending –nim is added to a person (the substantives) to show an honorable title to godhead.
11 Tong-Shik Ryu, Pungryudo and Korean Theology, Seoul, 1992, pp.10-35, 111. He asserts also that Pungryudo is the Korean religious expression of syncretism with other religions.
Korean culture. He argues that *Pungryudo* is the archetype of religious mind of Korean people. He further writes, “The difference between *Pungryudo* and shamanism is that the former is essentially pan-en-theistic based on monism while the latter is basically polytheistic based on animism and dualism.”

Third, the ancient Koreans’ sky worship for thanksgiving may support this view. “The core of sky worship was to unite Hananim and humans. To accomplish this, they drank, sang, and danced day and night. Singing-dancing-falling of spirit was characteristic of old Koreans,” writes Ryu. Regarding the similar phenomena of these feasts to shamanistic rituals, Kyoung Jae Kim argues the original purpose of those rites was communal thanksgiving to the sky god, which was different from the blessing-seeking shaman rituals. Ryu thinks that those sky worships were the practices of *Pungryudo*.

Fourth, the concept of god, which was expressed by *Hananim*, is attested to among Ural-Altaic peoples as well as among the Chinese. To have faith in heaven-god was not unique to the ancient Koreans. Some claim that the Chinese were also monotheists in the ancient world.

Fifth, the foundation myths of the ancient Koreans bear some relations to this view. The Dangun-myth, Buyeo-myth, Goguryeo-myth, Kim-myth, and Gaya-myth all have certain references to heaven. In chronological order, the Dangun-myth comes first and it particularly arouses our interest in connection with *Hananim* faith.

Sixth, many aspects of the Korean people have been woven together by the concept of *Hananim*. For example, Korean folk religions like Heaven Way Religion and The Great Religion have been woven together by the concept of *Hananim*. For example, Korean folk religions like Heaven Way Religion and The Great Religion.

---

13 Kyoung Jae Kim, ibid., pp.61-73 (cited from p.62).
14 Tong-Shik Ryu, ibid., p.62.
16 Iryeon, *Samgukyusa* (Remaining History of the Ancient Three Kingdoms), 1/1, ca. 1280. Translated by Seong-Bong Park and Gyeong-Sik Ko. Seoul, 1993; Bu-Sik, Kim, ibid., 1/1, 13/1.
17 Iryeon, ibid., 1/1. The story goes like this. Once upon a time, there was Hwanin (환인: Chinese transliteration of *Hananim* or *Haneul* (sky, heaven)). His son Hwanung wanted to rule the human world. Father Hwanin acknowledged his desire and found Taebaek mountain where his son could rule by the principle of ‘broad benefit to human beings’ (홍익인간: *Hongik-Ingan*). Then, Hwanung came down with 3,000 (followers) to the top of Taebaek Mountain under the ‘god altar tree’ (신단수: Sindansu). He called (the place) the city of god. This is the heaven-king Hwanung. He controlled and educated the human world managing 360 affairs of human beings such as corn, life, disease, punishment, goodness and evil etc., commanding wind, rain, and cloud. At that time, a bear and a tiger were living in a cave. They always prayed to Hwanung to become a man. He gave each of them a stock of divine wormwood and 20 heads of garlic and said, “If you eat these and do not expose yourselves in the sunlight for 100 days, you will become humans.” Only the bear succeeded. This bearwoman found no mate. She asked Hwanung if she could have a baby. Hwanung transformed himself for a moment into a man and married her. Between them a boy was born. This was Dangun. In the 50 years’ reign of Yo (Chinese legendary king), he became king at Pyongyang and called the name of the state Choseon (in 2,333 B.C.). He moved the capital city to Asadal and ruled for 1,500 years. When Kija was inaugurated as king of Choseon by the Chinese Tiger King Mu of Chu Dynasty, he retired to Asadal and became a mountain god. He was 1,908 years old.
18 This was the changed designation for Eastern Religion (2.2).
they worship Dangun] established their doctrinal bases on the concept of Hananim. The Korean national anthem, which has been sung by Koreans since 1948, has the words, “... may our nation long live with the help of Hananim ...” The Koreans sing and chant to Him without taking offence. In this case, Hananim has nothing to do with shamanism. Regardless of defining the religious meaning, the Koreans have used Hananim or Haneunim which is different from other god(s) or spirits, from ancient times until now.

When the Bible was translated into Korean, the Biblical God was translated as Hananim according to the conceptional synonym. To do this, the substance and meaning of traditional Hananim was reoriented by those of Jahweh because the former was totally ambiguous on the Biblical concept like the Creator God, Trinity, God’s redemption through incarnation, God’s holy love and resurrection. However, it served as an effective container or point of contact to receive Biblical God.19

3.2.2 Shamanism

It is commonly known or assumed that the prototype of Korean primitive religion is shamanism. Further, it is not rare for this deep-rooted folk religion to be practised among contemporary Korean grass-roots. Even if it developed into a more definite form among the northern Asian peoples, it is a pan-cosmic phenomenon. Seong-Il Kim claims that it is a degenerated form of Jahweh worship,20 which is a similar view to that of Kyoung Jae Kim who thinks Hananim faith was fused with shamanism.21 Korean shamanism deals with a large number of deities: from heavenly god to sundry evil spirits. It worships mighty and good gods to invoke blessings or to drive away misfortunes which are caused by evil spirits. In its cosmology, this world and the other world are distinguished on the one hand but are connected on the other hand. An unhappy dead spirit is believed to wander around this world and to bring disasters. Nevertheless, it neither has the idea of the Creator God nor the Biblical sense of the kingdom of God.

Today, the number of shamans in Korea is increasing in accordance with the change in the system of values in modern Korea. In other words, Korean society has begun to show the tendency that shamanism should be regarded as a cultural phenomenon. Hence, breaking with the long history of low and humble class shamans, recently some college graduates have become shamans. In the early part of the 19th century, there were 2,600 shamans and in 1930, the number amounted to 12,380. But in the early 1990s, there were almost 200,000.22

Korean shamanism is said to have originated from Siberian shamanism and functions through possession, trance, and ecstasy. The term shaman in Tungus-Manchuria means excited man. In Chinese-Korean, we call shamanism Mugyo [무교: 巫敎]. The Chinese character 巫 is explained as follows: the top bar (¯) implies the heaven or spirit (the transcendental world); the bottom line (―) implies man or earth (the empirical world); the vertical line connecting these two horizontal

21 Kyoung Jae Kim, ibid., pp.66-73.
lines (▁) stands for medium between heaven and earth; the two men on both sides (ㅅ) stand for dancing men.  

Through the course of history, two ways were opened for people to become shamans in Korea. The first way is to be taken ill with shamanistic disease [무병: Mubyeong: 巫病] and become a shaman. We call this ‘a man or woman who has become a shaman through spirit possession’ [강신무: Gangsinmu: 降神巫]. This disease occurs mostly in women. The other way is to become a shaman through hereditary transmission. It is called ‘a man or woman who has become a shaman by inheritance’ [세습무: Sesubmu: 世襲巫], which is a social status and a priestly shaman. There is no spirit possession in Sesseubmu. The former is the more original form of shamanism which is related to Siberian shamanism. But, as Korean society changed into a dynamic modern urbanization, Sesseubmu dwindled while Gangsinmu prospered. Gil-Seong Choe, who is a specialist in shamanism, mentions that the thriving of Gangsinmu in modern Korea seems to have to do with the growth of the modern Korean church. He argues that the expansion of the Korean church which depends on the Holy Spirit movement has the same form of mystical character as shamanism.

There are three main types of shaman rituals. The first is Gibok-Je, through which they supplicate property, long life and peace. The second is Chibyeong-je, through which it is believed that evil spirits are driven out and diseases are healed. The third is Songnyeong-je, through which grudges of the deceased will be satisfied and the spirit of the deceased will be sent to the world beyond. In such rites, a Korean shaman functions as a priest, medicine-man, prophet, and entertainer. She or he usually has three divine articles to accomplish them: small bells, a drum, and a mirror.

Shamanism is more of a grass-roots religious phenomenon than Buddhism. It has neither sacred books nor temples. Shamans simply live among the masses [민중: Minjung: 民衆]. Shamanism is more humane in its character than Confucianism. While Confucianism has a strong man-centered and family-oriented structure (ancestor worship), shamanism is woman-centered (70% of shamans are women) and has an interfamily-measure of healing (rituals for any malevolent spirits). Because of these facts, shamanism in Korea is related to the resentment [한: 恨] of Korean women and Minjung. This Han, which does not exist in Chinese and Japanese societies, is a complex mental situation of yearning, frustration and mild hostility of Korean Minjung. Because of this, it is called Minjung religion by some Korean liberal theologians.

The phenomenal aspects of shamanism can best be compared to those of pentecostalism because both are connected with spiritual dynamism among the

---

24 Gil-Seong Choe, ibid.
26 Sang Chan Paek, *The Han and Korean Illness: Where We Stand and Where We Should Go*, Seoul, 1993, pp.15-19. In contrast to the Chinese and Japanese, the psychological phenomenon of the Koreans is characterized with the feeling of Han. This static Han is kept by Koreans through adapting to their fates or endurance of sufferings. This Han causes various kinds of pathological phenomena, Paek argues.
masses in modern Korea. First, the number of shamans has grown rapidly in modern Korean society. Second, *Gangsimmu* (mainly spirit-possessed women) increased relatively. Third, a shaman is a mediator between the transcendental world and the empirical world by means of spirit-possession. Fourth, shamans perform their rituals in ecstasy accompanied by singing and dancing. Fifth, a shaman supplicates blessing, healing, and spiritual peace. Sixth, shamanism flourishes among grass-roots and those possessed by *Han* (恨). This reality arouses a sort of suspicion that *Sunbogeum* church might be a syncretism of Christianity and other shamanistic spirituality (see 8.2.3). To answer this question Jeong-Geun Pak published a book in justification of pentecostalism in 1970.

The issue from a missiological perspective is to observe how shamanistic religiosity will serve as the soil for Christian Gospel and how its traces can be transformed into Biblical thought. Regarding this Yung Han Kim suggested a view that there is a formal correspondence between the characteristics of shamanism and those of Christianity.

3.3. IMMIGRANT RELIGIONS IN KOREA

Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity were introduced into Korea as foreign religions. In this section, we deal with the first three religions which were introduced and fused with each other and with traditional religions. Islam is not discussed because it not only came recently into Korea but also its influence in Korea is minute. Christianity in Korea will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.3.1. Buddhism

Buddhism came into Korea through China. Buddhism in China contributed to enriching Chinese original culture, but it could not change it entirely. Rather, the Chinese transformed it into a ‘Chinese form of Buddhism.’ In China, monasterial and anti-social Buddhism was transformed into a Buddhism which served society and supported the state by syncretizing with Chinese ideas. The Chinese received

---

27 Boo-Woong Yoo, “Response to Korean Shamanism by the Korean Pentecostal Church,” in: *IRM* 75/297 (January 1986): 70-74; idem, *Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology*, 1988, pp.205-227; Sang-Chan Han, *Beziehungen zwischen dem Schamanismus und dem Verständnis des Heiligen Geistes in der protestantischen Kirche in Korea: Religionsphänomenologische und Missions-theologische Untersuchung*, diss. at Hamburg Uni., 1991. Ammersbek bei Hamburg, 1991. pp.129-175. Yoo tried to elucidate the relation between *Sunbogeum* movement and shamanism. But he could only compare the similar phenomena of both sides. Han followed the same step. Their problems were that they were not able to grasp the core of *Sunbogeum* theology. For example, Han writes as follows: “Die Essenz des Evangeliums ist für sie (Charismatiker und Pfingstler) die Krankenheilung und die Austreibung der bösen Geister durch Jesus ...”(p.135) or “Der Kernpunkt der Versöhnung Jesu Christi ist nach Cho (Yonggi) die Krankenheilung und der Hauptinhalt seiner Versöhnungslehre”(p.139).


29 Yung Han Kim, ibid., pp.284-296.
Mahayana Buddhism and developed it further.\textsuperscript{30} This Buddhism was directly related to Korean Buddhism.

Therefore, Korean Buddhism was characterized by Mahayana Buddhism which was adopted in China, Japan, and Vietnam as well. As we see, these East Asian countries are more open to Christianity than those Southeast Asian countries where orthodox and closed Hinayana Buddhism dominates. At the same time, because of its doctrinal openness (liberal and universal), Mahayana Buddhism could easily be syncretized with other religions or philosophies. The consequence was that it spread easily at first but it gradually lost its influential power in China and in Korea. Such a Buddhism was well accommodated by the shamanistic religiosity of Koreans, so that Korean Buddhism developed into a kind of shamanistic and syncretistic Buddhism. The Flower Youth Corps (화랑도: Hwarangdo: 花郞徒) of Silla Dynasty was a good example of this. Young nobles were chosen to follow the way of ‘the Wind Flowing’ (Pungryu or Hananim faith) as well as the teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Another example of Mahayana Buddhism in Korea was the practice of constant invocation of the name ‘the Buddah of Unlimited Light’ (Amitabul or Amitabha Buddha) and ‘the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy’ (관세음보살: Gwanseeum-Bosal: 觀世音菩薩: Kuan-um bodhisattva). It was the practice of Pure Land Buddhism, which taught that humans reach salvation (are reborn in the pure and happy land of Amitabha) not by individual efforts or good deeds but by faith in the grace of the Amitabha Buddha. Although Amitabha stayed in the Western Land (Pure Land), he, at the same time, existed among believers so that he might help them in whatever way they desired. Kuan-um was also believed to turn up under many appearances to help them in this world.

Syncretic Korean Mahayana Buddhism lost the spiritual support of the people at the end of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century (Goryeo Dynasty). However, its religious idea deeply infiltrated into Korean spiritual life. The doctrine of such liberal and spiritual Buddhism had common phenomenal characteristics with Spiritual Christainity.\textsuperscript{31}

3.3.2. Confucianism

Confucianism did not have ideas like revelation, salvation, redemption, signs and wonders, eschatology, and the Kingdom of God. It taught the full cultivation of the intrinsic nature of humans so that they may arrive at becoming persons of virtue. It was human-centered and in this respect, it had a common feature with Mahayana Buddhism. On the other hand, so long as it had the idea of the mandate of heaven (Tien Ming), veneration for the founder, and sacrifices to spirits, it was in the realm of religion as well.\textsuperscript{32}

Confucianism began to be taught around the 4th century in Korea. Until the introduction of Neo-Confucianism in the 13th century, Chinese literature and exegesis of classical Confucianism were mainly taught as the principles of socio-

\textsuperscript{32} “Discussion on Heaven and Man,” vol. 1 (The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean), pp.126-156 of The Four Books in the series of The Four Books and Three Classics of Ancient China, interpreted by Dong-Hwan Lee, Seoul, 1972,
politics. But Neo-Confucianism during Choseon Dynasty (1392-1910) was different. It was a philosophical and religious doctrine searching after the essence of human mind and the principle of the universe. Even though it was influenced by Zen Buddhism and Taoism in China, it generally rejected the imported Buddhism and heretical Taoism. It also re-interpreted Tien of ancient times into a metaphysical Li (reason or principle). In China, Neo-Confucianism developed two tendencies. The first one was the rationalistic Li (理: reason or principle) school. It developed in Sung Dynasty. The another one was the idealistic Hsin (心: mind or heart) school. It developed in Ming Dynasty. The former towered above the other. At first, Korea received the Li school.33

Neo-Confucianism adopted the idea of ‘the dual principle of negative and positive, and five elements of fire, water, wood, metal, and earth’ 음양오행: Eum-Yang Ohaeng: 阴陽五行. It was the principle to explain the formation of all things and changes in them. It was borrowed from the non-Confucian classic I Ching (the Book of Changes) to express the dualistic doctrine of Li and Gi (氣: spirit or breath). The totality of Li was symbolized as ‘the Great Ultimate or the Primal Beginning’ 태극: Tai Chi in Chinese. It is composed of ‘the negative principle in nature like dark or female’ 음: Eum: 陰: Chinese Yin and ‘the positive principle in nature like light or man’ 양: Yang: Chinese Yang. Five elements (Ohaeng) are the phenomena which follow according to the Great Ultimate. Originally, this Eum-Yang was a complementary unit, distinguished but never separated. These two are one, and at the same time this one is two. Eum includes Yang and vice versa. The I Ching, unlike Plato, made no implicit connection between Being (Good) and Becoming (Evil).34 It is a point of interest that this philosophical symbol became the emblem of the Korean national flag in 1883. “The Taegeuk symbol is significant to Korean people because it represents their collective ethos ... it grows out of nation and represents national consciousness.”35 Here we might find a ‘comparative’ thought between the Eum-Yang Ohaeng idea and the methodology of Korean pentecostalism. As the principle of Yang and Eum is taken to be positively materialized through five elements in this world, the latter positively claims to realize the word of God not only in saving souls but also in bringing material blessing (see chapter 8 and chapter 15). This resemblance in the way of thinking might furnish another ground for the rapid pentecostal development in Korea.

33 Logically speaking, Korean nationality seems to be closer to the mind-heart school, but this school not only developed later, but also made little of learning while Koreans were eager to learn. But, later, as Silhak (Practical Science) prevailed and the Li school declined, some Korean scholars preferred mind-heart school.


35 Jeong-Yeong Lee, “Korean Taegeuk Thought: A Paradigm for New Science,” in Korean Studies, Its Tasks and Perspectives, Seongnam City, 1988, vol. 2, p.297; Some explain that Koreans were able to endure Han (恨) because they knew the evil would wane some day according to the principle of Taegeuk which showed the changes of unbalanced situations and eternal harmony.
We are going to turn our attention to the radicality of Korean Confucianism and the understanding of ‘mind’ in Eastern thought. It is interesting to notice that Korean society possessed the Confucian tradition deeper than China and Japan. James Huntley Grayson writes:

> Although Confucianism originated in China, it never had the overall impact on Chinese society that Neo-Confucianism had on Korean society. In Japan, Confucianism was primarily a concern of the ruling elite and the associated scholarly class. It is only in Korea that we find a society in which the predominant political, cultural, and social influences were, and are still to an extent, Confucian.

It may be due to the ethnic and cultural differences of those countries. When the missionaries first came to Korea, they made the following comparisons: “Whereas in China the cast of mind is commercial, giving us a nation of merchants, and in Japan it is military, giving us a nation of warriors, in Korea it is literary, giving us a nation of scholars.” Some argue that Koreans are a mystic, religious and personal nation while the Chinese are a rational and reasoning nation. China as a continental nation with many cultural factors was surely hindered from developing into a Confucian monolithic society while Korea as a small unitary society could achieve it. This Korean social background is said to have influenced the development of Korean churches into Bible-studying Christianity.

The understanding of mind (心: sim in Korean and hsin in Chinese reading: mind or heart) arouses our concern. There is no distinction between heart and mind in Confucian or Neo-Confucian ideas. They neither separated the psychological aspect and physical aspect of humans, nor postulated the body as an opposite moral concept from the mind. Humans were regarded as whole beings. The statement that “hsin (mind or heart) is not subjectivism for it is in correspondence with hsing (nature), the essential nature of the self which in turn is a reflection of heaven” shows an example of Confucian anthropology. Such a perception of mind should have influenced Koreans to receive the Gospel by emotional stimulation rather than by applying reason to its theology. Again, there is little doubt that the effectiveness of revival meetings and the problem of schisms in Korean churches were partly caused by the Confucian tradition of anthropology.

It is interesting to note that some Silhak (Thought of Practical Science) scholars began to criticize the Li (reason) school and had a tendency to adopt the

---

37 Horace G. Underwood, The Call of Korea, Rep., Seoul, 1983, pp.45-48. Some other observations are made to the effect that Koreans are not as slavishly bound by superstition, old religions, and traditions as the Chinese, nor so imitative and ambitious as the Japanese. Also, the creativity of Koreans is mentioned: the first suspension bridge; the first iron-clad vessels; the first breech-loading cannon in the world; and the Korean alphabet.
40 See 2.2.
hsin (mind-heart) school. This subjectivistic mind school was closer to the spirit of Silhak that had Minjung and practical life at heart than the Li school. It is also interesting that in the period of Silhak, there appeared scholars who favoured a return to the worship of the ancient ‘above emperor’ or Tien (Heaven) instead of following atheistic and metaphysical Li. Such a new idea played a part in accommodating Christianity as it was first introduced into Korea as a part of Western science (4.2).

Even in the latter part of the 20th century, Confucian heritage like ancestor worship and filial piety shapes the ethical values of Koreans in general. This heritage functions more as a social tradition than as a religious factor where Confucianism, Buddhism and shamanism co-exist with a syncretistic reality.

3.3.3. Taoism

Taoism is more religious than Confucianism. The Taoistic idea (religious Taoism) is rooted in ancient folk customs. It was older than the philosophical Taoism which was set out by Lao-tzu (6 century B.C.) and Chuang-tzu (ca. 355 B.C.- ca. 275 B.C.). Taoism was introduced from China a little later than Buddhism. But, in Korea, it could neither formulate doctrine nor play a role as a leading religion. According to its characteristics, it was syncretized with Buddhism, Confucianism, and shamanism. It spread among Minjung (the common people).

It shared with Confucianism the same ideas about man, society, the ruler, heaven, and the universe which stemmed from the ancient tradition prior to either Confucius or Lao-tzu. But, Confucianism took the concept of personal Above Emperor or Tien (Heaven) while Taoism denied this and advocated an explanation of the universe according to ‘the Way’ (Tao: 道). Lao-tzu thought that Tao pre-existed Shang Ti (Above Emperor). According to Taoism, Tao cannot be defined in words. It is metaphysical nothingness, but it is the only substance and the great principle that enables everything to be created and changed.

The basic concept of Taoism is to gain harmony between microcosmic man and macrocosmic universe, of which Tao is the principle. Therefore, it belongs to the category of natural religions. Taoists teach a man how to become ‘a spiritual man or a perfected man’ [선인: Seon-in: 仙人: Chen-jen in Chinese]. They practise mystic religious means like breath control, meditation, gymnastics, and dietetics. They also experience certain kinds of miracles. Seon-Ju Kil, who was the leading figure of the early Korean Protestant church and started morning prayer meetings for the first time, had been a prominent Taoist before his conversion (4.3.1.4). The Taoist spirit, which is mixed with other folk religious phenomena, has not entirely faded away among Koreans.

---

41 Myeong-Jong Yu, The History of Korean Thought, Daegu, 1993, pp.445-533. Baekho, Danong, and Dasan (Yak-Yong Jeong) were the best examples.
42 The author was grown up by a Buddhist family that practised ancestor worships and shaman rituals. Such a practice was taken as a matter of course by village people. Christianity reacts differently.
3.4. MODERN FOLK RELIGIONS

Modern Korean folk religions started as Je-Wu Choe (1824-1864) established Eastern Religion [동학: Donghak: 東學] in 1860.\(^{45}\) Then, in 1901, Jeungsan (1871-1901) founded Jeungsan-Gyo. The Great Old Religion [대종교: Daejong-Gyo: 大倧敎], which was founded by Cheol Na (1864-1916) in 1909 and the Circle Buddhism [원불교: Wonbul-Gyo: 圓佛敎], which was founded by Jeongbin Pak (1891-1943) followed them. These are the representatives of modern Korean Folk religions.\(^{46}\)

They are syncretic Korean religions mixed with Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, shamanist, and even Christian beliefs. Je-Wu Choe insisted that Hanulnim (Hananim: god in heaven) descended upon him. Jeungsan said he was the heaven emperor who came down to this world. Daejong-Gyo is also called Dangun-Gyo because the believers worship the three gods of the ancient Choseon foundation myth (Hwanin, Hwanung, and Dangun). For Wonbul-Gyo, the symbol Won (circle or round) can represent the same origin and nature of all things.

Tong-Shik Ryu formulated the features of Korean new religions as follows: first, the idea of eschatology\(^\text{47}\); second, the idea of new world on earth; third, the idea that Korea will be the centre of the world; fourth, the idea of syncretism; and fifth, the idea of an incantatory mysticism.\(^\text{48}\)

3.5. CONCLUSION

The Koreans originally had a certain religious concept known as Hananim (one god in heaven). This has been explained either as being traceable back to the Jahweh faith of Semitic descendants (degeneration theory), as the highest deity of shamanism, and as universal evidence of the general revelation of God. This Han-nim faith is said to have been fused with shamanism and later immigrant religions without losing its identity. Therefore, Korean religiosity has been formed since ancient times through religious syncretization and the traditional shamanistic religiosity of Koreans is still alive in one way or another.

As an organized religion, the liberal Mahayana Buddhism firstly appeared on the scene as a dominant religion of Koreans. This Korean Buddhism had been developed through a mutual interaction with the traditional shamanism. This syncretic Buddhism held the religious role while Confucianism functioned more as a socio-political principle until the former was replaced by Neo-Confucianism. Syncretic Buddhism lost the support of the people at the end of the fourteenth century. Neo-Confucianism played somewhat religious role but it was more philosophy than religion. Taoism in Korea has been handed down by a form of syncretism with Buddhism, Confucianism, and shamanism. Modern folk religions

\(^{45}\) This religion changed its name to the Heaven Way Religion (Cheondo-Gyo).


\(^{47}\) The Wonbul-Gyo does not subscribe to this idea.

which arose since the intervention of the Western/foreign powers, disclose the characteristics of both syncretism with traditional religions and looking forward to a new world on earth, making Korea its centre. Here, we find that religions in Korea, both traditional as well as immigrant religions, show a strong tendency of syncretism.

This religious background must have influenced Christianity when it was introduced. The traditional Hananim faith and shamanism seem to have greater impact on Christianity. Next chapter will refer to how and why they have influenced Korean Christianity.