

Article

Kim Il-yeop and Christianity: The Influence of Christianity on the Life and Identity of Kim Il-yeop

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Introduction

Kim Il-yeop 김일엽 (1896-1971) holds a significant position as one of the first generation of Korean “new women” and “modern female writers” in the history of modern Korean women and women’s literature. Kim Il-yeop was considered widely to be a new woman and modern female intellectual since she had gained a modern education in Japan much earlier than other Korean women during the early modern period. Through her writing, Kim Il-yeop actively addressed feminist issues and put forward new visions for the emancipation and awakening of Korean women in her time. As a pioneering feminist, she led an early Korean women’s movement along with her contemporary Na Hye-seok in the early 1920s. However, later on she revealed her inclination toward Buddhism, both spiritually and ideologically. Finally, in 1928, Kim Il-yeop converted to Buddhism,¹ and a few years later, she became a Buddhist monk, which later led her to an ascetic and reclusive life.

As Kim Il-yeop’s life and literature reveal, she was actively and consistently involved with many different ideologies and beliefs in her life. In this regard, religion took a significant position in her life. Kim Il-yeop turned away from her Christianity and finally converted to Buddhism in her thirties. This occurred despite the fact that she was born in a Christian family and brought up under strong Christian influences. It is evident that Kim Il-yeop’s religious beliefs, both Christian and Buddhist, are greatly important in understanding her life and who she was. To better understand the background behind her conversion to Buddhism, we need first to look closely into the Christianity of Kim Il-yeop, its characteristics and implications. That is what I intend to do in this essay. But first, I will briefly present Kim Il-yeop’s life² up till her religious conversion to Buddhism.

Kim Il-yeop was born on June 9, 1896, in the small Korean town of

1. According to her personal accounts in “The Two Year Anniversary of Setting My Foot into Buddhism” (1930) and “Buddhist Faith and My Home” (1931), Kim Il-yeop was converted to Buddhism in 1928.

2. In this essay, information on Kim Il-yeop’s biography as well as the chronology of her life and works is taken from *Miraese-ga Dahago Namdorok* vol. 1 and 2, edited by The Committee for Publication of the Collection of Kim Il-yeop’s Works. However, it is also taken from Kim Il-yeop’s own autobiographical and confessional writings. Hereafter, the title of *Miraese-ga Dahago Namdorok* will be abbreviated *Miraese*.

Yonggwang in Pyeongnam province. Her given name was Kim Won-ju. Her pen name was Il-yeop, which literally means “one leaf.” She was better known by her pen name. At the age of eight, Kim Il-yeop attended Guse School (*Guse* literally means “salvation from sins or devils”; it is a highly religious term). This was a Protestant mission school in the area where she lived during her childhood. In 1906, Kim Il-yeop transferred to Samsung primary school in Jinnampo, a large port city some distance from her home, and there she received a formal Christian education, learning such things as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Around this time her father, Kim Yonggyeom, was ordained a Methodist minister (Bang 2006, 360).

Kim Il-yeop wrote her first poem, called “Death of my Sister,” in 1907 when she was only eleven years old. In it she vividly depicts her sadness and grief caused by the loss of her lovely younger sister. Her mother, Yi Madae, also died in 1909 when Kim Il-yeop was thirteen years old.

After graduating from Samsung primary school in 1912, Kim Il-yeop entered Ewha Hakdang (School of Pear Blossoms), the first Korean mission school for girls, which was founded in 1886 by Mary F. Scranton, the first American female Protestant missionary in Korea. Ewha Hakdang was not only the first but also the most prominent Korean women’s school and served as a principal means through which Korean women could receive modern education and actively engage in the public sphere. The vast majority of female Korean intellectuals, elites, and leaders were from Ewha (Ewha Womans University Archives 2005, 31). Kim Il-yeop was among them. She joined a Literary Society called “Imunhoe” 이문회 while at Ewha Hakdang,³ and this membership helped develop her literary potential and initiated her literary career. Imunhoe was founded in 1907 and served as a regular meeting place for Christian female students, providing them with opportunities to learn and gain experience in public speaking and debate. Participation in these meetings also fostered in the female students a sense of self-awareness and social consciousness (Ewha Womans University Archives 2005, 43).

Presumably around 1915, Kim Il-yeop’s father passed away (Kim 1962, 20); however, with the support of her grandmother, she advanced her higher

3. This information is taken from the chronology of Kim Il-yeop’s life and works as it appears on page 476 of *Miraese 1*.

education, attending the Ewha Hakdang College⁴ in 1915 at the age of nineteen (Kim 1974, 1:496) and graduating three years later in March 1918 (Ewha Womans University Archives 2005, 44), after which she then married Yi Noik at Jeongdong church in Seoul. Yi Noik was a professor of Chemistry at Yeonhui College who had studied overseas in the United States (*Shinhan Nation Newspaper* May 28, 1914).

In 1919, Kim Il-yeop received a chance to study abroad in Tokyo for about a year. During this time, she made acquaintances with Yi Gwangsu and Heo Yeongsuk that later provided great opportunities for her to establish and expand her career as a writer. It was at this time that Yi Gwangsu, a prominent Korean modern novelist and leading male intellectual, gave her the penname “Il-yeop” (One Leaf), after a Japanese modern female writer, Higuchi Ichiyo 樋口一葉 (Kim 2007, 276). This suggests that Yi Gwangsu found Higuchi Ichiyo and Kim Il-yeop to have significant commonalities in their writing and in life. Yi Gwangsu gave Kim Il-yeop this pen name in recognition of her literary talents and in order to encourage her creative pursuits.

After she returned to Korea, Kim Il-yeop founded the magazine *Sinmyeoja* (New Women) in 1920. *Sinmyeoja* was the first Korean magazine for women that was published exclusively by Korean women and had a pronounced feminist credo. Kim Il-yeop engaged herself actively with it as a founder, editor in chief, and main contributor. Her literary career and creative potential were cultivated to a greater degree through her activities and engagements in the magazine. She published short stories, poems, novels, critical essays, letters, and diaries there. During this time, Kim Il-yeop began to be publicly recognized as a writer, an editor for the magazine, and a feminist activist and critic. Later on, she began working in a literary section for the Buddhist magazine called *Bulgyo*, during which period she also produced many literary works.

In short, Kim Il-yeop is considered to have been a pioneering modern female writer in the history of modern Korean literature: she was Korea’s first female editor and publisher of *Sinmyeoja*, and she was also recognized publically as a “new woman” in the modern Korean society of her time.

Kim Il-yeop was born into a Christian family. Her father was a Methodist

4. According to information in *100 years 1886-1996, Ewha Old and New*, the college for women at Ewha Hakdang was established in 1910. The name of it is “the Ewha Hakdang College.” Kim Il-yeop was among the graduates of the Ewha Hakdang College.

minister, and her mother was a devout Christian. She grew up with Christian teachings and in Christian environments. Her practice of Christianity began when she was a young girl and intensified as she grew and developed under the Christian discipline of her father, who reared her according to its teachings. Remarkably, Kim Il-yeop attended only mission schools from her primary education through her time at Ewha Hakdang. As a result, we may infer that Kim Il-yeop maintained a close connection to Christianity in her life, and that Christianity had a significant impact on her perspective regarding it.⁵ In particular, Kim Yonggyeom, Kim Il-yeop's Christian father and a Methodist minister, strongly impacted her and her perspective on life.

Therefore, in view of her later life, the question is, what did Christianity mean to Kim Il-yeop? How exactly did she understand the Christian religion, and in what ways did she experience and practice it? More particularly, how did Christianity affect her experience and understanding, especially regarding love, romance, and sexuality? Concerning this question, Kim Il-yeop's close relationship with her father warrants special attention. Keeping these topics in mind, I will explore Kim Il-yeop's own religious experiences, including the characteristics of her faith, background, thoughts, and understanding with respect to Christianity. I will also explore her moments of questioning, doubt, and final rejection of Christianity and in doing so focus on the meaning and implications of the ways in which she represents Christianity in her writing. I will give special attention to the issue of how Christianity affected the formation of Kim Il-yeop's identity.

Christian Family and Religious Salvation

The nature of the relationship between Kim Il-yeop and Christianity becomes

5. Only in recent years have there appeared a few literary studies on the relationship and interplay between Korean new women or modern Korean female writers and Christianity. However, until now in literary studies, the discussions and views regarding it seem to have remained simple, inadequate, and rather general; namely, they do not address the topic comprehensively and with enough specificity. See Kim 2004, Jeong 2009, Yi 2009, and Sin 2006. These studies are principally conducted on the same hypothesis: that the modern Korean female writers and new women, Na Hye-seok, Kim Il-yeop, and Kim Myeong-sun, had close connections with Christianity; that is to say, their lives and works were significantly influenced by their Christianity.

far more evident by closely reading Kim Il-yeop's autobiographical writings⁶ and reviewing the literature⁷ about Kim Il-yeop, especially her autobiographical book *Eoneu Sudoin-ui Hoesang* 어느 修道人の 回想 (An Ascetic's Memoir) and the essay "Il-yeopsojeon" 일엽소전 (A Mini-Tale of Il-yeop),⁸ in which Kim Il-yeop attempts to portray her life thoroughly. In these works, she writes about her strong Christian background and her experiences under its Christian influence. They tell of how she grew up in a Christian family and atmosphere with the teachings of Christianity. She recounts her childhood as follows: "I grew up as a Christian, for my father was a pastor" (Kim 1974 1: 424); "I have been a Christian since I was a baby" (Kim 1960, 44).

Kim Il-yeop often mentions her childhood in relation to her Christian family background. In the short essay "Kkumgillo Oneun Ai" (Crossing Your Way in My Dream), in *Munyeogongnon* 3 (1927), she writes, "I attended church services every night, even if I felt sleepy and tired. Sometimes I had to squeeze myself and pluck my eyebrows to keep from falling to sleep at the church's night events." In "Dongsaeng-ui Jugeum" (Death of My Brother) of *Sinmyeoja* (1920), she further writes the following about her Christian experiences as a child: "As I watched my sister's death, I prayed to God, 'Father in heaven! please take the weary body and soul of my pitiful sister to heaven and into your arms. God, Father, please bestow great glory and mercy on her'" (Kim 1974, 1:396). Moreover, Kim (1974, 1:284) Il-yeop recalls, "The Christian ideas of sin and hell would immediately come to me as soon as I saw my friends lying to other people in front of me." These anecdotes indicate the extent to which Christianity constituted Kim Il-yeop's ideological framework, especially in her childhood. Furthermore, they imply that Christianity had a significant influence on the formation of her personal identity.

How terrified and frightened I was when I heard that if one did not believe in Jesus Christ, one must go to hell. Nevertheless, I was relieved because my parents and I were devout believers in God. Yet how pitiful all non-

6. They include the following books: Kim Il-yeop's *Eoneu Sudoin-ui Hoesang*, the essay *Cheongchun-eul Bulsareugo*, and *Haengbok-gwa Bulhaeng-ui Galpieseo*. Kim Il-yeop's works referenced here are cited from these three books and the anthology of her works *Miraese-ga Dabago Namdorok* vol. 1 or 2, unless otherwise indicated.

7. For further details, see Kim 2004, Choe 2000, Yi 2009, Chong 2008, and Sin 2006.

8. This work is included in *Miraese* 1 (256-65).

Christian believers were in the world!

I myself made a resolution to become a **bible woman** when I grew up, and then I would go to distant islands where cannibals lived and **devote my life to evangelizing them**. I would not be eaten by them due to God's power. Even if I should be eaten, though my body with much guilt might feed their empty stomachs well enough, my soul would be led to heaven. I was very satisfied with such thoughts at that time. (Kim 1960, 44; emphasis mine)

According to Kim Il-yeop, these reflections were from when she was eight years old. Around this time, she began receiving her first formal Christian education at the Samsung primary school. We may assume that she was then too young to fully understand what Christianity meant to her, and so her understanding of Christianity and the form of her Christian faith must have been in some ways limited, simple, basic, and superficial.

In general Christianity operates according to the dichotomies of good and evil, heaven and hell, body and soul, and Christians and non-Christians. Such dualistic idea, such a value system, was embedded in modern Korean Christianity (Go 2000, 229). It was also incorporated into Kim Il-yeop's Christianity. Min Gyeongbae points out that the defining characteristics of early Korean Protestantism were "simplicity of faith, in the form of an earnest personal piety; an emphasis on personal salvation from sins and the world; the longing for heaven, immortal life, and the blessings of God; an evangelical zeal for others; and peace of mind after conversion" (Min 2005, 201-02; 303).

In the above passage, Kim Il-yeop delineates the characteristics of her Christian faith and religious devotion. They can be summarized as follows: they consisted in the absolute belief that all non-Christians go to hell, whereas all Christians are taken to Heaven; the wish to become a bible woman and devote oneself to evangelistic work for uncivilized people; and a belief in the repentance of sins leading to a certainty of redemption, personal salvation, and a satisfaction, or peace of mind, for Christians. These all represent and reflect Kim Il-yeop's faith and her understanding of Christianity. More specifically, the passage reflects her religious conviction and belief that God would always be there to guide and protect her and her family, and that she lived under God's grace and holy power.

The essay "Jinrireul Moreumnida Naeui Hoesanggi" 진리를 모릅니다:

나의 회상기 (I Do Not Know the Truth: A Reflection on Me)⁹ presents Kim Il-yeop's childhood character in relation to her Christian family background: "I hardly ever lost my temper and remained calm no matter what happened to me; I never became nervous or felt uneasy" (Kim 1974, 1:274). Her friends confirm this characterization, describing Kim Il-yeop as a kind and "easy going" girl (Kim 1974, 1:283). More importantly, Kim Il-yeop attributes these qualities to her Christian family and its firm Christian faith. She writes further that "having seen my father's religious conviction and strong belief, I seemed to know that with only our mind, we could be led to the world of peace" (Kim 1974, 1:274), and "thanks to my faith or religious life, I supposed that I had lived a life without worries..." (Kim 1974, 1:276). All these accounts demonstrate how important Christianity was to her in early life, how it played an essential role in the development of her personal identity.

It is interesting that Kim Il-yeop even as a child hoped to become a bible woman when she grew up. She remembers that she used to have an enthusiasm and zeal for evangelistic work, in particular, for evangelizing the cannibals and heathens of a distant and savage island. Her wish to be a bible woman for evangelistic missionary work has to do with a type or ideal of Christian womanhood current during her time. In fact, in the history of modern Korean Christianity, such "evangelistic work" was considered to be the most important and indispensable religious activity for Christian women to engage in (Jeong 2009, 214-16).

Kim Il-yeop's fictional account "Gyesi" 계시 (Revelation)¹⁰ is an important reference toward figuring out her understanding of Christianity. This literary work was first published in the women's magazine *Sinnyeoja* in March 1920, when she was twenty-four years old. The theme of "Revelation" is highly religious both in content and form, and the title itself presages that God will give a revelation to the heroine at the end of the story. "Gyesi" deals with Christian themes and subject matter and conveys a Christian worldview through the voice of the main female character. It is considered the most Christian-influenced fiction in Kim Il-yeop's body of work and has been cited

9. This work is included in *Miraese I* (266-384). This autobiographical writing was serialized posthumously in the magazine, *Women's Donga* from December 1971, to June 1972. Hereafter, its title will be abbreviated "A Reflection on Me."

10. This work is included in *Miraese I* (101-05).

frequently whenever Kim Il-yeop's works have been dealt with or discussed¹¹ from a Christian perspective.

In the story "Gyesi," the female protagonist is a lonely widow called Ms. Kim who lives with her son Inwon. Inwon is everything to her and her only hope in life. She dedicates herself to him and is constantly concerned about his health and future. Her concern for Inwon is a significant part of what draws her to Christianity. She becomes a practicing Christian mainly in order to ensure her son's health and bright future.

How did it come to be that you dared to wish your dream to be achieved if you were still foolishly stuck on savage and evil shamans and blind fortune tellers? People should repent of their sins and come out toward God; afterward they would be given God's infinite grace and blessing. The bible woman evangelized the widow Ms. Kim and convinced her to believe in God for her son's health and future. Thereafter, Ms. Kim went to the church service every day, even on rainy days and days of terrible weather, because of her concern and care for Inwon, her precious son. For three years it was only happiness and pleasure for them to attend the church, wearing new white clothing. (Kim 1974, 1:101)

In the above passage, it is clear that the major motive behind Ms. Kim's embracing Christianity is her deep care for her son's health and future. She wishes desperately that Inwon should grow up healthy and without any troubles. She is determined to take good care of him, for she has already lost her eldest son. Around the time of that loss and her resulting determination for Inwon, she had first encountered a bible woman and decided to practice Christianity.

This story depicts how Korean people encountered Western Christianity and adapted it to their lives. It explains what motivated them to become worshipers and believers in God. It also describes how Western Christianity responded toward the religious traditions of Korea: in the passage the bible woman tells Ms. Kim not to believe and worship idols or spirits, which are alleged to be unholy, savage, and evil. This mirrors the general attitude of early American missionaries to Korea, who regarded Korean religions as "heathenism" (Min 2005, 303). The bible woman also explains that all people who repent of

11. See the articles of Kim Miyeong, Jeong Huiseong, Bang Minho, and Sin Sujeong.

their sins to God will in turn be given holy glories and blessings from God. In this way, “Revelation” illustrates typical concepts, principles, and forms of faith held and practiced among Korean Christians during the early modern period in Korea. The characteristics of Korean Christianity included a strong desire for family salvation, an awareness of original sin, the repentance of sins, the curing of illness through Jesus, daily happiness and blessing, an intense prayer life, and a simple Christian faith (Min 2005, 201-02).

In the story, the widow Ms. Kim initially approaches Christianity with her earthly ideas and interests. She prays only for her son’s health and well being, so that Inwon might be given God’s blessing and glories. The new white clothing that Ms. Kim and Inwon put on for church services signifies their purity of life and sincere Christian faith. As a result of their life of prayer, they are provided with happiness and pleasure.

One day, however, Inwon becomes severely ill. To cure his illness Ms. Kim does not go to shamans or blind fortune tellers, as she did before she learned about Christianity. Now, she instead attends church services and offers ardent prayers to God. Nevertheless, Inwon does not improve, but finally dies of his illness, despite Kim’s care and prayer and her strong Christian faith. Ms. Kim suffers sadness and despair and a broken heart because of the loss of Inwon.

Yet, she prays to God for Inwon at the time of his death,

My Father in Heaven! Please take little Inwon, his soul, with you.

For a long time after Inwon’s death she shed uncontrollable tears. Her tears dropped on Inwon’s baby-like face. (Kim 1974, 1:104; emphasis mine)

Ms. Kim does this so that her son’s soul will go into God’s world, and that God will lead him to heaven. After a while, Ms. Kim at last falls into a deep sleep, during which she has a dream:

On a bright and clear day the widow Ms. Kim went to the church as usual, wearing new clothes. She saw a pastor on the stage whom she had never seen before. His appearance was imposing and his attitude was majestic and noble. This noble looking-man, dressed in white, was preaching spiritual truths:

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“All worldly sinners, listen to me. Do not pray for your earthly desires and the matters of life or death.”

Ms. Kim woke up with his ferocious shouting. [Once she awoke from the dream] there was no such church around her. There was only Inwon's body, which lay silently in an empty room, dimly lit with foreboding light cast by a single lamp.

After that, there was the sound of a cock's crow, signaling the coming dawn. The next morning the sun would rise again, as it rose in the east and set in the west every day, as if bearing witness to what happened on the earth. Ms. Kim purchased a Bible, and its title was encrusted in gold. She buried Inwon with that precious Bible in a corner of the mountain of Bungmang. (Kim 1974, 1:104-05)

In the above passage, Ms. Kim experiences spiritual holiness and realizes the divine presence of God and his truths through her dream. She hears the voice of God and his words, which represent spiritual truths concerning a true Christian faith and life of prayer. God appears as a man, a very imposing figure with a noble and majestic attitude. After the dream she is strengthened in her Christianity; more precisely, she becomes highly religious and “develops a true faith.” As the title of the story implies, in her dream, God finally reveals and delivers to her the following religious truth: “All in the world are sinners! Listen to me; do not pray for your earthly desires and the matters of life and death.” Through these words, she becomes awakened and enlightened, and this “religious experience” is the central theme of “Gyesi.”

Through her dream, Ms. Kim discovers a divine faith and is transformed from a secular and selfish believer into a true and genuine Christian. Furthermore, she gains stability and emotional relief. The end of the story implies there is a chance for her to look at the future despite the loss of her son, to shift from a difficult time. In this way, in “Gyesi,” Christianity is depicted as a source of power through which one could resolve internal suffering, overcome worldly troubles, and gain a sense of peace and comfort. In short, it saves one from one's affliction and suffering.

In “Gyesi,” Kim Il-yeop seems to acknowledge the faith Ms. Kim takes away from her spiritual experience as a pure type of Christian faith, and that through this spiritual experience, she could overcome hardship and eventually

realize religious salvation. However, we are not provided a detailed account of the internal process and effects of her religious experience and understanding, so that it seems to us mystical and transcendental. In this regard, Ms. Kim's notion of a true Christian faith corresponds with that put forward by the modern Korean church: it is a superficial and simple faith that places special emphasis on personal salvation. Similarly, Kim Miyeong (2004, 83), a Korean literary critic, points out that Kim Il-yeop's superficial and restricted interpretation of Christianity in "Gyesi" presages that she would fail to maintain a lifetime dedication to Christianity. She asserts further that Kim Il-yeop exposed a limited knowledge and shallow understanding of Christianity (Kim 2004, 83). And this ignorance was endemic to Korean Christian women in general:

It seemed that the Christian beliefs and religious understanding of Korean Christian women remained limited and at an elementary level. At that time, female missionaries and bible women were unable to thoroughly teach and explain to new Christian converts the gospel of God and his teachings. They were limited to simple explanations and certain cautions regarding sin, dependence, hell, and Satan. **Therefore, the religious consciousness of Korean Christian women remained shallow and superficial.** (Yi 1985, 25; emphasis mine)

In the early modern Korean church, the essential tenets of Christian faith were summarized as the opposing concepts of heaven and hell, original sin, the repentance of sin, the power and blessing of God, personal salvation, the practical effectiveness of a life of prayer, and absolute belief in the Bible as ultimate truth (Min 2005, 201-02). These tenets were apparent in the lives of practicing Korean Christians during the early modern period (Baek 1973, 176-77; 272-73).

The understanding that Korean Christian women had of their faith and the knowledge they possessed of the Bible was limited to a basic conception and consisted for the main part of disciplinary regulations. Foreign female missionaries and Korean bible women were unable to explain to Korean converts the deeper meaning of the Bible and gospel teachings. On account of this, the character of Korean Christianity became simple, superficial, and regulatory. In some ways, the superficiality and simplicity of the understanding Korean women had of Christianity contributed a great deal to the blindness

and superstition of their Christian religiosity (Bak 2001, 292). In particular, the revival movements and evangelical emphasis of Korean Christianity in early modern Korea generated such problems as shamanistic Christianity and Christian mysticism (Bak 2001, 293).

Tension and Conflict with Christianity: a Religion of “Repressive Ideas”

The early policy of Western missionaries to Korea was set out and practiced according to a strict interpretation of biblical teaching. It entailed “strict discipline and biblical penalties” (Min 2005, 207). The foreign missionaries believed that the truth of Christianity could be lived. That is to say, not only could Korean Christians learn and know the teachings and doctrines of God; they could actually put them into practice in their everyday life (Min 2005, 157). According to this belief, converts to the modern Korean church were positively and consistently encouraged to transform themselves into persons of moral character. Every Christian was expected to be moral, honest, righteous, clean, and patriotic. It was believed that this moral character was in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels and the truth of Christianity. Min Gyeongbae (2005, 305), a historian of Korean Christianity, observes that Christianity had a great and positive impact on Korean converts in that it lifted up their sense of morality and corrected bad manners and behaviors.

Christianity changed the character and personality of Korean converts and developed in them a “fine Christian character” (Min 2005, 305; Oak 2010, 590-92). In so doing, it also shaped the landscape of Kim Il-yeop’s childhood, especially her strong Christian background, which included a Christian home, a formal Christian education, and her father’s embodiment of a “fine Christian character” as a pastor.

I believed that God at all times watched over and protected us, and that God was capable of knowing everything about me. Since my father’s words were supposed to be the words of God, I couldn’t ever set my mind at ease. At all times, I was pressured by **such repressive ideas**.

Since my father told me, “**Don’t** pick up or acquire any fruit that has

fallen from the fruit trees and is on the ground, because they are not ours,” therefore I never picked up anything rolling around on the road.

My father taught me that it was an insult to call any woman a chick; so whenever I felt like using bad language, I desperately tried **not to** because of the words of my father.

At that time, if a girl's hand happened to be touched or grabbed by a man, although it was only one time, it was a big deal. Once I should vow before God that this man was my husband, even if he should turn out to be a wicked and handicapped man, I knew that I could not leave him. (Kim 1960, 94-95; emphasis mine)

Apparently her father, as a pastor, reared and disciplined her according to his Christian beliefs and the teachings of Christianity. At that time, Korean Christianity and the Korean church focused on cultivating and enhancing the moral character of Korean Christians. They worked to correct bad moral surroundings and enhance the moral serenity of believers. The majority of the foreign Protestant missionaries were men who practiced a puritanical type of Christianity. In other words, in theology and biblical interpretations, they tended toward moral conservatism and a stoic contempt of the human body, especially as it related to sex and sexuality. Consequently, they placed many behavioral rules and regulations on all levels of one's everyday life.

By the same token, Kim Il-yeop remembered the reality of Christianity as being one of “repressive ideas.” She applied its discipline and regulations to her everyday life. For her, living as a Christian was nothing more than being watched over by God, or rather controlled by the words of her father, which, according to Kim Il-yeop's understanding, were nothing less than the mediated words of God himself and the revelation of God's teaching through her father's voice. Therefore, she felt she must follow her father's sayings. She remarks clearly, “At all times, I was pressured by such repressive ideas.” She felt fear and discomfort from the feeling that God constantly watched over her, that he saw her internal thoughts as well as her external behavior, and that he had the power to control and judge her.

Kim Il-yeop's belief that she was under God's constant surveillance derived from the Christian belief that God is omniscient. This caused her to become more self-conscious about what she was actually thinking and doing,

and it explains why she characterizes Christianity as a religion of “repressive ideas.”

Her father’s discipline informed Kim Il-yeop’s ideas and practice of Christianity. This discipline was presented in commandments according to the pattern of “do not.” The last sentence of the above passage, according to which women are bound to the man they marry no matter what, denotes that Christian norms and practices were much stricter and more conservative regarding women than men when it came to issues of sexuality and married life. Certain of these Christian norms and injunctions significantly affected Kim Il-yeop’s early life. Christianity seemed to control and discipline her attitudes and behavior, even her mind, and she found these experiences “repressive” and “disciplinary.”

For her, Christianity operated as a moral force enacted through strict self-regulation.

He [my father], as he watched **the misbehaviors and misdeeds** of young students, would have sensed that I was likely to do the same in the near future. He was worried about me since I was a female student studying in Seoul.

So in every letter he expressed his concerns and worries about me, requesting the following of me:
“Please, take care of yourself, and study hard under the Grace and blessings of God. Pray all the time to God that you may keep from making a
deviation.” (Kim 1960, 95; emphasis mine)

It seems probable this was around the time that Kim Il-yeop was attending Ewha Hakdang. The above passage shows the strict and conservative nature of her Christianity, particularly as it pertained to love, marriage, sexuality, and family.

Kim Il-yeop’s father was greatly concerned lest she happen to become involved in the practice of “free love,” as many young students had done at that time. In his view, “free love” was nothing more than a “deviation” from virtue that had derived from secular interests and harmful temptations. The word “deviation” referred to a sidetrack from the right and proper path under the grace and blessings of God, in this case, a sidetrack from an ideal Christian womanhood that would result in sexual depravity and the moral decay of a woman.

The effect of Kim Il-yeop's Christianity on the level of her everyday life was regulatory and morally instructive. Nevertheless, contrary to her father's hopes and expectations, Kim Il-yeop stumbled into "deviation" from the right and proper path of God's will (Kim 1960, 45).

In 1913, at the age of seventeen, Kim Il-yeop entered Ewha Hakdang. During her days at Ewha Hakdang, she had to stay at the dormitory in Gyeongseong. She negatively depicts her time at the dormitory as "a monastic life" that resembled "life in jail" (Kim 1960, 89). She does not explain her reason for this depiction any further. But it could be attributed to the strict and conservative discipline of Ewha Hakdang as a mission school for girls. It seems that around this time, she grew to doubt Christianity and even questioned the doctrines of the Bible (Kim 1960, 90).

Kim Il-yeop's growing doubt and skepticism about Christianity resulted in the weakening of her Christian faith to the extent that she ultimately rejected it altogether. When exactly this occurred, it is difficult to say; however, presumably sometime between 1918 and 1919, she had at least become "agnostic" (Kim 1974, 1:265).

I had doubts about Christianity. Yet I could not ask other Christians or even my father about them, because I assumed that they would assume that I had no faith in God, and that it wasn't a right thought. I assumed they would simply tell me that I should pray hard to God and remember to repent of my sins. There was no way for me to solve my doubts and questions. (Kim 1960, 90; emphasis mine)

Absolute belief in the Bible is the basis for practicing a Christian faith. That one becomes a Christian necessitates or presupposes a strong belief in the Bible and an absolute devotion to God. Kim Il-yeop, however, grew to have doubts and questions about the doctrines in the Bible. But she would not share them with others, for she was certain they would be considered morally wrong and a sign of lost faith, and that the only response she could expect, therefore, would be an adjuration to repentance from sin through prayer to God. To her Christian acquaintances and her father especially, Kim Il-yeop's behavior and thoughts, her questions and doubts concerning the Bible, were seen as dangerous heresies. This reaction features the aforementioned strong, unquestioning belief in the Bible and recourse to intensive prayer characteristic

of the modern Korean church. It seems problematic that Kim Il-yeop's doubt and questions about the Bible were treated as "sin" or "bad thoughts" and were not accepted by Christians as worthy of consideration. This treatment functioned as the backdrop against which Kim Il-yeop ended up repudiating her Christianity.

Kim Il-yeop posed thoughts that were considered dangerous by the Korean church. For instance, she held the view that "the sacred pictures of the Christian deity were mere idols if Christians did not experience and realize the presence and the power they represented, that is, the dealings of God in this world. In addition, she believed that if Christians simply made up God and believed in that conception, they would also be worshipping idols and images" (Kim 1960, 90). Even further, she denied the authority and sacredness of the Bible. Finally, she doubted the existence of God and the presence of his power and dealings in the world (Kim 1960, 90).

In the context of early modern Korean Christianity, the concept of "idolatry" was used negatively in reference to traditional Korean religions, including Buddhism and certain native superstitions. The early foreign missionaries and the modern Korean Christian church regarded these as heathenism. Therefore, it is quite significant that Kim Il-yeop uses the term "idolatry" to describe a practice in the Christian religion. It is notable that she did not hold the Christian faith at the time she put forward these views, but had already rejected and denied all Christian claims, beliefs, and ideas that she had theretofore accepted in life.

It is also notable that the time during which Kim Il-yeop began to feel disillusionment with Christianity and ultimately became "agnostic" coincided with her interest in love and romance. This puts a new perspective on Kim Il-yeop's relationship with Christianity.

I went to Tokyo to study at the age of twenty-four. There I had a love affair with R; but we broke up. This love affair occurred after I ended up becoming agnostic due to my growing doubts about the doctrines of Christianity... (Kim 1974, 1:265; emphasis mine)

This short quotation shows that, at least in the view of Kim Il-yeop, a romantic relationship occurring outside of marriage or a formal engagement was proscribed by Christianity as inappropriate and counter to good doctrine.

Romance, or “free love,” was still regarded in general as something harmful to social stability and morality in the Korean society of her time, although some modernist elites and young intellectuals strongly agreed with and espoused the idea of “free love.”¹² However, what is more important for our purpose is to establish that, according to Kim Il-yeop, love and romance between a man and woman outside of marriage, or at least an engagement, was “antichristian.” And we may take her as an authority in this matter considering she was “born a Christian” and grew up with Christian teachings, and her life reflected for many years Christian concepts and Christian ethics as they related to matters of love and romance.

Another part of the autobiographical writing *An Ascetic's Memoir* offers a similar example of Kim Il-yeop's tension and conflict with Christianity due to her inclination toward romance.

Due to my loneliness, I thirsted for love; so in my eyes there were only low-grade novels, which were all love stories. I was apprehensive, as I wished my sins not to be seen by **God's eyes ...**

Finally, however, such apprehensive feelings ended, and I felt some doubts [about my Christianity]. My faith in God gradually faded away, so that there was left only my suspicion and questions [of Christianity]. (Kim 1960, 90; emphasis mine)

It is remarkable that Kim Il-yeop conceives of her behavior in reading love stories, or romance novels, as an indulgence with “low-grade novels” and a sin that went counter to the teachings of Christianity. She regards it as a “deviation.” Because she wished her sin not to be seen by God, she was apprehensive, and this apprehension is an example of the guilt-consciousness of Christian believers. It finally faded away, however, as she began to have greater

12. The term “free” in “free love” had both positive and negative connotations. Positively, it implied one's freedom in love and romance, the idea that one could love a freely chosen partner. Negatively, it implied that one was promiscuous and having sex “freely,” outside the bonds of marriage. In its negative sense, the concept of “free love” was often associated with sexual immorality and, in the case of a woman, sexual promiscuity, dirtiness, and sin. The modern dialogue on “free love” in early modern Korean Christianity reveals that there were strong views against this idea and practice on account of its supposedly producing such harmful and dangerous effects as moral decay and sexual depravity among the youth of Korea. For more details, see Yi 2006.

doubts about her Christianity. In short, her faith became weaker and weaker. She developed enduring suspicions and doubts about Christianity. Kim Il-yeop's thirst for love and romance, along with her interest in low grade novels, conflicted with her Christian beliefs and therefore caused in her much tension and conflict. The idea and practice of "free love" contradicted the values and ethics of Christianity.

By the same token, the Korean Church and Christian communities expressed great concern and even antagonism toward the phenomenon of "free love" and its rapid popularization among Korean youth (Yi 2010a, 48-54). They looked down on this new practice, for they assumed that it was an "indiscreet" and "easy" love, based upon the immaturity and reckless emotion of youth, and consisting of nothing more than "young boys chasing girls of their age." They defined it as the love of instant feelings and secular interests that tempted immature youth.¹³

It is not difficult to see why Kim Il-yeop initially viewed the matters of romance, love, and sexuality between a man and woman to be taboo and something that should be repressed given her personal background: the fact that she grew up in a strong Christian family and learned much about the teachings of Christianity.

Before I was a Buddhist monk, as a worldling, I had no clue what true love was. So I considered instinctive love to be the essence of love.

When I was a little baby, I believed in Jesus Christ, and so I supposed it was true that if I made love with a man before marriage or committed adultery, I deserved to be punished and go to Hell. What was more, I was completely ignorant of my own body, of sex, and of sexuality due to my jail-like life at the dormitories, which lasted from the time when I was little until the age of twenty.

Then, when I went to Tokyo for study I received some love letters from male students and later had relationships with them. I was a sweet, kind

13. Concerning the Korean church's negative views on the concept and practice of free love, I refer to the articles by Yi Sukjin such as "Discourse on Marriage in Early Modern Korean Protestantism, with a Focus on 'Early Marriage,' 'Concubinage,' and 'Free Love'" and "The Narratives for Resistance and Trapping: Christian New Women's Sexuality, Love, and Marriage."

woman, and so it was only natural that I responded to them, I suppose. (Kim 1964, 21-22; emphasis mine)

Kim Il-yeop writes that before she became a Buddhist monk, there was a time when she was rapt with instinctive love, not true love. She pursued this instinctive love because she believed it to be “the essence” of love. The word “instinctive” refers here to physical love driven by sexual desire and temptation.

“Instinctive love,” when it occurred outside of marriage or constituted adultery, was completely unacceptable according to Christian ethics and puritan sexual morality. Even entertaining the temptation to engage in it was antithetical to Christian family values and moral guidelines. Kim Il-yeop, while she was a Christian, believed it to be wrong and explains that she was completely ignorant of her own body, her sexual desires, and sexuality, and that this ignorance was a consequence of having spent her youth in the “jail-like” dormitory for girls at the mission schools. This ignorance seems to have persisted until, while studying in Tokyo, Japan, she received love letters from male students and entered into romantic relationships with some of them as a result.

Inasmuch as love and romance in Korea were associated with sexual relations outside of the marital relationship, Kim Il-yeop considered these things to be sinful, adulterous, and worthy of punishment according to her conservative Christian beliefs and puritan sexuality. She was influenced by her Christian upbringing and held for much of her early life that romantic love and affection, feelings and desires, and sexual relations were sinful and taboo, and that they ought to therefore be repressed and restricted only to certain acceptable forms and expressions.

Kim Il-yeop incorporated her Christian views of love, romance and marriage, sex and sexuality into her literary works. In the short story “Hyewon” 혜원 (June, 1921),¹⁴ Kim Il-yeop demonstrates the importance of preserving women’s purity and their sensitive conviction concerning sexual sins. In this story, women take a conservative view of sexual purity and develop a strong awareness of sin and guilt.

In her other literary works, on the other hand, Kim Il-yeop formed her ideas of love and romantic relationships according to the ethics and spiritual

14. This work is included in *Miraese I* (140-49).

values of Christianity. In the fictional work “Naneun Gao” 나는 가오 (Here I Go)¹⁵ (March, 1920), Kim Il-yeop expresses clearly the Christian ideal of love between a man and a woman. The story portrays genuine moral love as a sort of spiritual love based on Christian principles. The message of the story was that, through Christianity, pure love and eternal love could be realized and expressed.

In this way, the Christian effects of the formation of Kim Il-yeop's thoughts regarding love, marriage, and sexuality inculcated Kim Il-yeop's literature with a stoic contempt of the human body, the repression of women's romantic affections for men, and an ideal of love defined by holiness, eternality, purity, and transcendence. These literary expressions seem to have been derived from her Christian background and experiences and the moral worldview these fostered. It is notable that Kim Il-yeop's understanding and literary expressions of love, marriage, and sexuality are inconsistent and even contradictory, given the fact that Kim Il-yeop disapproved of Christianity's repressive moral disciplines and that in her life, she had romantic relationships with several men and committed adultery.

The motivation behind Kim Il-yeop's repudiation of her Christianity for “agonisticism” could have been the fact that she was interested in romance, or free love, and even enjoyed romantic relationships in her youth. At the least, her inclination toward love and romance was linked with her conflict and tension with Christianity. It is also related to the fact that Christian norms and practices were much stricter and more conservative regarding women than men when it came to issues of love, marriage, sex or sexuality, and family.

Christianity will not be a real power for someone whose faith is neither strong nor firm. [For it can present itself only within one's mind; it can exist only mentally.] Therefore, I became unable to find or feel the real value of holding a faith in God. At that time, I assumed that as long as I believed in Christ, I would not have to face any real burdens, and nor would my body have to endure any worldly suffering. I was only a naïve believer who held the simple belief that everything in the life of a Christian would be protected by God's blessing.

15. This work is included in *Miraese 1* (121-39).

If one claims to hold a Christian faith, but that faith has no power or strength in one's life, then in reality one is not qualified to call oneself a Christian. (Kim 1960, 44)

The above quotation, however, notes clearly that Kim Il-yeop failed to save her Christianity because her faith in God was neither strong nor serious, but rather revealed itself to be present only within her mind. In other words, we can tell that Christianity did not become a real power and source of energy with which she could deal with the reality and difficulties of life. She could not grasp any true value in keeping her faith. She admitted that she used to be a simple and blind believer who would regard everything as the will of God and his blessings upon the world and its affairs. She assumed that there would be no need to worry if one believed in God, that as a consequence of her faith, she would have no real problems or worldly burdens or physical suffering, that she could overcome and transcend all worldly problems and matters.

However, she came to acknowledge that there would be certain realities in life that this belief could not easily account for. Her body would still feel suffering; her mind would still face certain problems and worldly troubles. And as long as she maintained a “simple,” “blind” Christian faith, she could not explain these things. She could not resolve them, for to do so would mean recognizing a reality that was at odds with the kind and just, divinely governed world of that faith. Kim Il-yeop, while she held to faith in God, could not realize an authentic faith. Her Christianity was not real.

After Kim Il-yeop turned away from Christianity, her inclination toward Buddhism developed further and finally she converted to Buddhism and became a Buddhist monk in her thirties. For the rest of her life, she remained this way, secluding herself from the world and its people.

Identity of a Pastor's Daughter: the Influence of a “Fine Christian Character”

In her writing, Kim Il-yeop (1960, 161) identifies herself as a pastor's daughter and introduces herself as such. She writes that people viewed her in this way as well. However, when she becomes conflicted and disillusioned with Christianity, it derails that identity. In the essay “A Mini-Tale of Il-yeop,”

she recalls, “It was a time when I was filled with impertinent complaints that were not appropriate for a pastor’s daughter” (Kim 1974, 1:276). In her memorial essay, “To My Departed Father,” moreover, all of the chaos, internal conflict, and struggles Kim Il-yeop (1974, 1:406) faces have to do with her self-conscious awareness that she is acting against her father, against his expectations and hopes for her. She acknowledges that she was supposed to meet the expectations and maintain the image of a pastor’s daughter, and that this weighs heavily on her.

My father, as a sincere Christian, wished and always prayed to God that I would become a fine Christian, and my mom also prayed to God that I could be a great person in the future.

...If I had maintained my Christianity and remained a Christian, by now, according to my father’s hope and expectation, I might have been.... already enlightened.

...But I dared to doubt what was said in the Bible, and soon my faith faded away accordingly. I ended up falling short of the hope and expectation of my great parents. I suppose that I myself ruined and destroyed such a fine background and jumped into a harsh and troublesome journey. (Kim 1960, 96; emphasis mine)

The above passage implies that Kim Il-yeop knew that she was expected to become a fine Christian and fulfill certain roles and social responsibilities; yet, as she recalls frequently in her writing, she would be a great disappointment to her parents. Kim Il-yeop assumed that she failed to satisfy these hopes and expectations for her. When Kim Il-yeop began to doubt Christianity, her father was concerned that his daughter would become a sinner. So he asked her to pray to God for forgiveness (Kim 1974, 1:276). She recounts that she ruined her fine Christian background and jumped into a harsh and troublesome life. It seems that she felt much sadness and dissatisfaction about her failing to save her Christianity. In “To My Departed Father,” Kim Il-yeop also expressed great concern: “What if my behavior should disappoint my father or hurt his reputation?” (Kim 1974, 1:407).

To my parents I was everything. They valued me above all else except God himself.

To my parents, I was everything but God.

And I, as their daughter, only knew that in turn, I valued my parents above all else except God. (Kim 1960, 95)

From the above passage, we may infer that Christianity was the centerpiece of Kim Il-yeop's family and its relationships. Its doctrines would develop in Kim Il-yeop a strong spiritual and emotional connection with her parents. It would amplify and intensify their already close attachment and bond to one another. In the above passage, Kim Il-yeop expresses great affection toward her parents. It is certain that Kim Il-yeop loved them very much and was a lovely and adorable daughter to them.

Considering the strong influence of Christianity on Kim Il-yeop's familial relationships, it becomes more important to determine how she perceived and understood her parents. Knowing this will be very important toward figuring out the nature of Christianity's influence on the development of Kim Il-yeop's identity and perspective on life; for although Kim Il-yeop remarks, "My doubt about Christianity grew more and more, and finally I fell into a state of non-religion" (Kim 1960, 93); although she left Christianity, this does not mean that she became completely disconnected from Christianity in her life.

In *An Ascetic's Memoir*, Kim Il-yeop (1960, 89-96) reflects on her parents, especially concerning their Christianity. She regarded her mother, Yi Madae, to be an "enlightened," "awakened," and "modernized" Korean woman because she had converted to Christianity and, more significantly, encouraged her daughter to receive a modern education, just as the men received. Yi Madae infused her daughter with a sense of self-confidence and pride. Moreover, Kim Il-yeop points to her mother's outspoken and unique personality as a factor in this. It was a personality that diverged distinctively from those of traditional Korean women at that time. Yi Madae declared that she would go so far as to sell all of her assets to ensure Kim Il-yeop was able to advance in her studies, just as other parents would do for their sons. She vowed to raise her daughter as finely as any boy might be raised. Kim Il-yeop attributed her mother's attitude and modern way of thinking to her Christianity.

Kim Il-yeop's father, Kim Yonggyeom, as a pastor and devout Christian, dedicated his entire life to Christianity. He was also a caring father. In her

memorial essays,¹⁶ Kim Il-yeop recounts his life and sincere devotion to his faith. She had a close bond and maintained an intimate relationship with her father, who sent many letters to her at Ewha Hakdang while she was in attendance there. Kim Il-yeop remembered this time as the happiest and most joyful in her life. Her father also made a special effort to visit her regularly at the school dormitory in order to spend more time with her while she was in school, far away from her hometown (Kim 1974, 1:408-09). He was sweet and generous to her. He loved her very much. She was very special to him for being his only surviving daughter.

Most importantly, however, Kim Il-yeop understood her father to be “the presence and embodiment of a fine Christian character” and describes him for the most part in terms of his Christianity, which was to him not only a religion, but a living spirituality, an ethic, and an actual practice.

For example, even if our house were to catch fire and everything in it burn, my father would still thank God that our family was alive. Even if his whole family were to die, he would still thank God for saving his own life. Even if he himself were to die of burns, he would nonetheless thank God for having been taken to God’s world. (Kim 1960, 93)

You indeed, were the truest and greatest Christian throughout Korea’s peninsula. You were the only person who took on and practiced the true essence of Christ’s spiritual principles. You realized and practiced such true humanitarianism as that one should love others as much as he or she loves himself or herself. You knew the truth that one’s life flows through the life of others, and that the life of others runs through one’s own as well. To be sure, you lived life as a saint.

People named you the most faithful envoy of God. (Kim 1974, 1:407-08)

On the one hand, Kim Il-yeop depicts her father as a devout Christian and a kind and true Christian father who internalized the sayings of God and the doctrines of Christianity and practiced them in life. According to Kim Il-yeop, her father was the only person who realized and practiced the essence

16. I refer to the following works; Kim Il-yeop’s “To My Departed Father” (*Dongailbo*, January 1, 1925) and “My Father and Hometown” (1933).

and true spirit of Christianity. He was “the truest and greatest Christian” in the Korean society of his time. He practiced sincere humanitarianism according to the precept that one should love others as one loves oneself. He was enlightened with the truth that one’s life flows through the life of others, and that others’ lives also run through one’s own life. Her father lived as a saint and was named “the most faithful envoy of God.”

In short, Kim Il-yeop acclaimed her father as the embodiment of true Christianity. And though, on the other hand, she disapproved of the blindness and absoluteness of his faith (Kim 1960, 162), she nevertheless recalls the very moment before his death, “I saw that he was singing a hymn, and in my eyes he seemed so happy to return to God’s world” (Kim 1960, 93). Kim Il-yeop depicts his faith metaphorically as having been firm as a rock, and she expresses respect and love for her father.

Kim Il-yeop recognized in her father the genuine embodiment of a “fine Christian character,” and for the most part, she experienced and understood Christianity and a true Christian life not through the Christian religion itself but through him.

He sacrifices himself for other people and shows mercy and benevolence to others. Whenever he happens to see people in trouble and in need, he always helps them out even though he is very busy with his own business. He helps to carry the heavy luggage of other people. And when he sees sick people around him, he tries to get them the medicine they need. (Kim 1974, 1:258)

Here we see that Kim Il-yeop recognized in her father a devout Christian who practiced “self-sacrifice” and showed benevolent affection to other people. These virtues were identical with the love and truth of God. In the historical context of the early foreign missions in modern Korea, many Korean Christian converts were greatly impressed and touched by the gentle and loving attitudes, the benevolence and ennobling behavior of the American missionaries and other Christians toward common Korean people (Min 2005, 136). They did not accept Christianity because they learned about its theology or the doctrines in the Bible. Instead, they began to accept Christianity because of the actions and practices of the American missionaries and early Christian converts (Kim 2009, 472).

What did Kim Il-yeop consider the legacy of her father? She recounts, “I think that from my father I inherited a deep concern for public matters and for fostering a benevolent affection for people” (Kim 1974, 1:259). The legacy of her father included love and benevolence, selflessness, kindness, mercy, and dedication and sacrifice for his family and the public. He loved his wife and daughter from his heart. He showed generosity and a noble attitude. His virtues stemmed from his Christianity. Kim Il-yeop founded *Sinnyeoja*. She engaged herself actively with it as a founder, editor in chief, and main contributor. Kim Il-yeop put forward her claims and arguments regarding Korean women in the magazine. She also occasionally gave speeches and lectures to the public on women’s issues at the Christian hall. Along with being publicly recognized as an enlightened, modernized, and educated woman; Kim Il-yeop in particular, according to her social identity as a “prophet teacher,” bore upon her back the social responsibility of bringing about the liberation, enlightenment, and education of Korean women in general. She led an early Korean women’s movement as a feminist activist and pioneering female writer. These activities and social commitments can be understood as having arisen from the influence of her father’s legacy.

In reference to the claim that “Christianity changed the character of Korean converts,”¹⁷ the Korean historian Min Gyeongbae (2005, 305) observes “that it in fact transformed them into persons of fine Christian character.” The following excerpt from Kim Il-yeop supports this observation:

Having inherited **a good heart from my father**, I suppose that I was guided and expected to be a good and happy person in the future. How much would my father’s heart break if he knew about the past ten years of my life? I made a great effort to become someone who could satisfy and console my deceased father. However, the more seriously I considered it, the less it worked out. I was afraid lest I defame him and bring disgrace to him.

I became able to be calm, stable, and easy whenever I thought about my father and remembered his words. I have never forgotten **my father’s good heart** for even a minute. (Kim 1974, 1:407-08; emphasis mine)

17. U.S., *The Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church* (1907), 283. The citation was taken from Min Gyeongbae’s book *A History of Christian Churches in Korea*.

Kim Il-yeop's memorial essay, "Abeonim Yeongjeon-e" 아버님 영전에 (To my Departed Father), was published first in *Dongailbo* in January 1925. This autobiographical work implies that although Kim Il-yeop turned away from Christianity around the time of its publication, she was still under the influence of Christianity through her father and his words to her. It indicates that the presence of her father and his sincere religious life continuously affected Kim Il-yeop's understanding of herself and her perspective on life. She kept in mind her father's good heart and the lessons he taught her. She never forgot her father's expectation and wish that she would grow up to be a fine Christian woman with a fine Christian character.

However, she derailed her father's expectations and wishes, and she eventually rejected her Christian faith, although she made a great effort to become someone who could satisfy and console her father. Kim Il-yeop had love affairs with several men during her youth. Her life, filled with scandalous love affairs, divorce, and the disgraceful rumors and gossip regarding them, drew strong criticism and contempt from the society of her time. More importantly, her life went against strict and conservative Christian norms and ethics. She was afraid and apprehensive lest she defame her father and bring disgrace to him. She expressed great concern about this.

I had no idea what would be right and proper for me; **should I regret my mistakes or should I** blame this unfair world. I cried over and over and wiped off my tears. Finally, I made a resolution to fight against the world for my happiness and to build a fine character. (Kim 1974, 1:407; emphasis mine)

Kim Il-yeop knows well that she failed to satisfy her parents' hopes for her and that her life went counter to her father's expectation. Inevitably, it causes in her much internal conflict and sorrow, and she struggles with regret. It seems rather natural and predictable, as far as the influence of her father is concerned. In the end, Kim Il-yeop makes a resolution to be a good person with a fine character although she has disappointed her parents, especially her father.

Kim Il-yeop understood herself through her identity as a pastor's daughter and according to the expectations of her father, whom she loved very much and looked upon as a saint and the embodiment of true Christianity. From this we may safely infer that Kim Il-yeop for the most part experienced and understood Christianity through her father and his Christian life. Indeed,

her understanding and interpretations of her father were based on his Christian devotions. They played an important role in the development of her identity and perspective on life.

However, Kim Il-yeop rejected her Christian faith in her early twenties. The influence of her father and his Christian faith did not affect her deeply enough to save her Christianity. Thus, the question is, why?

Before she reached her twenties, Kim Il-yeop lost all of her family members. Her father passed away around the time that she had just graduated from middle school. She remembers that it was after this she fell into a state of confusion, ideologically and spiritually, and could not find a direction for her life (Kim 1962, 21-23). This resulted in the weakening of her faith and her questioning of the Bible. Her doubt and skepticism about Christianity coincided with the loss of her father. She questioned the meaning of Jesus, the presence and the power of God, and the ultimate truth of the scriptures. She asked for an answer to these questions, but they remained unanswered, and she started to doubt her faith. She refused to have merely a blind and absolute faith in God, as other Korean Christians had at that time. Instead, Kim Il-yeop wanted logical answers to her questions about the doctrines of Christianity. She recounts that she was able to resolve her religious questions and doubts through the teachings of Buddhism and was greatly influenced by them: "I realized my Christian faith was weak and not real after I became a Buddhist" (Kim 1960, 163).

From her later personal accounts in the 1960s, we may infer that her father's influence on her derived primarily from the lessons she learned in observing his sincere religious life, rather than Christian doctrine considered in itself, abstractly. Her father practiced sincere humanitarianism, and from this Kim Il-yeop learned what the true value of faith was and how one should practice it in everyday life. It was through her father that Kim Il-yeop discovered her religious values, the values exemplified by his humanitarian attitude, benevolence, and affection for people.

She wished to become a good person with a fine character equipped with these ethics. Kim Il-yeop kept in mind her father's lessons and his good heart even after she became a Buddhist monk. She practiced them in her new religious life and ultimately wished to be a true believer. The influence of her Christian father on her remained in this way.

Conclusion

In the history of modern Korean Christianity, Christianity changed the character and personality of Korean converts and developed in them a “fine Christian character.” Kim Il-yeop was no exception. Christianity shaped the landscape of her childhood, which included a Christian home, a formal Christian education, and her father’s embodiment of a fine Christian character as a pastor. These played an essential role in the formation of Kim Il-yeop’s personal identity.

Concerning her personality in her childhood, Kim Il-yeop herself attributed her fine and optimistic character to her Christian faith. Her personal accounts reflect her religious faith and conviction in her childhood. On the other hand, however, she characterized Christianity as a religion of “repressive ideas” whose doctrines operated as a moral force that compelled strict self-regulation. In her view, Christianity conditioned her mind in a way that was objectionable: it controlled and disciplined her attitudes and behavior.

More importantly, Kim Il-yeop identified herself as a pastor’s daughter and introduced herself as such in her writing. She experienced and understood Christianity and the true Christian life through her Christian father. Her father’s influence on her derived primarily from the lessons she learned in observing his sincere religious life, rather than Christian doctrine. Kim Il-yeop understood the lessons of his Christian life more broadly and practiced them in her religious life after she became a Buddhist monk. Kim Il-yeop wished to be a person with a fine character and ultimately to be a true believer like her father.

Later on in life, Kim Il-yeop began to present a growing skepticism about Christianity, and this resulted in the weakening and final rejection of her Christian faith. Her disapproval of Christianity’s repressive moral discipline was the motivation behind her rejection of it. Indeed, the motivation behind Kim Il-yeop’s repudiation of her Christianity was the fact that she was interested in “free love” and even enjoyed romantic relationships during her youth. Her life, filled with many scandals, adulteries, divorces, and the disgraceful rumors and gossip regarding them, drew strong criticism and contempt from the society of her time. More importantly, her life went against strict and conservative Christian norms and ethics in modern Korean Protestantism.

As a writer, Kim Il-yeop pursued a realization of her selfhood: the

fulfillment of her happiness, desires, and literary pursuit. As a feminist, she argued for Korean women's liberation and gender equality. Specifically, her promotion and practice of "free love" and "free marriage" was severely criticized by the Protestant culture during that time. Her literary pursuit and feminist activities opposed the lives of "patriotic," "nationalist," and "self-sacrificing" Christian women. Kim Il-yeop's conflict and tension with Christianity was in a broader sense related to the traditional, nationalist, and patriarchal Christian churches of Korean Christianity at that time.

On the other hand, according to her personal reflection, for Kim Il-yeop, Christianity itself never became a real power and source of energy with which she could handle the reality and difficulty of life. She had doubts about Christianity and questioned the doctrines of the Bible. She sought logical answers to the questions in the Christian religion and in the end she resolved them through the teachings of Buddhism. That is why Kim Il-yeop could not realize an authentic faith while she held a faith in God. Her Christianity was neither strong nor serious, but rather superficial and simple. It is also related to the superstition, simplicity, and superficiality of Korean Christianity in early modern Korean society.

After Kim Il-yeop turned away from Christianity, her inclination toward Buddhism developed further and finally she converted to Buddhism and became a Buddhist monk in her thirties. For the rest of her life, she remained this way, secluding herself from the world and its people. On account of this, we may infer that through Buddhism, she finally discovered the truth regarding "a personal salvation" and "the liberation of herself as a woman," which she had earlier failed to find in the Christian religion.

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Abstract

Kim Il-yeop is considered to have been a pioneering female writer in the history of modern Korean women's literature, beginning in the 1920s; she was Korea's first female editor and publisher of a magazine for women, *Sinnyeoja*. She was one of the first generation of Korean "new women" and "modern female writers." More importantly, however, Kim Il-yeop had a close relationship with Protestant Christianity and was at one time in her life a devout Christian. This paper investigates what in fact Christianity meant to Kim Il-yeop in her own life, in other words, how exactly she understood the Christian religion and in what ways she experienced and practiced it. Christianity shaped the landscape of her childhood, which included a Christian home, a Christian education, and her father's embodiment of a fine Christian character as a pastor. Concerning her personality in her childhood, Kim Il-yeop herself attributed her fine and optimistic character to her Christian faith. On the other hand, however, she characterized Christianity as a religion of "repressive ideas" whose doctrines operated as a moral force that compelled strict self-regulation. More importantly, Kim Il-yeop understood herself through her identity as a pastor's daughter and according to the expectations of her father. She experienced and understood Christianity and the true Christian life through her father. Her father's influence on her derived primarily from the lessons she learned in observing his sincere religious life, rather than Christian doctrine. Kim Il-yeop understood the lessons of his Christian life more broadly and practiced them in her religious life after she became a Buddhist monk.

Later on in life, Kim Il-yeop began to present a growing skepticism about Christianity, and this resulted in the weakening and final rejection of her Christian faith. She ultimately repudiated all the beliefs and claims she had accepted before. The motivation behind her repudiation of Christianity was the fact that she was interested in "free love" and even enjoyed romantic relationships during her youth. Indeed, her life as a new woman went against strict and conservative Christian norms and ethics. Kim Il-yeop's repudiation of Christianity was in a broader sense related to the traditional and patriarchal Christian churches of Korean Christianity at that time. For her, Christianity itself never became a real power and source of energy with which she could handle the reality and difficulty of life, and in the end, she failed to save her faith.

Keywords: Kim Il-yeop, Christianity, new woman, free love, religious conversion