

# Exploring the Religious Marketplace for Korean Young Adults: *Riddles of Secular Change and Innovation*\*

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## Abstract

*The majority of Korean young adults prefer to identify with no religion. In this social context, how can we explain the religious landscape for Korean young adults? In order to answer it, I focus on three mission universities (i.e., schools affiliated with religious denominations) in the Western area of Seoul, utilizing mixed methods, such as surveys and interviews. The findings are as follows. On an institutional level, campus ministry centers, facing crises, have adopted different innovative strategies. Chapels of Protestant universities have adopted networking strategies with secular and utilitarian values, such as providing career preparation and cultural shows. Catholic University recently installed a retreat program by adopting reflexive and spiritual strategies without religious hues, and it seems to have been quite successful with many students. On an individual level, statistical analyses on students show the tensions between religiosity and secularity: the latter seems to be of the greater influence than the former. However, Christian young adults show higher levels of social commitment than non-religious young adults. In sum, this study explores the religious marketplaces of Korean young adults, and explains the social implications of religious innovations created in response to social changes. However, there still remain many unresolved riddles about how secular change and religious innovation might function dynamically in religious marketplaces.*

**Keywords:** religious market theory, innovation, strategy, young adults, religious nones, religiosity, secularization, unchurched, spirituality

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Introduction

Over the last decades, South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has seen a great fluctuation in the religious spheres. Let us take a brief look at trend data as an overall backdrop for this study. The Korean Census (conducted every ten years) began to include religious figures in 1985, and there seemed to be an increase of religiosity until 2005; however, this trend was reversed during the decade between 2005 and 2015. The 2015 Census report provides confusion for scholars in the fields of religion and the sociology of religion because there seems to be no solid continuity in terms of the religious trends in Korea (see Table 1). Catholicism, which was previously waxing, is now in decline, while Protestantism, which was previously waning, is on the rise once again. The traditionally dominant religion of Buddhism has become much less significant, and now religious nones (i.e., those who prefer “no religion”) have become the majority.

Table 1. The Changing Religious Population in Korea from 1985 to 2015

(Unit: 1,000 persons)

	1985	1995	2005	2015
Having a religion	17,203 (42.6%)	22,100 (50.4%)	24,526 (52.9%)	21,544 (43.9%)
Having no religion	23,216 (57.4%)	21,735 (49.6%)	21,826 (47.1%)	27,499 (56.1%)
Total population	40,448 (100%)	43,834 (100%)	46,352 (100%)	49,043 (100%)
Under religion category				
Buddhism	8,059 (19.9%)	10,154 (23.2%)	10,588 (22.8%)	7,619 (15.5%)
Protestantism	6,489 (16.1%)	8,505 (19.4%)	8,446 (18.2%)	9,676 (19.7%)
Catholicism	1,865 (4.6%)	2,885 (6.6%)	5,015 (10.8%)	3,890 (7.9%)
Won Buddhism	92 (0.2%)	86 (0.2%)	129 (0.3%)	84 (0.2%)
Confucianism	483 (1.2%)	210 (0.5%)	104 (0.2%)	76 (0.2%)
Cheondogyo	26 (0.6%)	28 (0.1%)	45 (0.1%)	66 (0.1%)
Daejonggyo	11 (0.3%)	7 (0.0%)	4 (0.0%)	3 (0.0%)
Other religions	175 (1.95%)	225 (0.5%)	196 (0.4%)	139 (0.3%)

Source: Statistics Korea (2016).

According both to Gallup Korea (2015) with five waves in Table 2 and Statistics Korea (2016) with four waves in Table 3, the religious population has declined overall; in particular, Korean young adults have overwhelmingly gravitated towards no religion. The Gallup Survey reports that the proportion of religious young adults (aged 19–29) has dropped from 45% in 2004 to 31% in 2014, and overall 69% of Korean young adults (aged 19–29) prefer no religion to any institutional religion. The Korean Census reports that the whole portion of Korean young adults (aged 20–29) preferring no religion rose to 65% in 2015, up from 50% in 2005. Indeed, as a reflection of the mainstream secular culture, it appears that “no religion” has become the most preferred religion among Korean young adults. In such a shifting social context, scholars have been asked to explain the great conflict between religious markets—the rational choice theories and secularization theses across the religious landscape of Korea.

**Table 2.** Changing Percentages of Religious Populations  
in Korea from 1984 to 2014

	1984	1989	1997	2004	2014
Young adults (19–29)	36%	39%	36%	45%	31%
All adults	44%	49%	47%	54%	50%
All male adults	34%	40%	36%	44%	44%
All female adults	53%	58%	58%	63%	57%

Source: Gallup Survey (2015).

**Table 3.** Religious Preferences among Korean Young Adults (20–29)

(Unit: 1,000 persons)

Young adults (20–29)	1985	1995	2005	2015
Buddhism	1,543 (18.6%)	1,639 (19.4%)	1,414 (19.3%)	571 (9.6%)
Protestantism	1,438 (17.3%)	1,665 (19.7%)	1,310 (17.9%)	1,051 (17.6%)
Catholicism	404 (4.9%)	489 (5.8%)	821 (11.2%)	437 (7.3%)
Other religions	128 (1.5%)	85 (1.0%)	90 (1.2%)	32 (0.5%)
No religion	4,799 (57.7%)	4,563 (54.1%)	3,696 (50.4%)	3,874 (65.0%)
Total	8,315 (100%)	8,442 (100%)	7,333 (100%)	5,967 (100%)

Source: Statistics Korea (2016).

Given the increasingly non-religious culture of Korea, how can we explore, describe, or explain the religious landscapes of Korean young adults? This is the overall research question for this article. In order to answer it, we need to revise the theoretical frames and collect proper empirical data. First, I will revisit two major themes in the contemporary field of the sociology of religion: (1) religious market theory and innovation should be considered together so that the limits and innovative directions of religious institutions may be better understood, and (2) the secular change and the increasing number of religious nones represent a new phase of secularization. Then, I will empirically focus on three mission universities (i.e., schools affiliated with religious denominations) in the Western area of Seoul for the systematic analyses of the religious landscapes among Korean young adults.

### **Religious Market Theory and Innovations**

Religious market theories have a theoretical root in “exchange theory” (Finke and Stark 2005; Homans 1958; Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Stark and Finke 2000). Religious market theories are efficient, not in a social context where only one established church is allowed, like a medieval church in alliance with the state, but in a social context where religious freedom is legally guaranteed and multiple religions coexist in the public realm (e.g., democratic) (Warner 1993). Religious market theories could offer new perspectives from which scholars in the field can appreciate the efficient services of religious organizations in a “religiously plural” social context (Finke and Stark 1992; Stark and Finke 2000; Warner 1993). Overall, this approach consists of two sides, namely suppliers and consumers in the social context of religious competition. At an organizational level, church growth rates act as barometers by which scholars differentiate “winners” from “losers.” Religious market theories would justify which church has gained more believers than other churches in capitalist market contexts (Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1994, 1998); however, they cannot be universally applied to all cultures beyond the empirical limita-

tions of cultural contexts (e.g., time and space).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the theoretical premise is the rational choice of individual consumers as social agents with freedom. This premise of rational choice reflects the “privatization of religion” in religious marketplaces (Luckmann 1967). However, religious freedom should be premised in a religiously plural context in order for us to approach these religious market perspectives. For this reason, there have been strong doubts about whether religious market theories would work in the religious contexts of European countries (Casanova 1996).

Nowadays, “innovation” is one of the most influential keywords in contemporary economics, business administrations, and non-governmental organizations, including churches (Burt 2004; Flory 2017). Innovation is very important in order for any organization, public or private, to continuously face crises of business, refresh brand value and effects, and meet the demands of customers and the supply of organizations. Particularly, innovation is one of the most efficient motivators for change in neoliberal market systems. Innovation has become the necessary condition not only for private organizations whose main purpose is profit-making, but also for local governments who are concerned about brands, tourism, and consequently, profits as well.

There are two different types of innovation: (1) the networking strategy through bridging structural holes (Burt 2004) and (2) the *reflexive* and *spiritual* strategy often accompanied by charismatic initiatives (Flory 2017; Lowney 2005). These different strategies may follow the main force of innovation, whether it starts from outside or within oneself. The first strategy, innovation through networking, tries to make use of external sources for

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1. For instance, religious market theorists often argued that strict churches would gain more believers in regard to “church growth rate” (Iannaccone 1994, 1998). However, this cannot be universally applied to many European countries and South Korea. In South Korea, “religious switches” have widely happened in the last two decades. A significant number of Protestants are reported to have moved from overall strict churches to lenient Catholic churches (Jo and Lee 2013). Jo and Lee (2013) strongly argue that not only strictness/lenience but also generosity/exclusivity should be taken into consideration regarding the overall issues of church growth.

innovation; however, it may not be able to change the internal and essential character of the organizational identity. On the other hand, the second strategy, innovation through reflexive and spiritual change, may begin with internal, structural changes, particularly when an organization needs to undergo a deep and thorough change. Thus, it might result in a serious change of its previous identity. Nonetheless, there are common grounds between the two strategies in the long process of innovative institutionalization.

Then, what about religious organizations? Religious institutions are confronted with the challenges of how well their innovative strategies serve the internal needs of individuals. This study focuses on the “campus ministry centers” of three Christian Universities. How do campus ministry centers manage their religious education at each respective mission school? What kinds of innovation in religious programs have been devised by the initiatives of the campus ministry centers? This article aims to explore any organizational limitations and innovations of these campus ministry centers. Subsequently, it will explore the overall religious or belief trends among college students and the gap between religious institutions and individual religious sentiments.

### **Secular Changes and Increasing Religious Nones**

The increasing number of “religious none” is a notable trend in contemporary societies like the United States and South Korea (Baker and Buster 2009a, 2009b; Hout and Fischer 2002, 2014; Lim and Chong 2017; Lim, MagGregor, and Putnam 2010; Oh 2011). For instance, religious none have rapidly increased from 7% in the 1990s to around 20% in the 2010s in the United States (Hout and Fischer 2014, 425). These social phenomena might signal a pathway toward “secularization” in contemporary society, but they require systematic, theoretical analysis to understand their social implications (Hout and Fischer 2014; Oh 2011).

Secularization theses have multiple implications in modern society on many different levels such as: (1) worldviews/meaning and value systems,

(2) institutional issues, and (3) individual choices. First, secularization theses, from the perspective of modernity founded upon the Enlightenment, have often been ideologically challenged with the notion that “religion will die or fade away eventually” (Bruce 2002). Weber’s thesis on the “disenchantment of the world” contemporarily continues at the face of the conflict between religion and science (Dawkins 2006). In a similar vein, secularism often adopts such antireligious and liberal political ideologies, especially against the public stances of the established Churches or against the conservative politicization of churches (Casanova 1996; Hout and Fischer 2014; Warner et al. 2010).

Second, religious institutions have notably changed in modernization processes and overall societal differentiation (Taylor 2007; Wilson 1982). In this regard, secularization reflects on the results of the disestablishment of the Church in Western Europe (Oh 2015). Domination by only one religion is not allowed by the state and religious pluralism has become the new norm in public. The separation of church and state, thus, has constrained the limited boundary of the public expressions of religious institutions. They are increasingly differentiated from other institutions in the public realms of modern societies, such as governments, markets, schools, hospitals, arts museums, social welfare services, and so on. Furthermore, the authority of leaders in religious institutions has been questioned not only due to questions about their veracity, but also because of moral issues (Brinkman 2016; Chaves 1994). In such institutionally differentiated and religiously plural societies, religious leaders need to compete for the quality of their services or the social credibility of their public contributions.

Third, religion has become a private matter of “individual choice” (i.e., the privatization of religion) in the modern and democratic world (Berger 1967; Joas 2014; Luckman 1967). Freedom of religion, regarding whether to choose a particular religion or not at an individual level, is normally guaranteed by modern, democratic constitutions as one of the essential elements of human rights. This freedom of religion for individuals includes both beliefs and practices, since believing a religion and belonging to a specific faith can be separated; some are “believing without belonging” while others are “belonging without believing” (Davie 1994; Oh 2011, 2014).

Let us then look closely at “religious nones” in regards to the privatization of religion. In fact, religious nones can include multiple categories, including secularists (e.g., atheists), spiritual seekers, or unchurched believers.<sup>2</sup> Whereas secularists as antireligious groups are not yet salient in Korean society, anti-Christian sentiments are common, particularly against the materialistic tendency of Protestant churches, the exclusivity of fundamentalism, or the immoral scandals that have plagued some churches (Lim and Chong 2017). Spiritual seekers in the United States are part of the unchurched believers whose lives are deeply embedded in the Christian culture from their childhood<sup>3</sup> (Oh 2014; Roof 1999). However, unchurched believers in Korea differ from spiritual seekers and religious dones (i.e., those who have given up a previous religious journey) (Lim and Chong 2017). In Korea, spiritual seekers are often connected to “mindfulness” and the “heart-oriented meditations” often found in Buddhist or traditional Korean religions rather than the head-oriented fundamentals of Christianity (Lee 2012; Oh 2017). It is also notable that among religious nones, the number of those who were formally religious and engaged somewhat enthusiastically in churches, yet ultimately ended up without religiousness, are increasing in Korea (Lim and Chong 2017). In sum, as is the case with the various types of religious beliefs, the choices of religious nones are all based on individual tastes, life-styles, values, or beliefs.

What, then, is the purpose of life (i.e., the symbolic meaning systems) for Korean young adults in accordance with their belief types? This article compares religiosity and spirituality to secularism in relation to belief systems, and then, examines the social implications of religious or belief types as one of the significant factors in a secular age (Oh 2011; Oh and Sarkisian 2012; Taylor 2007).

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2. Lim et al. (2010) describes the fluidity of religious identification among religious nones and refers to them as liminal nones or unstable nones. This implies that many religious nones face a problem in choosing between religion and no religion.
  3. The development of this spiritual discourse might be critically analyzed as a disassociation from institutionalized churches and the dilution of communities (see Bender 2007; Heelas 1996; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Oh 2014; Oh and Sarkisian 2012; Roof 1999; Wuthnow 1976, 1998).



## Methods

For this study, I chose to focus on three private mission universities in the Western area of Seoul (S, Y, and E). There are several reasons why I chose three mission universities in the Western area of Seoul. First, the Western area of Seoul has been traditionally regarded as one of the most representative college towns in the modern history of Korea. Second, the three universities were established by Western missionaries; however, all of them now function as major private schools in South Korea. Third, each school has a peculiar religious ecology with Christian culture and institutions. Fourth, their religious innovations signal the struggles chaplains face in our contemporary intellectual and secularizing culture.

I utilized various mixed methods: (1) surveys (i.e., quantitative studies), (2) in-depth interviews, (3) content analyses, and (4) focus group interviews with specialized experts of campus ministries (i.e., qualitative studies). In order to analyze the dynamics of the religious institutions, I conducted content analyses to compare the webpages of the campus ministry centers. Furthermore, I held focus group interviews (FGI); 12 campus chaplains from three mission schools gathered to share their innovative strategies and pastoral problems with one another. These chaplains are all religious experts, such as ministers, priests, or religious. To conduct research on the individual level, I collected 982 surveys from college students and conducted 42 in-depth interviews from May to October 2015.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, I selected a different methodology for the collection of valid and reliable quantitative data. I participated in focus group discussions

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4. This survey collection is based on a non-probabilistic sampling with a consideration of "quota sampling." As a rule, the author tried to collect surveys in public places (e.g., student cafeterias, libraries, streets, etc.) or classrooms for general courses rather than in department-specific settings (394 students answered at S University and 484 students at Y University). One hundred fifty surveys were collected from the class "Introduction to Christianity" with the help of school chaplains at Y University. The author excluded E university from survey collection because it is not co-ed; however, an equal portion was included for interview data from all three universities.

and conducted interviews with chaplains. My graduate students, who are both religious and non-religious, conducted personal interviews with college students.

## **Data Analysis**

Because this study aims to explain the social implications of the religious marketplace for Korean young adults, the data analyses consist of two parts: institutions (i.e., suppliers of religious programs) and individuals (latent consumers of religious programs). First, I will focus on the interest and concerns of the chaplains over the institutional dimensions by analyzing the data from the focus group interviews from the three school chaplains. In particular, the roles of chaplains are basically school-chapel-oriented tasks; however, their perspectives and reflections could help further explore and illuminate the religious culture of their students in the big picture.

Second, I will explain the significant religious characteristics of Korean young adults by analyzing the survey and interview data. The data from college students are not bound to the school chapel, unlike the data from their chaplains. In fact, many college students go to other parishes than the school chapels while the majority of students do not go to any church, parish, or temple at all. Therefore, I will try to analyze the diverse social, cultural, and religious implications of the different types of beliefs and religions.

### *Tensions between Maintenance and Innovation on an Institutional Level*

First, let us observe the main activities of the Campus Ministry Centers (CMC). Table 4 compares the characteristics and activities of the three CMCs, in categories such as religious identity, mission statements, main activities, social services, and so on.

In Korea, there have been long struggles on the part of students at Protestant universities regarding mandatory chapel courses as a necessary requirement for graduation. It has been debated whether such courses go against the human rights and freedom of religion of students. In 1998, the

**Table 4.** Comparisons of Three Universities’ Campus Ministry Centers

	Y Univ.	E Univ.	S Univ.
Religious background	Protestant	Protestant	Catholic
Co-ed	Yes	No (female)	Yes
Human resources at CMC	7 chaplain professors 6 staff members	7 chaplain professors	7 (4 priests, 1 brother, 2 sisters) 2 staff members
Religious committee	Yes (27 professors)	Yes (21 professors)	Yes (8 consultants)
Keywords in mission statement	Christian spirit, evangelization, chapel	Christian spirit, evangelization, community	Catholic ideals, integral Christian, faith does justice
Chaplain’s emphasis	Serving leadership	Finding true self, service	Humanism (universality beyond religion)
Main activities	Chapel, faith counselling, Bible study	Chapel, faith counselling, Bible study	Faith formation, catechism + Bible, spiritual retreat
Prior focus as mission schools	Weekly chapel course (4 semesters)	Weekly chapel course (8 semesters)	Spiritual retreat (two nights and three days; only for freshmen)
Directions of innovation	Religious, utilitarian (job prep), cultural (refreshment)	Religious, utilitarian (job prep), cultural (refreshment)	Spiritual, humanistic, practical (communal training)

Korean Supreme Court judged that private colleges can install religious education as a graduation requirement in accordance with school regulations as long as they do not try to proselytize and offend the freedom of religion for students. This juridical case from Soongsil University, a private university

located in the Southwestern part of Seoul, applied the principle “No proselytizing, but yes to religious education” to all Korean mission colleges (Jo 2012, 5). School chaplains at Protestant colleges have thus regarded chapel courses as the representative ideal of their school missions and have struggled to maintain them by all means.

Still, Korean young adults do not favor mandatory religious education. When I participated in a chapel class at Y University, more than half the students seemed inattentive or indifferent. The atmosphere of E University was very similar to this. Minister K, one of the chaplains at E University said, “The majority of students seem to doze off in chapel class. However, they are not sleeping. Although they look inattentive, they are listening. If a speaker says something controversial to non-believers, for instance, ‘If you don’t believe in Jesus, you will go to hell,’ then most of the students will wake up and send messages to their friends.” This shows the strong antipathy students have against fundamentalist sermons and exclusive Christian doctrines.

S Catholic University offers theological anthropology or philosophical anthropology instead of mandatory religious courses. Although there is no objection from students to these general education courses, the CMC of S University seems to have lost its control over the content of these courses. Though some theologians are passionate about instructing Christian values to students in secular and social contexts, these courses overall seem to be about anthropological thought and humanities rather than religious education. On the second Thursday of every semester, the Mass of the Holy Spirit (a semester-opening Mass) invites every student and no class is officially offered by school regulations; however, only a few hundred students attend. It does not seem to attract many students, unless the CMC of S University invites celebrity speakers. For instance, in spring of 2015, when the most famous TV anchor in Korea, Mr. Suk-hee Sohn, delivered his speech during the homily of the mass, almost 1,000 students attended. However, a great number of students left right after his speech even during the mass.

In sum, when religious programs are mandatory, they do not seem attractive to the majority of students, regardless of whether they are Catho-

lics, Protestants, Buddhists, other-believers, or non-believers. In addition, when they are freely offered to students, these programs are ignored because of the secular tastes of the majority of students. In such an unfavorable religious social context or religious marketplace, how can campus chaplains function for their students? In particular, how can they deliver the ideals of their mission school in a way in which non-Christian students can accept them? This is the starting point of their innovations in religious education.

All three mission schools have tried to make innovative programs. Y and E University CMCs, by adopting networking strategies, have made chapels into a place of a combination of religious service and secular programs. For instance, a short time for prayer and praise is followed by a variety of special sermons and useful or cultural programs. Special sermons can be offered by famous ministers outside of the school. Useful programs usually focus on job preparation or self-help talk concerts, whereas cultural programs include plays, musicals, liturgical dances, and music concerts, including orchestras or choruses. In particular, any content that is related to job preparation or cultural amusement seems to be appreciated by the majority of secular students. Y and E universities have tried to accept the secular needs of the majority of students and innovate their religious programs. Their CMCs endeavor to keep their religious identity and maintain the importance of their chapel courses. A reporter at Y University's newspaper said:

There are seemingly not as many complaints as before about the chapel courses because non-religious chapels are interesting, and they offer somewhat useful and instructive information. Particularly, the dialogue chapels with firemen and the bereaved families of the Sewol ferry disaster were very meaningful to me. (Female, 21 years old)

S Catholic University has also tried innovation by installing a spiritual retreat program by adopting reflexive strategies. All freshmen must take "Reflection and Growth," a new spiritual course that takes places outside of the school for two nights and three days. The staff, which includes three Jesuit priests, two lay experts, and senior students who voluntarily join, does not call this

program religious, but spiritual (Fuller 2001). Though it is not an elective but a mandatory course, it features nothing symbolically religious. There is no sign of the cross and no official time for prayer. Masses are essentially offered for the clergy and staff members. The content of their three day spiritual programs includes short lectures, meditations, a variety of communal activities like skits, and the general sharing of their experiences.

Let us explore some of S University's spiritual programs. First, students often chose "meditations" as one of the most intriguing and useful programs. Fr. L, who has a doctoral degree in Buddhism, leads the meditation class without any religious connotation; however, the main focus of his guidance on how to see and experience one's own feelings, emotions, difficulties, and wounds is an eye-opening discovery for many students. Second, an activity where one partner leads another who is wearing a blindfold teaches mutual trust and interdependent sensitivities. As they change their roles, between guide and blind person, they experience many different issues arising from interpersonal and mutual relationships and learn how to build a trustworthy community. Students shared the following after taking "Reflection and Growth":

During the three day program without my smartphone, I found myself enjoying things like a child. The most useful experience of this program was that we enjoyed playing with pure minds and hearts. . . . After taking "Reflection and Growth," I have a new habit to listen carefully to others and try to arrange my thoughts. I make an effort to take care of others more than before, thinking how and what others, who have grown up in different situations from mine, would think. (Female, 19 years old)

The daily reflection and the sharing of "praising cards" with others were the most impressive to me. The question, "What did I learn today?" helped me reflect every day. Although I was not good at praising others, I learned a lot. In order to praise the positive aspects of others, I had to observe their characteristics and strengths carefully and deeply. Meanwhile, during this process, the person with whom I shared my praising cards turned out to be better than before. . . . Sharing with others with a good heart like children, made us all warm and honest. (Male, 19 years old)

In spite of the strengths of its humanistic programs, as the CMC of S University has adopted these non-religious and spiritual strategies, it has had difficulty in transferring a particular religious identity to its students. However, Fr. L says that their goal is greater than religious formation.

In sum, all three universities have faced a sort of crisis of religious education at the institutional level; however, they all have been trying to innovate their religious programs. Y and E Protestant universities have maintained Christian symbols in the form of religious services (i.e., chapel courses) first and accepted cultural content in response to the secular needs of Korean young adults. S Catholic University does not insist on emphasizing religious symbols and formalities but offers spiritual programs for all students, religious or secular. Therefore, an important question for CMCs is how to deal with the tensions arising between the maintenance of the religious identity and characteristics of a mission school and creative innovations that are attractive to Korean young adults and more suitable in secular contexts.

#### *Diverse Social Implications of Belief Types on an Individual Level*

The religious, cultural, and social implications on university students, namely at the individual level, are concisely reported based on statistical data analyses. In order to see the overall “religious landscape” for Korean young adults, I will examine the variety of belief types among Korean young adults (i.e., university students).

First, I will show how belief types are distributed in accordance with religious types. Belief types are composed of five items: strong theism, weak theism, pantheism, agnosticism, and atheism. These types are quite similar to the questionnaires by the General Social Survey on Belief in God in the United States. However, the third category (pantheism) has a different cultural implication in Korea from the alternative belief type of spiritual cultures in the United States or Europe (Oh 2011; Oh and Sarkisian 2014; Roof 1999). In Korea, pantheism is not a part of alternative religious or spiritual cultures, unlike in Westernized dualistic worldviews. Instead, it is a part of traditional (monistic) religions or Eastern meditations (McGuire 1998, 115).

Table 5. Religions and Belief Types

Belief types	Religious types				Total
	Protestants	Catholics	Buddhists	Nones	
Atheism (I do not believe in God.)	1 (0.5%)	4 (2.7%)	13 (22.4%)	222 (40.9%)	240 (25.1%)
Agnosticism (I don't know whether God exists, neither do I know how to prove it.)	7 (3.3%)	23 (15.8%)	16 (27.6%)	152 (28.0%)	198 (20.7%)
Pantheism (I don't believe in a personal God, but I believe in energy, <i>qi</i> , or spiritual beings.)	2 (0.9%)	12 (8.2%)	23 (39.7%)	117 (21.5%)	154 (16.1%)
Weak theism (I believe in a personal God, but sometimes I have doubts.)	83 (39.3%)	68 (46.6%)	4 (6.9%)	42 (7.7%)	197 (20.6%)
Strong theism (I certainly believe in a personal God.)	118 (55.9%)	39 (26.7%)	2 (3.4%)	10 (1.8%)	169 (17.6%)
Total	211 (100%)	146 (100%)	58 (100%)	543 (100%)	958 (100%)

Note: Degree of freedom=12, chi-square=646.57 (sig.=.000).

Table 5 illustrates how belief types differ in accordance with religions. The majority of Protestants are theists: either strong theists (55.9%) or weak theists (39.3%); though there are a few agnostics (3.3%), less than 1% of Protestants are atheists (0.5%) or spiritualists (0.9%) who do not believe in a personal God but believe in energy, *qi*, or spiritual beings. Interestingly, religious nones are distributed in almost exactly the opposite way from Protestantism, as the Table shows: atheists (40.9%), agnostics (28%), spiritualists (21.5%), and theists (9.5%). Catholics consist of 46.6% weak



theists, 26.7% strong theists, 15.8% agnostics, 8.2% spiritualists, and 2.7% atheists. Among Buddhists, the belief types are proportionally distributed as pantheists (39.7%), agnostics (27.6%), atheists (22.4%), and theists (10.3%).

In sum, the distribution of belief types among Korean young adults is arrayed in this order: atheist (25.1%), agnostics (20.7%), weak theists (20.6%), strong theists (17.6%), and spiritualists (16.1%), while the modes of religions are all different: Protestants (strong theists), Catholics (weak theists), Buddhists (pantheists), and nones (atheists).

What do the distribution of these belief types imply in the context of the religious marketplace for Korean young adults? This array suggests that it is very difficult to find common ground. Furthermore, the biggest portions of belief types among Korean young adults are atheists and agnostics. Are both atheists and agnostics parts of religious markets? Such uneasy findings challenge classical sociologists of religion to revise the range and function of religious markets. I will show some consequential findings in accordance with these belief types.

### *Religious and Cultural Implications of Different Belief Types*

Table 6 shows how various aspects of religiosity differ in accordance with the above five belief types. Here, religiosity has five items: (1) the importance of religion, (2) the frequency of religious service attendance, (3) the frequency of prayer, (4) religious comfort, and (5) religious networks. The importance of religion is self-rated religiosity, and religious service attendance and prayers are two dimensions of religious practices. Religious comfort refers to an intrinsic dimension of religious life whereas religious networks signify an extrinsic dimension (see Allport and Ross 1967).

The findings show that there is a clear and similar tendency to move from strong theists to atheists. This is not surprising. Strong theists appear to be at the highest levels of religiosity in regard to all five items. Let us take a look at the other dimensions, spiritualism, and secularism.

**Table 6.** Various Aspects of Religiosity in Accordance with Five Belief Types

Belief types		Religiosity				
		Importance of religion	Religious service attendance	Prayer	Religion gives comfort	Religious network-preference
Atheism	Mean	1.22 <sup>b</sup>	1.17 <sup>b</sup>	1.27 <sup>b</sup>	1.58 <sup>b</sup>	1.35 <sup>b</sup>
	N	242	232	242	241	242
	SD	0.597	0.612	0.644	0.937	0.759
Agnosticism	Mean	1.65	1.32	1.50	2.05	1.49
	N	197	194	197	197	197
	SD	0.835	0.684	0.767	1.155	0.837
Pantheism	Mean	2.14	1.47	1.58	2.43	1.61
	N	158	150	157	158	158
	SD	1.170	0.939	0.863	1.289	0.996
Weak theism	Mean	2.92	2.71	2.90	3.58	2.62
	N	197	194	197	197	197
	SD	1.042	1.260	1.062	1.045	1.246
Strong theism	Mean	3.89 <sup>a</sup>	3.47 <sup>a</sup>	3.96 <sup>a</sup>	4.23 <sup>a</sup>	2.71 <sup>a</sup>
	N	175	175	175	175	175
	SD	0.991	1.087	1.085	0.887	1.213
Total	Mean	2.29	1.99	2.19	2.70	1.92
	N	969	945	968	968	969
	SD	1.328	1.297	1.350	1.454	1.172

*Note:* SD means standard deviation(s). The superscript *a* signifies the largest belief type; and the superscript *b* indicates the smallest belief type. Questionnaires follow the variable labels in parentheses: religiosity (I am religious), prayer (How often do you pray per a week?), religious comfort (religion gives me comfort when I am suffering or in a sad mood), religious network (I go to religious groups because I like to meet good people), spiritual dimension (there exists a spiritual dimension unlike the rationality in our lives), meditation (meditation or Zen are quite important for me), new age (I often go and see fortune-tellers or tarot card readers), scientism (science may replace religion), and humanism (If a person lives well, then s/he does not need to go to practice religion).

**Table 7.** Various Aspects of Spiritualism and Secularism  
in Accordance with Five Belief Types

Belief types		Spiritualism			Secularism	
		Spiritual sensitivity	Meditation or Zen	New Age (Tarot or fortune- telling)	(Secular) Scientism	(Secular) Humanism
Atheism	Mean	1.96 <sup>b</sup>	1.66 <sup>b</sup>	1.90 <sup>b</sup>	3.07 <sup>a</sup>	3.93 <sup>a</sup>
	N	242	241	242	242	242
	SD	1.130	1.028	1.202	1.401	3.549
Agnosticism	Mean	2.78	2.02	1.98	2.74	3.78
	N	196	197	197	197	197
	SD	1.071	1.086	1.160	1.253	1.101
Pantheism	Mean	3.71	2.30	2.51 <sup>a</sup>	2.59	3.70
	N	158	158	158	158	158
	SD	0.898	1.197	1.315	1.205	1.188
Weak theism	Mean	3.55	2.64	2.11	2.50	3.00
	N	197	196	197	197	197
	SD	0.829	1.045	1.162	0.993	1.093
Strong theism	Mean	4.26 <sup>a</sup>	2.92 <sup>a</sup>	1.57	2.05 <sup>b</sup>	2.21 <sup>b</sup>
	N	175	174	175	175	175
	SD	0.857	1.175	1.002	1.038	1.176
Total	Mean	3.15	2.26	2.00	2.62	3.36
	N	968	966	969	969	969
	SD	1.282	1.189	1.203	1.245	2.122

*Note:* The superscript *a* signifies the largest belief type; and the superscript *b* signifies the smallest belief type.

Table 7 shows how spiritualism and secularism differ in accordance with the five belief types. As a composite index, spiritualism includes spiritual sensitivity, frequency of meditation (or Zen), and new age. These three are, to some degree, heterogenic; though spiritual sensitivity and meditation can be a part of religious practices in the contemporary Christian context,

new age (e.g., tarot cards or fortune-telling) would be a pseudo-religious practice that is part of pop culture in Korea (Chun 2009). In addition, secularism includes scientism (i.e., science will replace religion) and humanism (i.e., humanism suffices without a religion) in opposition to religious stances (Warner et al. 2010).

The findings report that strong theists show the highest levels of spiritualism, including spiritual sensitivity and meditation, while pantheists show the highest levels of the category of new age. In regard to the two dimensions of secularism, the arrays from atheists to strong theists are distributed in an exactly opposite order from the religiosity dimension. In particular, when looking at the standard deviations, scientism shows low means overall with little dispersion (low SD), while humanism shows high means with high dispersion. This implies the tensions between religious and secular beliefs are great in regard to human problems rather than scientific issues. Let us next look at the findings about social implications as a dimension of meaningful lives.

### *Social Implications of Religions*

Table 8 includes the results of the mean comparisons, *t* test, and ANOVA for the same variables. In regard to social responsibility and public concern for the local community, Protestant students show a higher level of interest than both Buddhist students ( $p<.05$ ) and non-religious students ( $p<.001$ ). The percentage of Protestant students who are currently engaged in voluntary services is significantly higher than that of Catholic students ( $p<.05$ ); however, Catholic students are more likely to serve longer than students from other religions. Overall, Buddhist students show the lowest level of social responsibility and public concern. Non-religious students show lower levels of social and public interest than Christian students. When setting “belief types” as the independent variable, the results are shown in the following Table 9.

**Table 8.** Voluntary Services and Social Responsibility  
in Accordance with Religions

Religion		Voluntary service	Service length	Social responsibility	Public concern for the local community
Protestantism	Mean	0.72 <sup>a</sup>	8.49	3.78 <sup>a</sup>	3.34 <sup>a</sup>
	N	211	59	209	211
	SD	0.452	7.80	0.826	0.954
Catholicism	Mean	0.61	10.33 <sup>a</sup>	3.63	3.20
	N	144	55	146	146
	SD	0.489	7.58	0.863	1.001
Buddhism	Mean	0.66	9.71	3.44 <sup>b</sup>	2.97 <sup>b</sup>
	N	59	19	59	59
	SD	0.477	7.74	0.915	1.033
No religion	Mean	0.65	8.02	3.47	3.11
	N	543	186	547	547
	SD	0.480	7.23	0.926	0.988
Other religions	Mean	0.56 <sup>b</sup>	6.00 <sup>b</sup>	3.88	3.31
	N	16	7	16	16
	SD	0.512	5.93	0.885	1.078
Total	Mean	1.66	8.55	3.57	3.17
	N	973	326	977	979
	SD	0.476	7.42	0.903	0.990

*Note:* The superscript *a* signifies the largest religious group; and the superscript *b* signifies the smallest religious group.

*Social Implications of Different Belief Types*

As seen in Table 9, belief types do not significantly affect voluntary services and service length. However, the data report that strong theists show significantly higher levels of social responsibility than weak theists ( $p<.05$ ),

**Table 9.** Voluntary Services and Social Responsibility  
in Accordance with Belief Types

Belief types		Voluntary service (%)	Service length	Social responsibility	Public concern for the local community
Atheism	Mean	0.68	7.54	3.40 <sup>b</sup>	3.14
	N	241	78	242	242
	SD	0.474	7.10	0.943	0.995
Agnosticism	Mean	0.67	9.94	3.46	3.12
	N	199	62	200	200
	SD	0.472	7.48	0.890	0.968
Pantheism	Mean	0.60	8.48	3.56	2.99 <sup>b</sup>
	N	156	60	158	158
	SD	0.491	7.44	0.941	1.044
Weak theism	Mean	0.64	7.65	3.63	3.30 <sup>a</sup>
	N	197	70	198	199
	SD	0.481	7.51	0.855	0.973
Strong theism	Mean	0.69	9.72	3.86 <sup>a</sup>	3.27
	N	175	54	174	175
	SD	0.463	7.62	0.810	0.949
Total	Mean	0.66	8.56	3.57	3.17
	N	968	324	972	974
	SD	0.476	7.44	0.904	0.989

*Note:* The superscript *a* signifies the largest belief type; and the superscript *b* signifies the smallest belief type.

pantheists ( $p<.01$ ), agnostics ( $p<.001$ ), and atheists ( $p<.001$ ). Regarding public concern for the local community, strong theists show higher levels than pantheists ( $p<.01$ ).

*Unresolved Areas outside of Religious Marketplaces*

There are many complexities that religious market theories cannot easily resolve. Simply put, there are unresolved areas between the religious and the secular. How to integrate science and religion seems to be one of the issues over which many clashes occur. The following interviews contrast different perspectives on how to understand religion and human beings (Brinkman 2016).

Nowadays science is very advanced, and some things like robots have emerged, and most of the content from the Bible cannot be proven from the perspective of science. But if we take scientific standards and try to prove everything in the Bible one by one, is this possible? So, people might say that science is superior to religion. Science deals with the rational aspects of things that religion cannot explain. However, there are many things in our lives that can't be proven, . . . religion explains something related to faith and the heart. So I think these things should not be treated in the same way. Science and religion are obviously different. (Female, 22 years old, S Univ.)

Religion, I think, to an extent, is something that we are continuously making in order to supplement the incomplete aspects of human beings. Also, religion, on an individual level, serves to fulfill our own incompleteness. Although science has developed a lot, I think humans have an innate incompleteness that cannot be satisfied or relieved by science. That's why I think religion will not disappear but remain in some form. (Male, 23 years old, S Univ.)

The majority of students (74%) did not agree with science's precedence over religion in my survey, denying ideological secularism. However, the most serious problem does not come from secular scientism. Rather, it seems to be related to the exclusivity of religious messages or the immoral aspects of religion in the public realm.

Christians say God loves everybody, but they say if people don't believe in Jesus they will go to Hell. If people lived a very good life in the Joseon era

[before Christianity was introduced in Korea], did God send them to Hell? They couldn't have known about the Christian God, but I think Christians believe they were sent to Hell. (Male, 24 years old, Y Univ.)

Frankly, I think it is sufficient if religion can bring benefits or happiness to people regardless of denominations or sects. So I dislike churches, . . . I really don't like the exclusive attitude of churches. (Male, 22 years old, Y Univ.)

If God is really merciful, I don't think God would treat people harshly, just for idolatry or for believing different religions, . . . I mean God says not to worship other gods, . . . But some people might have been born into a Buddhist family and naturally became non-believers. It's too harsh to consider these cases idolatry. Since most cases cannot be considered that way, I don't like how churches excessively exclude other faiths. (Female, 22 years old, E Univ.)

There are a variety of reasons why unchurched believers or religious nones do not accept churches in Korea: exclusive salvation, strict rejection of other religions as idol worship, and the banning of homosexuality. How can religious people reconcile themselves with these unchurched or non-religious people? Can they sit together at religious marketplaces? No simple answer exists, but more reflections, truer renewal of the church from within, and better innovations are required to find common ground. Academically, contemporary themes, in the field of the sociology of religion arising from European scholars, such as the "post-secular society" (Habermas 2008), the "various types of secularism" (Warner et al. 2010), and the "various types of self-transcendence" (Joas 2008, 2014), can be very meaningful co-hans in the religious marketplace for Korean young adults.

## Conclusions and Discussions

This article investigated three mission universities in Seoul in order to explore the changing religious landscape for Korean young adults from the combined theoretical perspectives of religious market theory, innovation,



and religious nones. In particular, this article could help explain the meanings and limits of innovations, and the unresolved riddles in the religious marketplace.

At the institutional level, there are big differences between the three mission schools. The campus ministry centers of Protestant universities sometimes face tensions with students, and to alleviate this they are actively adopting networking strategies with secular and utilitarian values, such as job preparation talks or various cultural shows. The religious programs at S Catholic University seem to be very limited inside of its CMC, while their emphasis on general education is neither strong nor effective. However, a new mandatory *reflexive* and *spiritual* course, "Reflection and Growth," which does not emphasize religious symbols, seems very suitable and effective for Korean young adults who have grown up in a more secularized and pragmatic world. Both innovations from networking strategies and spiritual innovations from reflexive strategies have their strengths and limitations.

The findings at the individual level seem to be quite complex. In regard to the religious and cultural implications, there has been a clear distinction between the religious and the secular (i.e., non-religious), though the non-religious consists of many different categories of belief.<sup>5</sup> Christian students are more likely to be concerned about social responsibility and public issues for their local communities than non-religious or Buddhist students. These religious students are more significantly engaged than secular ones in not only religious activities but also social services as well. Thus, it does not seem to be all that easy for CMCs to attract these secular or non-religious students. Although Western-style spiritual discourses (e.g., spiritual but not religious discourse) are not widely held among young adults in Korea, religious organizations need to develop effective dialogues, beyond "God-talks," to face and embrace more secularized young adults from the perspective of religious market theory and innovations.

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5. The initial stage of our qualitative data analyses reports that the social construction of significant meaning may vary in accordance with religiosity: Christian students would follow God-talks (evangelicalism); unchurched believers would express positivist ideas/concepts rather than spirituality; and liminal nones would follow a utilitarian ideas/concepts (see Han and Oh 2016).

Finally, what will the future of the religious marketplace be like for Korean young adults? I assume that the increase of religious nones stemming from a “detachment from religion” will continue in Korea into the near future. First of all, “materialism,” as one of the most influential secular forces under the neoliberal regime, will most likely drive young adults to more individualistic and material goals in life (Taylor 2007). In this regard, “megachurches,” which can provide a whole package of good services such as inspirational sermons, orchestral music, high-level social capital, and so on are poised to attract young adults in the religious marketplace. Thus, the percentage of religiously active Protestant young adults will probably remain more or less consistent (17% over the last three decades). However, conservative, particularly *fundamental* Christian denominations may lose their legitimacy in the public sphere if they stick to narrow, exclusive attitudes toward salvation. On the other hand, as social inequality gets worse, religions that support marginalized young adults will get more public credit than those that do not. In this individualized social context, the “spiritual marketplaces” will be enlarged as post-materialism develops in Korean society, and un-churched young adults may choose spiritual programs for their holistic health. Such marketplaces will not be as large as those in the United States, but post-materialistic spiritual values will, no doubt, constantly intrigue young Koreans seeking a deeper meaning of life. Institutionalized religions need to innovate their pastoral strategies to provide better ways to attain this “fullness of life” through authentic reflection (Taylor 2007). In addition, chapel courses at mission schools will have to become more integrated with general education in more utilitarian and practical ways than they are now. Otherwise, like those in the United States, they will disappear.

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