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The Christian and Buddhist Environmental Movements in Contemporary Korea:
*Common Efforts and Their Limitations**

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Abstract

Scholars of Korean religions have commonly held the view that Christianity and Buddhism have deliberately tried to exclude one another as they struggled to win popular favor over the previous three decades of radical socio-economic change in Korea. The authors of this article argue that, contrary to the existing view, the two religions have been broadening a common ground of understanding and creating an allied action front. At the core of this positive engagement has been the environmental movement. Christian and Buddhist environmental activists have set a model agenda and viable action plans, and share a conception of the meaning of life and human happiness revolving around various environmental issues. To show how the environmental movement has brought the two parties closer, this article examines how ecological concerns emerged within the two religions in the first place, explores the ways they managed to cooperate on concrete environmental issues, and assesses the extent to which those common efforts have been successful. It concludes with the implications of such cooperation for the present and future relationship between Korean Buddhism and Christianity.

Keywords: Korean religion, environmental movement, nuclear issue, religious ecology, Korean Buddhism, Korean Christianity, religious dialogue, environmental politics

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Prologue: Significance of the Issue

When it comes to the issue of environmental crisis, established religions can play just as important a role as political parties and civil society organizations. The urgency of the present crisis demands active cooperation from all the members of the society affected by it. In particular, we often find the seeds of important arguments about the causes of the environmental crises and the solutions to them in the doctrines or the belief systems held by religions. In this way, religions, with a vast range of material resources at their disposal and the ability to mobilize people, can play a significant role in tackling environmental problems. Christianity and Buddhism are the two major non-political groups[1] playing such a role vis-à-vis environmental challenges in Korea.[2] Generally, environmental movements are not just concerned with the practical goal of conserving the environment conducive to clean and disease-free life, they also represent a body of values and beliefs pertaining to the very meaning of human existence. In other words, they aim to regulate conflicting interests between individuals or groups revolving around what each believes to be true about happiness and human fulfillment. Conflicts emerge from differences or gaps between the members of society, e.g., between generations, ethnicities, regions, and the religious beliefs. One may argue that the ethnic homogeneity of Koreans has worked to suppress religious conflicts. Yet recent statistics concerning people's religious affiliations indicate that Korean society is witnessing a rapid growth of religious pluralism,[3] potentially subject to conflicts between the

1. This statement by no means implies that Christian and Buddhist environmental organizations are non-political. Later in this article, we will discuss the extent to which they have been driven by political agendas.
2. The official Korean national census on religious affiliation allocates separate choices of affiliation for Protestants and Catholics (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism 2011, 9). However, in this article the term Christians or Christianity refers to both groups.
3. According to the 2005 National Census, 46.48% of South Koreans claimed no religious affiliation, 22.% claimed to be Buddhist, 18.32% Protestant, and 10.94% Catholic (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism 2011, 18). In spite of the multiplicity of religious affiliations in Korea, there have been no serious religious conflicts; on the contrary, dialogue has been emerging between them.

followers of different religions, at a much faster speed than people would have imagined just a few decades ago.

Given the potentially precarious relationship between the two dominant religions in Korea—Christianity and Buddhism—their collaboration over environmental issues carries great significance.[4] Although the West has often seen cooperation between different denominations of a religion, it has rarely seen the same phenomenon between different religions. In this regard, no matter how superficial it might be, the religious collaboration over environmental issues in Korea presents a unique case in relations between religions.[5] In short, environmental crises in Korea have offered a rare opportunity of encounters between influential religious institutions.

Moreover, through their cooperation in the negotiating process over issues with strong social consequences, these two religions in Korea now present an exemplary model for how responsible social institutions should behave publicly; and in this regard, their environmental cooperation has revived the confidence of the general public in established religions. The question is how to analyze the cooperation and dialogue thus implemented. The excessive variety of opinions within the respective religious circles on Buddhist-Christian cooperation has deterred a proper comparative study. Those who are involved in environmental movements tend to agree about the need of mutual tolerance and cooperation, and such agreement makes it relatively easy for researchers to clarify what aspects of the movements should be investigated. And yet, a separate study is still required to answer the question of whether such cooperation points towards any convergence at the doctrinal level or merely a common imperative at the operational level.

This article avoids making any assumption on these points, and instead examines cases wherein the religious groups have cooperated to satisfy their

4. Examining the possibility of the eventual convergence between Buddhism and Christianity in Korea, Keel (2000) argued that the dialogue between the two religions should go beyond the level of exchanging ideas and theologies to engaging with each other in matters of practice.
5. Chun (2010, 122) thoroughly examined the Christian Environmental Movement Coalition as a representative case of a Protestant environmental movement in Korea.

own organizational needs while leaving the question of reconciling the respective religious doctrines a moot point. Research on the involvement of Korean religions in environmental movements from such a perspective has been rare. The lack of pioneering work also leads to the difficulty of finding an analytical framework best applicable to explaining the coalition hitherto achieved. For this reason, the present writers have borrowed a conceptual framework from the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism during the Joseon dynasty.[6] Such historical precedent of "acknowledging each other's existence" and "need-based tactical cooperation" has provided to students of the subject a useful interpretive framework.

While no agreed outlook arose between the religiously-rooted environmental movements, they have at least accepted the fact that they share a common living space without having to converge on their core doctrinal positions. This article aims at testing such a hypothesis by investigating the emergence and subsequent development of collaboration between Buddhist and Christian environmental groups. In addition, the present writers believe that the concerted work has ramified into the rest of the bilateral relationship, and thereby stimulated a wider dialogue and a deeper level of reconciliation between the two faiths.

With this supposed historical development as a background concern, this article firstly addresses the way in which debates about important environmental issues started within each religion before they gained momentum to evolve into concrete action, while at the same time exploring other factors that have shaped their positions within and beyond

6. At the start of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), Joseon kings heavily oppressed Buddhism. Towards the mid-period of the dynasty, however, as Confucian literati's criticism of the danger posed to state and society by Buddhism weakened, Buddhism saw an increasing range of tolerance practiced by the ruling Confucian elites. The Hideyoshi Invasions of Korea (also known as the Imjin War, 1592–1598) further consolidated this burgeoning trend of harmony and acceptance. The ruling elites demanded Buddhist monks fight in the war against Japan, to which the monks enthusiastically responded by forming voluntary armies. Thereafter, the animosity of the Confucian literati towards Buddhists subsided drastically. See Bu (2007).

national borders.[7] In the following section, the authors will examine specific cases of collaboration and identify the elements that affected the outcome of that collaboration. Next, the article evaluates the extent to which the collaboration produced fruition and identifies the factors that were conducive to both positive and negative results. The authors conclude by elucidating the implications of the environmental collaboration for the present and future relationship between the two religions.

The Origins and Development of Environmental Concerns in Korean Buddhism and Christianity

Buddhist Environmental Movements

With the largest community of followers among religions in Korea,[8] Buddhism recently has been actively pursuing environmental protection and ecological conservation. Buddhists believe that their Scriptures have long expounded ecological values and that the humble and natural way of life taught in the Buddhist Scriptures is intrinsically eco-friendly. Although not everyone endorses such a view (Keown 2006, 512), people have increasingly accepted the Buddhist doctrine as a teaching truly congenial to an eco-friendly life. Those doctrines can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, Buddhism teaches non-killing. This is one of the oldest and most important doctrines in Buddhism. Non-killing is a corollary of the belief in the sanctity of all life, which can be readily incorporated into the notions of bio-diversity and conservation (Cho 2011, 68–69). Secondly, Buddhism believes in the interconnection of all things. The principle of interconnectedness postulates every constituent of the universe to be linked to every other in a net of cause and effect (Kim 2004, 20–24, 406–425).

7. A full study of religious ecological movements will require a detailed comparison of the theological and doctrinal positions of the religions involved. However, due to limited space, the writers have focused on the tactical and behavioral aspects of the movements, leaving the theoretical part to future research.
8. See the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2011, 9).

Hatred and harms committed to other human beings or creatures, or any destruction of the common habitat, always come back as a threat to the very survival of humans themselves. Thirdly, Buddhism regards everything in the world as a manifestation of Buddhahood. Buddha takes myriad forms of incarnation in the body and spirit of the cosmos (Song 1993, 58–59). Hence, a Buddhist is obliged to protect all life forms encountered during his or her life journey just as a Buddhist should look after his or her own body, as well as to treat those life forms as sanctified as his or her own life. Beopjeong, a Buddhist monk and writer, once expounded upon this in terms of an "expanded-self," while to elaborate on this notion, Beomnyun of Eco Buddha[9] adopted the idea of the "self expanded in time and space."

1) Buddhism and the Challenges of Modern Times

In Korea, there has been growing concern over the diminishing popularity and influence of religions. Over the last decade, membership in a religion, particularly among the younger generations, has been rapidly shrinking. A sense of crisis has led clergies and monks to conclude that their institutions must find a way to reverse this trend. Some Buddhist leaders have come to realize the positive impact of taking on ecological issues as a responsible public institution can have on the image of Buddhism among the younger generations.[10] As mentioned above, Buddhism has long espoused an eco-friendly lifestyle, which the teachers of Buddhism think should now

9. The fact that the aims of Eco Buddha and other Buddhist environmental organizations converge with each other can be inferred, to a certain extent, from the fact that Beomnyun joins Beopjeong in stressing the notion of the "expanded-self" through the idea of "I in the cosmos and the cosmos in Me" (Beomnyun 2006, 15–21).
10. The views and interests of active Buddhist environmental organizations should not be treated as representing the official stance of Buddhism. There is no single official position expounded concerning Buddhist environmental movements, and, moreover, the movements still remain activities by the minor party in the religion. Yet recently there has been a tendency to welcome environmental movements as a new frontier in Buddhist practices. This is evidenced by various interdisciplinary studies conducted on Buddhist ecology. The theoretical development of Buddhist ecology in the work of Kim Jongwook also indicates this emerging tendency. See Kim (2004, 2006).

be a legitimate part of the religion's official teachings.

For some, undoubtedly a more cautious approach is preferred in postulating an intrinsic compatibility between Buddhist teachings and ecological concerns, since ecological crises are only a modern phenomenon. One may even question whether the environmental movement belongs in the realm of religion. Certainly the legitimacy of putting Buddhism on a par with an ecological ideology requires more than a simple collection of apparently congenial passages from its Scriptures. However, what is important to note is the rise of actual movements among lay believers who have tried to translate what they read in their Scriptures into concrete action in view of humankind's rapid erosion of the natural habitat. Moreover, religions cannot simply remain silent as the health of the environment is seriously compromised through various land projects and industrial activities, since the so-called development projects usually threaten the quality of life of the religious community as a whole. The environmental movement has thus become a moral imperative for Buddhists.

2) Buddhist Environmental Organizations[11]

The onset of Buddhist environmental movements coincided with the establishment of the Buddhist Institute of Environmental Education (Bulgyo Hwangyeong Gyoyugwon) in March 1988 (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 119). This was followed by the formation of the National Campaign for Clean Land (Cheongjeong Gukto Mandeulgi Undong Bonbu) by Song Wol-ju, the then secretary of the Jogye Order (Jogyejong), and then by the "In Purity and With Fragrance" (Malkko Hyanggiropge) movement initiated by Beopjeong in 1994. Yet proper Buddhist involvement in the environmental movements had to wait until the relaunch of the existing Buddhist Institute of Environmental Education under its new name, Eco Buddha. Initially, Eco Buddha took a populist-oriented progressive line aimed at

11. Buddhist environmental movements can be categorized into three organizational structures: (a) organizations by independent monks; (b) voluntary organizations claiming to be Buddhist in affiliation; and (c) organizations formally recognized by the offices of Buddhist denominations.

tackling pollution problems and the associated cases of socio-economic injustice (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 120).

In addition, the Indramang Life Community, founded in 1999, added force to the existing Buddhist environmental movement by encouraging its followers to practice a natural way of life centered on agricultural community and avoiding the urban secular lifestyle. This community is presently led by Dobeop, an ordained Buddhist monk. In September 2001, Sugyeong founded the Buddhist Environment Alliance (Bulgyo Hwangyeong Yeondae) to tackle various environmental issues that drew the nation's attention (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 132–133). At the same time, the Jogye Order, the largest Buddhist order in Korea, decided to create an environmental committee under the direct supervision of the General Secretary of the Jogye Order. This committee subsequently initiated the "People's Action for Saving Jirisan Mountain" (Jirisan Salligi Gukmin Haengdong). Recently, the environmental movement leaders began to exchange information and mutual support with other organizations on the issue of nuclear energy. In sum, in response to the ecological crises it has encountered during the last three decades, Korean Buddhism has established a number of environmental organizations, each assigned with a different task appropriate to its size and the expertise of its members.

Christianity

1) Korean Christianity and the Rise of the Environmental Movement in Korean Society[12]

During the 1970s, Christian organizations, such as Christian Academy or YMCA, occasionally met to discuss the implications of the deteriorating

12. Christian environmental organizations do not necessarily represent the official positions of different denominations in Korean Christianity, since different churches hold different opinions and attitudes as to the goal and direction of environmental movements. Moreover, some Christians oppose cooperation with Buddhists on ecological issues. Although the present writers are aware of differences between doctrines and strategies favored by Protestant and Catholic churches in Korea, we treat the two forms of Christian movements under the single category of Korean Christianity.

condition of lands and rivers on the life and faith of Christians. Yet it was largely after 1982 that the Christian ecological movement took off in a way that it had actual impact on both government policies and people's awareness of the value of the natural habitat to the quality of life.

When the Korea Institute of Pollution Research (Hanguk Gonghae Munje Yeonguso) was established in 1982, South Korean pro-democracy activists found in it a useful venue for raising political issues with the government. Since the institute was run not only by Christians but also by non-Christian progressive activists, it would not be accurate to term it a Christian environmental organization. Yet at the heart of the operation were a number of Christians, such as the Catholics Shim Seung-hun and Kim Taek-am and the Protestants Kwon Ho-gyeong, Cho Seung-hyeok, and Cho Hwa-seon. These Christian activists ran the institute in close collaboration with some non-Christian progressive activists, such as Choi Yeol and Jeong Mun-hwa (Shin 2012, 138–139).

The anti-government orientation of the environmental movement, which shaped the image of the institute in the minds of the general public, has its origin in the political atmosphere of the time immediately preceding its founding. The increasingly bitter protests against the late President Park Chung-hee's dictatorship, which peaked in the late 1970s, evolved by May 1980 into an anti-military movement on a national scale. Yet, by 1983, with the consolidation of the military dictatorship and the brutal suppression of the civil and student democratic movements, opposition parties and pro-democracy activists had to find an alternative strategy for the anti-governmental movement. They found it in the environmental movement.

Thus, the environmental movement at first took the form of anti-pollution protests. Pollution cases drew a clear line between villain and victim. The villains were the power elites and entrepreneurs who sought to dominate and exploit laborers. The victims were the grassroots, those who had neither power nor money with which to protect their basic interests. The parties challenging the status quo treated the anti-pollution movement as a protest by the socially oppressed against the exploitative financiers and the dictatorial military power. In this way, the initial environmental movement went hand-in-hand with a movement for socio-economic and politi-

cal liberation.

The political context in which Christian environmental movements were conceived does not necessarily indicate that Korean Christians were devoid of theological insights whereupon they could have developed their unique Christian spiritualism into a visible social movement. On the contrary, there were abundant doctrinal sources that point towards such a novel trend. For example, Catholics took note of a common inheritance of God-given creation as early as 1961, when the Pope explained the true meaning of "human lordship over the world" (Genesis 1:28) in his *Mater et Magistra* (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 54–55). The Protestants raised the same issue in 1975, when they held the Fifth World Church Council (WCC) meeting in Nairobi, Kenya (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 146).

Despite the rich Biblical and spiritual traditions inherited by Korean Christianity, the Christian environmental movement in Korea started as a religious version of the secular political movements of the early 1980s, which found a new lease of life in ecological issues. Certainly at the heart of the secular vision was an awareness of the unbreakable link between the military-led political oppression and the exploitative economic forces operating under the tutelage of the military, leading to the continued pollution of the country's lands and rivers and strangling the lives of the grassroots populace (Park 2003, 8). With its theological grounds for social engagement yet to be laid out, the faith-based Christian environmental movements initially had to be content with the social programs of a progressive nature borrowed from secular activities.

2) A Turning Point: 1992

As its leaders relabeled the Korea Institute of Pollution Research as the Korean Church Research Institute of the Environment (Hanguk Gyohoe Hwangyeong Yeonguso) in 1992, the progressive activists increasingly manifested a religious color in their movements. Their membership comprised not only Catholics and Protestants but also Buddhists, thus making the new institution a union of multiple religions. However, around this time, the Christian environmental movement underwent a paradigmatic

change. It shifted its main concern from narrowly defined anti-capitalist and anti-pollution protests to the broad question of the systemic ecological crisis at both the national and global levels.

Two forces were at work behind this change. In 1990, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the message of "a new ecological awakening" to the Catholic Church on the Day of World Peace (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 58). This was followed by commentaries by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which urged each local church and every lay believer to seek a way in which they could preserve the created order (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 59). The papal message encouraged the Catholic faithful to pay attention to bigger issues, such as air and soil pollution, nuclear energy, and so-called "death-inducing dietary habits." Moreover, as the Korean Catholic Church initiated the "One-Mind, One-Spirit Movement" (Hanmaeum Hanmom Undong) in 1991, various Catholic organizations and monasteries began to dedicate their energies to a massive national movement for the conservation of the natural environment (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 60–61).

The more Korean Catholics dedicated themselves to environmental movements domestically, the more they became receptive to the trend developing abroad. For example, Korean churches—both Catholic and Protestant—dispatched their own representatives as a part of the grand coalition, consisting of government officers, business representatives, and NGOs, to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro. The Catholic Church was represented by the Korea Catholic Council of Justice and Peace (Cheonjugyo Jeonguk Pyeonghwa Wiwonhoe), not a specialist team with regards to environmental issues, and yet commissioned with the important mission of defining its position and role vis-à-vis similar organizations abroad. The Protestant churches also dispatched some members of the former Korea Institute of Pollution Research to represent their denominational interests.

Driven by the impetus from abroad, Christian environmentalists in Korea began to see environmental problems not only as a local issue warranting regional anti-pollution protests, but also as a critical issue that

could affect the future of the nation and humanity itself. Yet such a shift did not come without a cost. This cost was a schism within the circle. A typical voice of reservation was expressed in the March 1990 issue of *Saengjon-gwa pyeonghwa* (Survival and Peace), the official magazine of the Korea Institute of Pollution Research. It raised a loud and clear warning that unlike in a pollution case, in which one could draw a clear line of liability, "the issue of the earth's environment has blurred the perceived cause of damages and responsibility for them by putting everything in one sweeping package of 'the earth'" (Shin 2012, 142).

The apprehension voiced on the part of the old guard still had a strong grip on many Christian activists, particularly, on those whose goal was on bringing about full economic justice as well as open and popular participation in the political process. For them, environmental protection meant protection of the environment for the sake of guarding the health and life of the grassroots, not merely for the sake of protecting the environment. In addition, engaged in devising the tactics of political protests, they primarily concerned themselves with how to translate the ideological challenges occasioned by the shift to the wider horizon of Mother Earth into a dynamic formation of a political force. The schism between the old and new schools, each equipped with a different notion of what is at stake in the face of accelerating ecological crises, continues to characterize the environmental movement until the late 1990s (Shin 2012, 142).

Reflecting all these changes revolving around the environmental issues, the Korean Church Research Institute of Environment reshuffled its structure in 1997 under the new name, the Christian Coalition of Environmental Movement (Gidokgyo Hwangyeong Undong Yeondae), by incorporating all the environmental organizations operating within the Protestant circle under its wings. From that time on, the Christian movement began to move beyond the old framework of pollution protest to a broader concern over the health of the planetary ecology. The twenty-year period from the early 1990s to 2012 has seen three developments in the Christian environmental movement. Firstly, as the pro-democracy movement progressed, Christian activists began to influence the environmental policies of the government. Secondly, Christian environmental activists no longer

remained content with developing a strategy of raising the alarm, but instead began to build expertise as to how environmental problems might be identified and what solutions might be proposed. Thirdly, the environmental movement has shifted its main focus away from the existing government-led, Seoul-centered programs to civil society-led, rural area-centered ones (Koo 2012, 150–151).

Against the backdrop of such changes, and particularly since around 2004, Korean Christians have concentrated their efforts on the most fundamental environmental issues, such as climate change, denuclearization, and energy conversion. This suggests that the horizon of the Korean Christian environmental movement has expanded beyond the peninsula. As a way of meeting this broadened vision, Christian activists like Yu Miho have suggested that individuals could help stem global warming by reducing their personal production of carbon dioxide, practicing "carbon neutrality," and promoting a so-called "diet for life" (Yu 2011, 335–346).

The Emergence of Buddhist-Christian Collaboration

The Christian idea of the dignity of all life, as a gift from the Creator God, and the human responsibility to listen to the tormented voices of other creatures, is in essence the same as what Buddhists expound in their doctrine of the sanctity and interconnection of all life. As was mentioned earlier, the doctrine of the interconnectedness of all life and of a moderate and frugal lifestyle emphasized in the Zen tradition have encouraged Buddhists to take ecological problems seriously. Following the Papal Encyclical of 1987, Catholics also began moving away from the anthropocentric reading of Genesis 1:28, in which the first humans are seemingly commanded to multiply and exploit the world, to a more holistic and ecologically tenable position (Lynn 1967).

In this way, a contact point was already emerging between Korean Buddhism and Christianity. Both believed in the equality and interconnectedness of all creatures, which could be ignored only at the expense of human flourishing. This convergence did not mean that one religion accepted the entire doctrine of its counterpart or shared in its salvific

vision. Recently, Catholic and Protestant theologians in the West have sought mutual accommodation through various ecumenical platforms, but the unique religious culture in Korea has allowed no comparable attempt at reciprocity between Catholics, Protestants, and Buddhists. And yet, at least in terms of doctrines, they have come to agree on the sanctity of life and the interconnectedness of all creatures on Earth.

In the midst of the emerging doctrinal convergence, some salient cases of industrial pollution and environmental damage, although very limited in scope, have inevitably brought the Buddhist and Christian camps closer together. It is true that the two religions first raised their concerns over environmental problems for different motives. As we will see in more detail later, Buddhism became interested in environmental issues when they witnessed some government-driven development projects destroying their places of worship or affecting their natural habitat. In the case of Christian activists, they spearheaded an environmental movement when they came to believe that industrial pollutions were aggravating the predicament of farmers and laborers who had already suffered the socio-economic injustices brought about by the government's developmental policies.

Whatever motivating them, the two religions managed to carry a common effort whenever they witnessed the destruction of lands and rivers. One of the most decisive concerted actions was the Conference of Religious People for Environment and Ethics, which was organized by the six representative Korean religions in May 1993.[13] The conference set off a series of annual meetings at which delegates discussed various environmental issues from a religious perspective (Daehwa Munhwa Academy 2001, 49). As a result, the activists of those six religions were able to form a united front in protesting a number of land and river projects, such as the Donggang River Dam construction, the Saemangeum Seawall project, and the Jirisan Mountain Dam construction. In May 2001, soon after those representatives had formed a tactical alliance in resistance to the Saemangeum

13. These six religions include Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Won Buddhism, and Cheondogyo.

Seawall project, they organized a Conference on Religion and the Environment, the first ever comprehensive consultative body of the kind involving all the major religions of Korea.

Areas of Buddhist-Christian Collaboration

The environmental collaboration that has thus emerged can be classified into two categories. There are cases in which the two religions managed to achieve specific concerted action in opposition to construction projects funded and implemented by the government. The actions belonging to this category can be further divided into: (a) protests aimed at habitat conservation, in which case religious organizations worked alongside other civil society movement groups and yet played only a limited role; (b) activities where the religious organizations took a leading role both in raising the alarm bell and mobilizing non-religious environmental groups in the process; and (c) occasions in which a local issue became nationally politicized with the consequence being it blown out of proportion, allowing very limited maneuverability for the participating religious groups. The second category pertains to actions addressing the issue of nuclear energy. This type is differentiated from the first in that it has required a convergence among all parties at a deeper level of consciousness, including a shared understanding of the meaning of life and the future of the human species, as well as a readiness to accept the entire planetary eco-system as a target for action.

Actions Focused on Specific Incidents at the Local and National Levels

Here we briefly examine the aforementioned three subcategories. The first consists of protests against government-driven development projects organized to prevent the destruction of or damage to lands and rivers. There are many examples of environmental concerns that drew the serious attention of the general public. In these cases, the development projects were opposed by a number of groups, such as the local government, local environmental

action groups, intellectuals, and affected residents. Christian and Buddhist circles also took part in these movements, but they usually followed the trend rather than actively shaping the course of the protest. The results were mostly successful.

A typical case is the Donggang River Dam project. When the Hangang river was flooded in September 1990, the upper regions of Yeongwol and Danyang were severely affected by the rising waters. To counter this, the government decided to build a multi-purpose dam along the Donggang river and officially announced this intention in September 1997. This triggered a massive protest on the part of local residents. The Gangwon-do province branch of the Taegojong, an influential Buddhist order, denounced the project[14] and actively participated in mass demonstrations with other civil organizations.[15] The Korea National Council of Churches (Hanguk Gidokgyo Gyohoe Hyeobuihoe) also dispatched a team headed by Jeong Hag-yong, the chairman of the council's environmental committee. The team held special services to "save the Donggang River" and carried out protest walks.[16] The dam project over such an ecologically important and scenic route scattered with historical-cultural heritage sites, including the epitaph of the Joseon dynasty's King Danjong, failed to garner support from the general public and in the end, President Kim Dae-jung announced on June 5, 2000, that the government would abandon the plan.[17]

The second subcategory involves those cases characterized by the active leadership of religious establishments. The most typical case includes the infamous Saemangeum project. This government-proposed project was

14. "Bulgyo taegojong gangwon gyogu, yeongwoldaem bandae seongmyeong" (The Gangwon-do Diocese of Buddhist Taego Sect Issues a Statement Opposing the Yeongwol Dam), *Yonhap News*, April 8, 1999.
15. "Gakgye insa ilbaengmyeong, yeongwol donggangdaem bandae seoneon" (One Hundred People from All Walks of Life Declare Their Opposition to the Construction of the Yeongwol Donggang River Dam), *Yonhap News*, July 22, 1998; see also Daehwa Munhwa Academy (2001), 158.
16. "'Gyohoehyeop' donggangdaem bandae haengjin" (The National Council of Churches in Korea Marches to Oppose the Donggang River Dam), *Kidok Newspaper*. June 9, 1999.
17. "Donggangdaem baekjihwa" (Voiding the [Plant to Construct] the Donggang River Dam), *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 6, 2000.

an initiative for land reclamation on the Mangyeong Plain through the creation of a seawall stretching for 33 kilometers along Korea's western coast. Completion of the seawall would annihilate the coastal mudflats, in the process destroying the biodiversity at the site and in the adjacent sea. While various environmental groups organized mass rallies at the site and local residents brought the case to court, delegates from four of Korea's major religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Won Buddhism—carried out a "Three Steps, One Bow" pilgrimage covering the entire 350 kilometers from Saemangeum to the South Korean president's office in Seoul. The walk took 65 days to complete.[18]

The protest walk impressed neither the government officials nor the Supreme Court,[19] and construction of the world's longest seawall was completed in April 2010. The whole course of the protest was met by an equal amount of antipathy on the other side. Moreover, the business groups which were behind this project had a stake over which no one was able to prevail.

In the third subcategory, we see issues that originated as clashes between local interests but increasingly came to involve various ideological positions and interests, and escalated to the national level. In 2007, the South Korean Navy announced plans to build a naval base covering an area of 450,000 square meters in Gangjeong village on Jejudo island. The government justified the plan with the argument that it needed a naval base to deter the future expansion of Chinese naval power in the Yellow Sea and East China Sea. At first, the villagers, local government, and environmental organizations focused on the environmental impact of the proposed project on the livelihoods of the village residents and the area's fishing industry.

Christian and Buddhist environmental groups flocked to the site for a

18. "Saemangeum samboilbaedan, olhae-ui hwangyeongin sang" ("The Saemangeum Three Steps, One Bow Group' Awarded the Environmental Men of the Year Prize), *Hankook Ilbo*, December 3, 2003.

19. On the final verdict by the Supreme Court, see "Saemangeum gaebal saeop gyesokhara!" (Continue the Saemangeum Development Project!), *Kukmin Ilbo*, March 16, 2006.

systematic protest, challenging the need to have a military base at the expense of the natural habitat. As this was happening, the issue spilt over into party politics, thus adding a political dimension to an issue originally raised as an environmental case. The Presbyterian Church issued a formal statement saying that the project would not only destroy the natural habitat of the site, designated a biosphere reserve by UNESCO, but also directly contradict Christian pacifism by putting military hegemony ahead of the peace and life this idyllic village had long stood for.[20] A few months prior to this, on May 13, 2011, delegates of Korea's major religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Won Buddhism, and Cheondogyo—had held a press conference where they demanded that the government immediately abandon the construction project.[21] Although the protests continue to this day, the case shows the limitations of collaboration. The religious groups have managed to draw wide attention from the general public, yet have failed to achieve the desired goal due to the heavy politicization of the issue.

The Nuclear Issue: The "Sanctity of Life" and the Paradigmatic Shift

Korea had not seen any serious anti-nuclear protests until 1990 when the government designated a small island called Anmyeondo off the country's west coast as a candidate for a nuclear waste disposal site. Environmental activists had usually been able to build rapport with the local populace, a rapport they used as a conduit to protest the government for what they perceived as undemocratic decisions. This proved no longer the case with the issue of nuclear waste disposal. The primary reason for this was the different stakes of the groups involved. The government often wooed the local residents through socio-economic incentives, and as a result conflicting interests emerged not only between the environmental activists and the

20. Hanguk Gidokkyo Jangnohoe Chonghoe (Korean Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea), accessed June 2, 2014, http://www.prok.org/gnu/bbs/board.php?bo_table=peace_letter1&wr_id=27754.

21. "Gyohoehyeop donggangdaem bandae haengjin" (The National Council of Churches in Korea Marches to Oppose the Donggang River Dam), *Jeju Today*, October 23, 2014.

local populace but even between the local residents themselves.

But insofar as the nuclear issue is concerned, the mainstream environmental activists have consistently held a negative view of nuclear power, and Korean Buddhists and Christians have not deviated much from this norm. Echoing this trend, An Byeong-ok, an environmental activist, commented that in Europe and elsewhere the anti-nuclear stance is so fundamental to the green movement that the nuclear issue had never been an object of negotiation. Mainstream environmental activists may disagree on other issues, but not on the nuclear question (Shin 2012, 138).

In this respect, Korean Buddhists and Christians consider the German case to be the most successful example of an anti-nuclear movement. For example, Ko Jae-gil, a Christian environmental activist, argues that Korean churches ought to emulate the example set by German churches and their government. On May 30, 2011 the German government announced that it would phase out all the country's nuclear power plants by 2022 (Ko 2011, 41). Behind the decision was undoubtedly the shock of the Fukushima accident, but, Ko argues, the pressure from the German churches also played a decisive role.[22]

Toeing the line with such development overseas, Korean Buddhists and Christians synchronized their anti-nuclear movement with their foreign counterparts, demanding changes in individual lifestyles and the search for alternative sources of energy. The voice from the opposing side is still strong: where else can we find the needed energy unless we return to fossil fuels? The Christian response has been straightforward: reduce energy consumption by changing our lifestyle. For example, Yu Miho, the head of the Policy Committee of the Christian Environment Institute, argued that since 11.4 percent of the total energy consumed in Korea derives from nuclear energy, by reducing consumption by exactly that amount, people

22. For example, Nikolaus Schneider, the chairman of the Evangelical Church Council in Germany (EKD), and Friedrich Weber, the EKD head of Braunschweig State, put consistent pressure on the German government with warnings about the irreversible consequences of a nuclear accident and the danger of relying upon nuclear sources for energy acquisition, while also demanding the closure of all nuclear power plants in Germany at the earliest possible date (Ko 2011, 41).

could close down the country's nuclear plants (Yu 2011, 50). Accordingly, she has proposed a nationwide campaign for people to keep a daily energy consumption logbook and practice fasting during Lent as a way of reducing carbon production (Yu 2010, 327–346).

The recent movement has been shifting its main concern from anti-nuclear to denuclearization protests. Departing radically from the existing action-oriented protest against particular cases of nuclear policy, Protestant Christians now focus on the broader issue of energy conservation and securing alternative energy sources as a package solution to the threat of global warming. Recently, the Christian Alliance for a Nuclear-Free World and the National Council of Churches have been holding regular "denuclearization services" on Sundays.[23] Catholic churches also now act as a unified unit increasingly engaged in the denuclearization movement on pastoral fronts.[24]

By contrast, Buddhism did not organize a concerted anti-nuclear movement until a few years ago. Individual believers or the staff of local Buddhist temples had occasionally joined locally-organized anti-nuclear demonstrations. With the establishment of the Buddhist Council of Life and Ethics (Bulgyo Saengmyeong Yulli Hyeophoe) in March 2012, Buddhism began to gather up all its nuclear-related movements under a central leadership. Beopeung, a co-chairman of the council, publicly denounced the government, saying "nuclear energy is like a fire which, once ignited, refuses extinction, and that is the true face of nuclear power hiding itself behind the label of clean energy." Hence, he continues, "The Buddhist lifestyle, which encourages 'being content with a small desire' (*soyokjijok* 所欲知足), can provide a solution to the nuclear issue by helping to save energy and find alternative energy sources."[25] Beophyeon, a member of the Executive Committee the

23. "'Haek eobsneun sesang-eul wihan hanguk geuriseudoin yeondae' 2013-nyeon chonghoe gaechoe" (The Korean Christian Alliance for Nuclear-Free World Holds 2013 General Assembly), *Kukmin Ilbo*, April 19, 2013.
24. "Hanguk cheonjugyo talhaek ipjang gongsik seoneon" (Korean Catholic Church Officially Declares its Post-nuclear Stance), *Yonhap News*, October 17, 2013.
25. "Bulgyogye, talhaek nonui hwaksan" (Spread of Post-Nuclear Discussion in the Buddhist Community), *BTN News*, March 1, 2012.

council, also said, "Nuclear energy has never been a solution to the energy problem. . . . From the Buddhist point of view, the solution lies only in restoring the purity of the mind. . . . The Council will look into the issue very seriously from this day on, and suggest an action."[26] The implication is clear: the denuclearization movement will be treated as one of the most crucial issues in the Korean Buddhist environmental movement.

Encouraged by the strong public support shown for Christian and Buddhist denuclearization movements, the Conference of Religion and the Environment began to form a united front of the major religions. During August 20–23, 2012, the delegates of Catholicism, Buddhism, Protestantism, Won Buddhism, and Cheondogyo undertook ritual walking circuits around the nuclear power plants at Gori, Wolsong, and Uljin with banners proclaiming, "Pan-Religious Coalition Pilgrimage of Life and Peace for a World without Nuclear Power," and "Religious People's Declaration for a Nuclear-Free World." Until that time the five religions had only participated in separate capacities in protests against the government's policies on nuclear waste disposal sites. This declaration carries historic significance in that for the first time in their history the five religions worked out their positions on the nuclear issue in concert. On this particular occasion, they voiced a unanimous opinion that nuclear energy programs put economic interests ahead of the survival of humans and other life forms on the Earth, and demanded that the planned construction of nuclear power plants at Yeongdeok and Samcheok be abandoned.[27]

An Evaluation of Buddhist-Christian Collaboration

The collective environmental movements on the part of Korean religious organizations garnered some support from the general public, which was essential for achieving success in their rallies against polluting industries

26. "Bulgyogye, talhaek nonui hwaksan." *BTN News,* March 1, 2012.
27. For the full Korean text of the declaration see Hanguk Cheonjugyo Jugyo Hoeui. *Hanguk cheonjugyo jungang hyeobuihoe* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea), accessed June 2, 2014, http://www.cbck.or.kr/bbs/bbs_read.asp?board_id.=K1500&bid= 13009004.

and government-funded development projects. The blocking of the Donggang River Dam construction is a case in point. The two religious parties were able to draw massive popular support since the project, if implemented, would destroy a number of scenic attractions and historical heritage sites scattered along the Donggang river. In the case of the Buan nuclear waste disposal site in 2003, the obvious danger associated with the plan stirred up a considerable amount of fear among the local residents who had a direct stake in it. For most movements organized by Christian and Buddhist environmentalists, such public support was essential. Insofar as the relationship between the success rate of a movement and the level of its popular support, we do not see much difference between religious and non-religious environmental organizations.

Yet Christian and Buddhist movements possessed aspects that are rare among non-religious organizations, i.e., their organizational power and moral influence. Moreover, since these religious organizations have accumulated expertise on environmental issues over an extended period of time, they were easily able to create a "will to protest" among citizens and transform that into a powerful rally. For example, the Christian Coalition of Environmental Movement, Eco Buddha, and the Buddhist Environment Conference have long experience in representing people's interests on environmental issues and in collaborating with civil environmental groups, and such experience has facilitated their ability to mobilize people to organized action.

In addition, behind the faith-based local environmental groups were the central leaderships of the religious communities assisting their protest by taking advantage of their influential positions in society. A case in point is the formal support given by the Jogye Order Headquarters for the Buddhist delegate who joined the "Three Steps, One Bow" pilgrimage in response to the Saemangeum project. Another factor that contributed to the high rate of success was the unusually high level of commitment with which religious environment organizations carried out their work. This is partly due to the strength of an action inspired by religious convictions.

Finally, the environmental movements led by Christian and Buddhist organizations aimed at strictly practical goals. In the case of the protests against the Donggang River Dam plan and the Buan nuclear waste site,

they set their goals not in developing a long-term strategic collaboration, but only in conserving sites at issue. Focusing on the actual problems themselves, while keeping potential sources of disagreement at bay, made it possible to form consensus on specific actions fairly quickly.

A movement failed when it went against the interests of the majority. This was also the case when there were a multiple number of influential groups involved but with conflicting positions, or when there was no one dominant voice. Or, when a party in favor of a development project prevailed throughout the course of the debate, the argument in favor of conservation did not convince the general public. This was particularly the case when the consensus within the government and the major political parties was leaning towards development. Examples of this include the construction of the Seoul-Busan High-speed Railway, the Cheonseongsan Mountain Tunnel, the Seoul Outer Circular Motorway project, the Saemangeum Seawall project, and the Four Main Rivers project.

The politicization of some environmental groups, whether actual or merely apparent, alienated the general public. Some Buddhist and Christian environmental organizations publicly expressed strong political views during elections or supported particular candidates, to the detriment of needed rapport with the general public, who subsequently viewed the environmental programs promoted by these groups with suspicion. Jiyul, a Buddhist nun, publicly expressed her support for Roh Moo-hyun, then a presidential candidate, when the latter promised to change the planned route of the high speed railway in order to bypass Cheonseongsan mountain.[28] In addition, people treated some conservation campaigns and popular movements as politically motivated, such as the protest against the U.S.-Korea FTA, the massive candlelight civil protest against the Grand Canal project, and street demonstrations against the planned naval base in Gangjeong village, Jeju Island.

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28. "Cheongseongsan gosokcheol baekjihwa handadeoni . . ." (Despite the Statement to Cancel the High-speed Railway through the Cheonseongsan Mountain) *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 17, 2003; "Cheonseongsan gosok cheoldo baekjihwa musan wigi" (Critical Moment for the Plan to Void the High-speed Railway through the Cheonseongsan Mountain), *OhmyNews*, February 7, 2003.

Conclusion

The discussion above shows at least two points clearly. At the level of core doctrine, the environmental activists affiliated with the two religions share a common notion of what is at stake in undertaking an environmental movement: to protect the sanctity of life on Earth. Neither Buddhism nor Christianity can afford to ignore environmental issues since the planet's ecological condition directly affects the biological survival of all life forms, including humans. Faced with the threat thus posed by the deteriorating environment, Buddhist and Christian environmental movements first tried to justify their actions through interpreting and reinterpreting their respective religious doctrines.

However, there is no evidence that Buddhist-Christian cooperation has to any degree bridged the essential differences in their faiths. If their cooperation had been predicated upon the adoption of the other's belief system, their collaboration would not have happened. Cooperation between the two camps remained merely at the level of concrete action. In other words, when faced with issues that required urgent action, the two parties pursued synchronized action at an agreed place and time, but no more than that.

Has their environmental collaboration brought any transformation to Christianity and Buddhism as religions? The findings here confirm our initial expectation that the practical needs of developing a common action front required the activists of the two faiths to accept each other's institutional legitimacy, but without really debating their respective core belief systems, to say nothing of accepting their counterpart's. As was mentioned at the beginning, the leaders of the Christian and Buddhist environmental movements sought not so much convergence at the doctrinal level as passive acceptance of the existence of the other as religious institutions. It was their shared sense of environmental crisis and need to develop a viable common front for action that brought them together, but none of their common actions thus far would indicate that the leaders of the two camps came together to develop an ecological doctrine or to discuss a long-term funding program or to agree to take legal responsibility for the conse-

quences of their actions. Most of their cooperation focused on nothing more than issuing a communiqué or undertaking action at a protest site.

There may be a number of reasons why their cooperation rarely progressed beyond the level of common action. As mentioned previously, at first, the activities of environmental activists overlapped to a large extent with those of pro-democratic progressive activists. Yet, within Christian or Buddhist circles, there were also those who supported government-driven development projects over ecological conservation. Hence, the environmental activists do not represent the entire Buddhist or Christian establishments but rather the interests of some parties or factions within the two religions. This leads us to conclude that the alliance for common protests arose not as a result of general religious harmony or reconciliation, but from limited cooperation horizontally forged between the progressive factions within the two institutions.

In short, it will be a gross exaggeration to say that the two camps have developed collaboration to the extent that it amounts to full religious reconciliation in Korea. The cases of collaboration have so far triggered no full-scale religious ecumenism, and between the lay believers of Buddhism and Christianity, there is still a considerable degree of antipathy. The two religions still adhere to an exclusive route to salvation. They cooperate with each other over environmental issues because they have only one physical space of residence, unlike the transcendental salvific space which exists exclusively to one party in total separation from the other. For Korean Buddhism and Christianity, there is only one nation, one land, and one Saemangeum. When this space of common residence is threatened, there is no other option but to protect it with concerted effort, no matter how uncomfortable that coexistence might be.

The crucial question is whether the two religions will continue to collaborate over environmental issues. As long as the government is unable to shake off the ideology of economic growth and the whole world continues to fail to find viable alternative energy to restrain a wayward global warming, the two main religions will continue to work together. The grim future of humanity allows us to project that doctrines pertaining to environmental change will grow in significance in their respective faith system. It is

highly likely that faith and action will increasingly converge within each religion. Yet when this happens, we still do not know whether it will shrink or expand collaboration between the environmental organizations of the two religions. To a considerable extent, it will depend on whether and to what extent the environmental doctrine of one religion develops in conjunction with that of the other.

In spite of such limitations, the cooperation hitherto achieved between Buddhism and Christianity will certainly exert significant influence in shaping their future relationship. The potential always exists for the two religions to plunge suddenly into serious antipathy as they have occasionally done in the past. Yet even in such a case, the memory of their precious collaboration will help them find a way towards common ground.

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