Article

The Emergence of a Religious Market in Twentieth-century Korea

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Introduction

In 2012, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of the Republic of Korea issued a 286-page report on the religious environment in Korea in 2011. That report began with the statement that "Korean society can be described as characterized by religious pluralism, with the religious situation in Korea functioning as a 'religious supermarket' or a 'religious market.' There are many different religious organizations in Korea and it would be fair to say that those different religious organizations compete with each other according to the principles of capitalistic markets just as products compete to be selected by a consumer in an economic marketplace" (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2011, 3). The report then went on provide quantitative information on the membership, ritual halls, and social outreach activities of more than 510 different religious organizations active in the Republic of Korea that year.

This is a dramatic contrast from the way Korean society looked a century and a half ago. In the 19th century ago the average Korean lived in a village, had limited exposure to a market economy, and did not claim membership in any specific religious community. Even into the second decade of the 20th century, few Koreans identified with any specific religious communities. When the Japanese controlled Korea from 1910 to 1945, few Koreans claimed membership in any religious organization. In 1916, Japanese authorities counted only approximately 500,000 Koreans, out of a population of between 15 to 17 million, who were enrolled in various Christian, Buddhist, sectarian Shinto, or Korean indigenous new religious organizations (Takahashi 1929, 959; Murayama 1991, 413; Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 131).[1] That was at most 3% of the Korean population at that time. By 1940, the number of Koreans on the peninsula who said they had a specific religious orientation had risen to close to one million, but that still was only a little more than 4% of the total population of 23.5 million (Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 143; 155; 157; Murayama 1991, 419)

At the beginning of the 21st century, on the other hand, the average

1. Takahashi (1929, 959) gives a figure of 63,571 Korean Buddhists in 1916. Murayama (1991, 413) suggests that there were around 150,000 Korean followers of new religions at that time. Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso (1993, 131) reports that there were a total of 283,022 Christians in Korea in 1916, including 81,878 Catholics.

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South Korean lives in a crowded urban environment, is deeply immersed in a market economy, and is much more likely to identify with a specific religious community. According to a Gallup poll in 2014, half of the population of South Korea today wears a religious label, a sharp contrast with the situation a century earlier (Gallup Korea 2015, 19). How did this change come about?

It is unlikely that Koreans are more religious today than they were a century and a half ago, if we understand "religious" to mean nothing more than engaging in ritual interactions with supernatural entities. Koreans have been availing themselves of the services of shamans and frequenting Buddhist temples for well more than a millennium. However, until the second half of the twentieth century, most Koreans did not identify themselves as Buddhists or "shamanists." They did not see participation in, or sponsorship of, a religious ritual as an affirmation of a commitment to a specific religious orientation (Baker 2006, 257-60). Yet, as noted above, that changed over the course of just a few decades, so quickly that, as noted above, today half of the population of South Korea professes allegiance to a specific religion. What has brought about this change? How can we explain this transformation in the way Koreans relate to religious activity and religious organizations? Why did the percentage of Koreans who identify with a specific religious community rise so dramatically?

This article will attempt to provide an answer to that question. It will argue that there are two factors responsible for the dramatic growth in religious affiliation among South Koreans. First of all, Christianity introduced to Koreans the notion that individuals should identify with one and only one religious community. Christian missionaries worked assiduously to convince Koreans to call themselves Christians. They also taught their Christian converts that, as Christians, they had to distance themselves from any other religious communities. That provoked the second reason for the growth in the size of the self-consciously religious population on the peninsula: competition among religious groups. As more Koreans began calling themselves Christians, more and more non-Christians started calling themselves Buddhists. Moreover, Buddhist orders responded to the Christian proselytizing drive by putting more of their clergy into the business of proselytizing in urban areas.

The statement cited at the beginning of this article supports the hypothesis that a competitive environment has fueled growth in Korea's religiously-affiliated population. In a marketplace, brands matter. Thanks to advertising (think "proselytizing"), consumers become conscious of differences

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among products in the same general category. Influenced by advertisements, as well as by availability, price, and the recommendations of relatives and friends, they often decide to favor one brand over another. If Korea really is a "religious supermarket," as the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism proclaimed, then we can investigate if the sort of competition seen among the products in supermarkets can also be seen within the Korean religious market and if that may had led to increasing numbers of Koreans preferring "brand name" religious products rather than simply engaging in interactions with supernatural entities without bothering to identify such interactions with only one religious tradition.

A useful guide to the application of notions of consumer behavior to religious choices is the work of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. Those two American sociologists of religion have argued that to understand the nature of religious organizations, the commitments of their members, and why religious organizations grow or shrink, we need to apply a market model of religion. They draw their data primarily from North America and Europe (Stark and Finke 2000). Stark (2015, 339-44) dedicates a few pages to South Korea in one of his latest books but does not make any attempt to apply his market theory to the religious environment there.

Korea's Competitive Religious Market

Stark should have done so, since Korea has an extremely competitive religious market and has also witnessed rapid growth in the size of its major religious communities over the last few decades. According to Stark and Finke, a competitive religious market should lead to increasing rates of religiosity. They argue, "The overall rate of religiousness will be higher when pluralism is greater or where regulation is lower" (Stark and Finke 2000, 219). Since they define religiosity in terms of membership in religious organizations, this could help explain the rapid increase in the number of the self-proclaimed religious in South Korea over the course of the 20th century, particularly from 1960 through the start of the 21st century.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that South Korea may have one of the most competitive religious environments on earth today, if competitiveness is defined not by the number of different types of religious communities but

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by the relative distribution of their memberships. There are dozens of different religions competing for members in South Korea in the 21st century, including Islam, Bahai, and even Hinduism (of the world major religions, only the Sikhs and the Jews have not attracted a Korean membership). However, three of those religions, Buddhism, Protestant Christianity, and Roman Catholicism,[2] embrace almost all of the self-proclaimed religious population. What makes the religious market unusually competitive is that none of those three is dominant. Moreover, the percentages of the population claimed by each of those three communities are relatively close.

In many countries the inhabitants have a default option for their religious affiliation. If there is a religion that is overwhelmingly dominant in a particular country, people born in that country are assumed to belong to that religion unless they specifically specify otherwise, especially if they are a member of the dominant ethnic group. There are plenty of countries in which the inhabitants are assumed to be Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindi, unless they are a member of a minority ethnic group associated with a different religion. In many situations, if your country does not determine your default religion, your ethnicity does.

Korea is quite different. With around 98% of South Koreans ethnically Korean, it would be reasonable to describe Korea as essentially ethnically homogenous. Yet it enjoys a religious diversity often associated with ethnically diverse societies. In South Korea, Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism are not identified with different ethnic groups. Koreans, therefore, do not have a default religion. They can choose to associate with one of those three religious communities, or even with other religious communities, or to not be a member of any organized religious community. That creates an unusually competitive religious market in South market.

To make matters more competitive, there are plenty of other religious communities beckoning Koreans into their worship halls. There are also new

2. Koreans treat Protestant Christianity and Roman Catholicism as separate religions, probably because until recently Catholics and Protestants used different names for God, with Catholics calling God the "Lord of Heaven" (*Cheonju*) and Protestants using two vernacular terms, *Haneunim* (Revered Heaven) or *Hananim* (The Revered One). Though Catholics have started using *Haneunim* alongside Lord of Heaven in recent decades, most Koreans still see Catholicism and Protestantism as two separate religions rather than as two branches of the one religion of Christianity. Koreans will frequently ask a Westerner "Are you a Christian or are you a Catholic?"

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religions (mostly Korean but Japanese, Chinese, and American new religions are also active in Korea). However, it is not the variety of religions present in Korea that makes Korea unusually diverse. Other countries, such as the US and Canada, probably have a greater number of distinct religious communities. What makes South Korea standout from other countries is the absence of any default religion for the vast majority of the inhabitants of South Korea. This religious diversity alongside ethnic homogeneity makes a study of the religious market in South Korea worthwhile.

The most recent census figures we have for the Korean religious landscape dates back to 2005. The ROK government carries out a census, which includes questions about religious affiliation, every ten years. At the time of this writing, the 2015 figures were not yet available. We do, however, have figures from a 2014 Gallup Survey. Except for the Catholic percentage of the population, there is no much difference between the 2005 census figures and Gallup's 2014 results. They both show a society in which about half of the population says they have no affiliation, and the other half is divided among Buddhists, Protestants, and Roman Catholics.

The government census in 2005 found that 29.3% of the population called themselves either Protestant (18.3%) or Catholic (10.9%) and another 22.8% said they were Buddhists. Another 46.9% said they had no religious affiliation, the lowest percentage of the non-affiliated since Koreans were first asked if they believe in any religion (Tonggyecheong 2006, 32).[3] I am not aware of any other country in which Christians (in the broad sense of both Catholics and Protestants) and Buddhists are so close in their membership numbers, or in which both Christian and Buddhists communities are strong and healthy, yet half the population says it has no religious affiliation.

In 2014, Gallup, with a much smaller sample (1,500 individuals) estimated that 22% of South Koreans were Buddhists, 21% were Protestants, and 7% were Catholics. 50% said they had no religious affiliation, up from 47% in the 2005 census, though that is within the margin of error for Gallup's small sample of the overall population. Except for the Catholics, given the margin of error in statistical sampling those figures are the same as they were in 2005 (Gallup Korea 2014, 19).[4]

3. This was confirmed by Gallup Korea 2004, 17-18.
4. It is worthy of note that Gallup in 2004 estimated that only 7% of Koreans were Catholics then,

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With a population divided almost evenly between the religious and the non-religious, Koreans find themselves confronted on a daily basis with evidence that they can now freely choose whether or not to believe in God, in addition to having the freedom to choose whatever religious community they find most appealing.

The vast majority of them take that first question seriously. According to the 2014 Gallup poll, 39% of Koreans answered yes when asked if they believe in the sort of God Christians believe in, a Creator who is a Supreme Being. 45% answered no. Only 17% said they did not know whether such a God existed or not or did not think that question was worth answering (Gallup Korea 2015, 59). They also take seriously their option to choose their own religious affiliation. Gallup found in 2014 that 10% of Koreans who were a member of one religious community in 2014 said they used to be members of a different religious community—that is down from 16% in 2004 and 1997 (Gallup Korea 2015, 24). Moreover, another 35% of those who said they had no specific religious affiliation in 2014 said that they used to wear a religious label. That figure is down from 43% in 2004 and 50% in 1997 (Gallup Korea 2015, 27).

Clearly, the religious market in South Korea remains very competitive, with Koreans moving both in and out of religion and in and out of different religious communities, though the percentage of people changing from one religion to another, changing from being non-religious to being religious or from being religious to being non-religious, has declined over the last decade or two.

The Rise in Religious Affiliation

We noted above that only 4% of Koreans claimed a specific religious affiliation in 1940. That changed very quickly. In 1964, the government of South Korea calculated that 3.5 million out of its 28.2 million citizens (12%) had a specific religious affiliation (Gweon 1993, 41). Possibly as early as the mid-1990s,

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though the next year the census, which surveyed everyone in Korea, found that almost 11% declared themselves to be Catholics. It is unclear why there is such a significant difference between government and Gallup figures for Catholics but not for the other religions.

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according to the government census, for the first time in Korea's history, a slight majority of those living under a Korean government had come to consider themselves to be members of a specific religious community (Gallup has the transition taking place a few years later) (Kim et al. 2009; Gallup Korea 2015, 19).

Census figures and Gallup survey results are not the only evidence we have for an increase in organized self-conscious religious activity in South Korea. We have architectural evidence as well. In 1962, when there were less than 2.6 million Koreans who claimed to be members of a religious community (that is less than 10% of the population at that time), the government of the Republic of Korea identified only 10,357 buildings regularly used for religious rituals, excluding shaman shrines. The largest number, 6,785, were Protestant churches, followed by 2,306 Buddhist temples and 1,004 Catholic Churches (Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 168). By 2011 (the last year for which I could find authoritative numbers), the total number of religious buildings in Korea (again excluding shaman shrines)[5] had risen to 109,668, a more than ten-fold increase in half a century. Protestant Christianity again had the largest share (77,966), over 70% of all halls of worship in South Korea. Buddhists again came in second, with 26,791 temples. Both Protestants and Buddhists had more than ten times as many worship halls as they had in 1962. The Catholic ritual infrastructure grew much slower. With only 1,609 churches in 2011, they had fewer than double the number of churches they had had a half-century earlier, despite the fact that the number of Catholics had grown substantially (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2012, 10).[6]

Though Korea's different religious communities added new worship halls at different rates, by the second decade of the twentieth-first century, all of the major religious organizations, even Confucianism (it had 34 ritual halls in 1962 but claimed to have 234 in 2011), provided substantially more places for their followers to gather than they ever had before in Korean history.

5. The Korean government considers shamanism a folk custom rather than a religion. Therefore, no statistics are available on the number of practicing shamans or on the number of sites at which they hold their rituals.

6. If census figures rather than Gallup percentages are accurate, there are now more than five times as many Catholics in Korea as there were in the 1960s.

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For Buddhism, most of that growth came after 1980. In 1974, Buddhist organizations reported even fewer ritual halls (1,912) than they had had in 1962. However, six years later Korea's various Buddhist denominations reported a total of 7,244 ritual halls. That figure rose to 8,892 by 1989 (Yun 1997, 206). Growth accelerated over the following decade before it began slowing down at the start of the 21st century. By 1999, the number of Buddhist ritual halls had more than doubled, to 18,511. In 2008 Buddhists reported they now had 21,935 ritual halls. As noted above, that figure rose more than 4,000 over the following three years, reaching 26,791 by 2011 (*Beopbo sinmun*, Jan. 29, 2009).

The rise in the number of Protestant churches has been both steadier and more rapid. The number of Protestant churches in Korea grew from the 6,785 in 1962 to 13,417 in 1974 and 21,243 in 1980. By 1989, however, there were 29,820 Protestant churches in Korea (Yun 1997, 206). One decade later, by 1999, that number had more than doubled, reaching 63,275. After a short decline, down to 58,404 churches in 2008, the number of Protestant churches began to rise rapidly again, so that as of 2011 there were almost 78,000 churches in Korea (*Beopbo sinmun*, Jan. 29, 2009; Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2012, 10). It is likely that number has passed 80,000 by now even though the growth in Protestant membership has slowed.

The Catholic Church, the smallest of the three major religious communities in Korea, has not been able to increase the number of its worship halls as quickly, probably because the requirement of celibacy for clerics has made it difficult to attract people to run those churches. Nevertheless, there were 1,511 Catholic churches in Korea in 2008 and 1,673 in 2013 (*Beopbo sinmun*, Jan. 29, 2009; Vatican Radio 2014), compared to only 1,004 in 1962—that 1962 number represents parish churches, of which there were only 313, along with missionary stations, whereas the numbers for 2008 and 2013 represent actual parish churches. So that growth in the number of actual Catholic churches is greater than it appears at first glance.

Even the relatively small indigenous religion of Won Buddhism (which, despite its name, considers itself a new religion rather than a branch of Korean Buddhism) expanded from 215 worship halls in 1970 to 550 by 2011, indicating that the boom in organized religion has not been confined to those religious organizations with a long history and international connections (Yun 1997, 206; Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2012, 10).

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This explosion in the number of halls of worship, as well as in the percentage of the Korean population that confesses a religious affiliation, was accompanied by a sharp rise in the number of, if we want to use the terminology of the market, "salespeople," clerics who lead religious communities and act as proselytizers trying to convince people to join their community. In 1962, according to numbers reported by religious organizations themselves, there were 9,185 Buddhist clerics in Korea—of whom only a little over 5,000 were monks, and the remainder were nuns—20,897 Protestant clergy—among that number are women lay leaders in churches, and only 10,886 are identified as male—and 2,254 Catholic religious, of whom most were nuns—there were less than 1,000 priests in Korea then (Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 168). By 1974, the number of Buddhist clerics had almost doubled to 18, 629. The number of Protestant clerics had declined to 17,562—I don't have a gender breakdown for 1974, but I suspect that "decline" is because only ordained males are being counted by this time. The number of Catholic religious increased to 3,487, but that was a slower rate than the number of Buddhist religious professionals had grown. A decade and a half later, in 1989, there were reported to be 23,967 Buddhist clerics and 55,989 Protestant clerics—over three times what was reported in 1974. That Protestant number again probably includes both ordained pastors and others, such as lay leaders appointed to help the pastor lead congregations, who are not pastors. That year there were only 6,941 Catholic religious, most of whom were nuns rather than ordained priests. The number of ordained priests in Korea was still below 2,000 in 1995 (Yun 1997, 206; Pak 2000, 686). By 2011, all three religions reported much higher numbers of professional leaders of their religious communities. Buddhists reported 46,905, Protestants reported 140, 483 (of whom approximately half are ordained pastors), and Catholics reported 15,918 (of whom only around 4,000 are ordained priests). Even Won Buddhism, which reported only 215 clerics in 1970 (men and women are both clerics with responsibilities for their own congregations), had expanded to almost 2,000 clerics in 2011 (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2012, 10).

The dramatic growth in the number of religious believers, buildings dedicated to religious activities, and religious professionals is, of course, interrelated. We can highlight that interrelationship by using the terminology of the markets. We can note that growth in "customers" (believers) is

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related to growth in the number of "retail outlets" (churches and temples) and "salespeople" (religious professionals). But what is the nature of that relationship?

Normally, in a competitive market, all else being equal, the more salespeople and retail outlets there are for a particular product, the easier it is to attract customers for that product. For example, we can ask if MacDonald's sells as many hamburgers as it does because it has more restaurants or because more people prefer MacDonald's hamburgers over those sold by its competitors. It is true that MacDonald's hamburgers are delicious but are they so much better tasting than those of its competitors that MacDonald's can outsell them by such a wide margin, or is it the fact that there are a lot more places selling MacDonald's products than there are selling competing products that gives MacDonald's its edge in the marketplace? Not only the number but also the visibility of those "retail outlets" can draw more "customers." As one architect of mega-churches in Seoul is reported to have stated, "If you build it, they will come." He assumed the larger the church, the more people will enter its doors and fill its pews (Han 2015, 143). The many mega-church congregations in Korea suggest his assumption is correct.

In a religious market like we see in Korea, we can ask if an increase in the number of religious believers is a consequence of or a cause of the fact that more buildings exist to serve them, and more religious professionals have been trained and certified to meet their religious needs. It is difficult to determine which comes first, though, it does appear that, in the Korean case, growth in the number of Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, and Buddhist monks preceded the dramatic surge in their membership and number of worship halls, though not by much. Moreover, in the Protestant case, growth in the number of clergy has been faster recently than growth in the number of members of their congregations.

Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants in Competition

In the competition between Buddhists, Catholics, and Protestants, all was not equal. Buddhism had a long head start, having arrived on the Korean peninsula in the 4th century. The first Catholic community did not appear on Korean soil until the last quarter of the 18th century. There were no Protestants

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in Korea until a century after that. Buddhism would appear to have had any easier time attracting adherent than its younger rivals, since all it had to do was convince people who were already frequenting Buddhist temples to think of themselves as Buddhists. Catholicism and Protestantism in their early years had to convince people to adopt a totally new approach to spirituality. Yet they were able to convince a substantial number of people to do so.

Protestants were much more successful than Catholics in that project. We cannot overlook the fact that one factor in the Protestant success had been the much larger number of Protestant missionaries and clerics, and more sites for them to use to preach to potential converts, compared to how many the Catholics had. As early as 1901, when Korean Protestantism was less than two decades old and there were more Korean Catholics than Korean Protestants, there were already 216 Protestant churches in Korea, compared to only 42 Catholic Churches. By 1907 that ratio had risen to 642 to 47 (Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 122; Han'guk Gatolik Daesajeon pyeonchan wiwomhoe 1992, 322). That was the year the number of Protestants surpassed the number of Catholics. Protestants have maintained that lead ever since. By 1916, according to Japanese figures, the clerical ratio was even more in favor of Protestants. That year there were only 49 Catholic priests in Korea, compared to 1,909 Presbyterian and Methodist pastors (Hanguk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 130). At that time, the number of Presbyterians and Methodists in Korea outnumbered the number of Catholics by less than two to one, yet there were 38 times as many Protestant pastors. It is not surprising therefore that by 1940, Protestants outnumbered Catholics almost four to one (Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 149).

Protestants even outnumbered self-identified Korean Buddhists on the peninsula in 1940, by a factor of more than two to one (Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 162). One reason for that disparity is probably the fact, uncovered by the colonial government, that there were only 365 Korean Buddhist proselytizers, working out of 373 proselytizing stations in 1940 compared to 4,825 Christian (the vast majority of whom were Protestant) proselytizers working out of 5,522 proselytizing stations (Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 145).

In the post-war period, Protestants have maintained their large lead over Buddhists and Catholics in the number of "retail outlets" (churches and temples) they have had at their disposal. However, for about a decade, from the

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mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, Buddhists and Protestants did not differ very much in the number of clerics they had available to attract more believers (Han'guk Jonggyo Sahoe Yeon'guso 1993, 169; 175). That allowed Buddhism to catch up to Protestant numbers of adherents. Even though the number of Protestant preachers has far outpaced the number of Buddhist monks since the 1980s, Buddhist has been able to hold its ground. When Protestantism and Catholicism are viewed as two separate religious communities, then ever since accurate figures on religious affiliation became available through the census of 1985 Buddhism has held on to bragging rights as the largest single religious community in Korea (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism 2012, 9). It has been able to do so because the number of Buddhists has grown rapidly since 1960 and, even more significantly, the number of urban temples and proselytizing activities has grown as well (Nathan 2010). Catholicism, though it has been growing at a faster rate than its two major competitors over the last couple of decades, still has far fewer clerics and houses of worship than either Protestantism or Buddhism and therefore remains a distant third in the number of its adherents.

A Change in How "Religion" is Understood

Putting aside the issue of which comes first, customers or buildings and salespeople to attract them (though the numbers suggest that growth in lay adherents follows growth in clerics and ritual centers), it is important to note that the growth in explicit religious affiliation, from around half a million at the beginning of the 20th century to 25 million today, is a manifestation of a much deeper change that has taken place in Korea over the last century, particularly over the last half a century. Explicit religious affiliation has grown so rapidly not because a much larger percentage of the Korean population engages in ritual interaction with spiritual beings today than ever did in the past but because many more Koreans today see themselves as belonging to a specific religious community than did so in the past, thanks to "brand" consciousness introduced and promoted by Christianity.

In an earlier article, I explained in detail what has caused this change less in religious behavior than in how the people of Korea understood what it meant to be religious (Baker 2006). Therefore I do not need to go in detail

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here. Let me, however, sum up that earlier article by reiterating that before the 20th century most Koreans, those who were not ritual professionals such as shamans, Buddhist monks, or Confucian ritual specialists, did not wear a religious label nor did they consider themselves the members of any specific religious community. Christianity, which entered Korea in the form of Catholicism in the late 18th century, introduced to Koreans the notion of lay religious affiliation with specific religious organizations. That notion began to spread beyond Christianity with the emergence of Korea's first indigenous organized religion, Donghak, in the second half of the 19th century, but only began to appeal to a substantial percentage of the South Korean population in the 2nd half of the 20th century.

There are four important characteristics of the Christian paradigm of religion that have greatly influenced Korea's religious culture. First of all, Christianity puts a lot more stress on doctrine than pre-Christian religions did in Korea. A Christian is defined, first of all, by belief in the assertion that Jesus Christ is God. If you don't accept that basic theological claim, then you cannot call yourself a Christian, even if you participate in some Christian rituals. Buddhists traditionally do not ask those who come to their temples if they believe in Buddha. Nor do shamans ask their clients if they believe in the gods. Unlike what we see in the Christian paradigm, in Buddhism and folk religion what you did, in particular your support for rituals, was more important than what you believed. Christianity challenged this stress on behavior over doctrine and belief.

Second, Christianity is exclusivist. Because Christianity is monotheistic, it requires that its members refrain from any activity that implies belief in any other gods, especially participation in rituals directed toward any of those other gods. Such an exclusive religious orientation was new to Korea, and it created a strong sense of a distinct community of believers that included both clergy and laypeople. We see the first signs of this new Christian notion of a larger religious community influencing non-Christians with the emergence of Korea's first organized indigenous religion, Donghak, in 1860. The Donghak religion was not Christian at all. But its teachings come close to monotheism (mono-devotionalism might be a better word, since their "God" dwells within human beings rather than existing as a separate and distinct supernatural personality). And it formed into congregations of believers who distinguished themselves from their neighbors not only by the rituals they performed but also by the

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God they believed in.

Third, and this is connected to the Christian notion of congregations of lay people led by certified clergy, Christianity, especially the Protestant version, is more participatory than Korean religion traditionally was. Traditionally, lay people watched Buddhists and shamans perform their rituals. Even participation in Confucian rituals was confined to a few designated ritual celebrants. However, Christians expect to be able to join in prayer with the ritual celebrant. This creates a greater sense of being part of the religious community they are affiliated with.

The fourth component of the Christian paradigm of what a modern religion should look like is the emphasis on proselytizing. Buddhism has a proselytizing tradition. However, that had faded by the Joseon dynasty. We do not read of many Joseon-era monks wandering into villages or along the paths and roads of the Korean peninsula trying to convince people to come to their temple. Christianity, because of its belief that there is only one God and what happens to people after their death depends on their relationship with that one God, has long considered mission work, proselytizing ("selling," in the terminology of the market), one of its central tasks. Even Korea's first Catholics, though they endured almost a century of persecution, tried despite the danger of doing so to entice others into their church. And, of course, Protestant Christianity was brought to Korea by missionaries, predominantly from North America, who came to Korea with the primary goal of attracting Koreans away from their "heathen faiths and practices" (as well as from Catholicism), into their churches, which they believed was the only way Koreans would be able to escape the terrors of hell after they died.

If we study Korean religious culture today, we can see that many Korean religious organizations, including Korea's many new religions, have adopted the Christian paradigm, especially the emphasis on belief in a particular God, the important of regular meetings for rituals and worship as congregations, and even on proselytizing. Along with those three characteristics borrowed from Christianity, even if they allow their members to participate in the rituals of other religious organizations (Buddhists are not condemned for patronizing shamans, and followers of most new religions are not discouraged from participating in Confucian or Buddhist rituals or availing themselves of a shaman's services), they still encourage their members to think of themselves as having one primary religious identity (Baker 2003).

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Therefore, we can ascribe the rise in self-proclaimed religious identities in modern Korea more to the influence of the Christian paradigm of what a religion, and a religious believer, should look like than to any increase in actual religious activity by Koreans. However, there is another factor we need to consider as well: the rapid rate at which Korea has become an urbanized country.

Urbanization and Religious Affiliation

Half a century ago, Korea was a poor country, and most Koreans lived in small villages. In 1960, only 28% of South Koreans, a little more than one out of four, lived in towns and cities with 50,000 or more inhabitants. By 2005, over four out of five (81.5%) lived in cities, with almost half of them living in or near the capital city of Seoul.[7] Pulled out of the comfortable communal cocoon provided by village life, left to fend for themselves on bustling factory floors and crowded urban streets, many Koreans have turned to religious groups for a new sense of community and new guiding principles more compatible with the modern world. And, of course, those religious groups, thanks to the new emphasis on proselytizing, made it known to new city dwellers that they were available for those who were searching for a replacement for the sense of community living in a small village once gave them.

To help us understand how rapid the urbanization of Korea was over the course of the 20th century, here are some figures for which percentage of the Korean population lived in settlements with 50,000 inhabitants or more:

1915	3.1%	1920	3.3%	1925	3.5%
1930	4.5%	1935	7.4%	1940	11.6%
1945	14.5%	1950	18.4%	1955	24.4%
1960	28.3%	1965	33.9%	1970	43.1%
1975	50.9%	1980	57.3%	1985	65.4%
1990	74.4%	1995	85.7%	1999	88.3%

7. Population figures are taken from *Han'guk-eui sahoe jipyo* (*Social Indicators in Korea*), published annually by Statistics Korea, and the population figures (*Chong in'gu mit jutaek josa bogo*) published every five years by Statistics Korea.

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Notice that it was not until the urban population began to outstrip the rural population in size that we find the dramatic upsurge in self-conscious religious affiliation. Rapid urbanization freed people from traditional village and local lineage networks and allowed them to both pursue new economic and social roles and make more decisions that affect their lives without interference from others, including decisions involving religiosity and rituals. That has encouraged Koreans to think of themselves as individuals who are free to decide for themselves what is most important to them. As a result, Koreans are now both politically and psychologically free to choose which, if any, religious rituals to participate in and which religious communities to join.

The Emergence of Individual Choice in Religious Orientation

In the past their ritual life was largely determined by their neighbors in their villages and their fellow lineage members. Such local rituals are much less important today than they were in the past. South Koreans who want a rewarding ritual life must seek out their own ritual communities. Many do so by turning to specific religious congregations. Such congregations now play the same role in Korean ritual life that villages and lineages once played. However, there is one big difference—people can choose which congregation they wish to join. In traditional Korea, you could not choose which village you lived in or which lineage you were a member of. In cities, in which you are surrounded by strangers, you have more leeway.

In another sharp break with the relatively recent past, a growing percentage of South Koreans now seek out faith-based communities (religious communities defined by the doctrines they hold) to a greater extent than they ever did before. Traditional Korean religiosity was centered on ad-hoc ritual-based communities. Participation in rituals was not normally taken as a sign of a long-term commitment to a particular religion. A person could participate in a Buddhist ritual one day, a shaman ritual the next, and a Confucian ritual the day after without feeling any contradiction and without being seen as a Buddhist, a shamanist, or a Confucian exclusively. The question of belief or disbelief in God was less important than the question "what ritual should I participate in for this particular occasion," with community sentiment more important than personal beliefs in determining the answer. Increasingly

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these days participation in a religious ritual leads a participant to ask "Am I a member of this particular religious community?" and "If I am, is this my primary religious orientation, one I can use to identify myself in interactions with both fellow believers and with those who do not share my particular religious orientation?"

Since the introduction of Christianity in the late eighteenth century and its insistence on exclusivity and doctrinal conformity, a ritual choice has come more and more to be read as a commitment to a specific ritual-performing community that is tied to a particular doctrinally-defined faith-based community. Moreover, because Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity, was seen as a core element of modernity (thanks to the Protestant missionary role in building modern schools and hospitals), it soon became in many Korean eyes a mark of modernity to affiliate with a Christian or other faith-based communities with creedal boundaries. One reason more and more South Koreans became Christians may be that they wanted to join the group that was seen to be better-educated than the general population, had more modern attitudes toward family relations, and had higher social status. In other words, becoming a Christian appeared to many to be one way to adapt to Korea's transition to a thoroughly modern society. As one scholar who studied the higher educational level and resulting more modern attitudes and higher social status of Christians in Korea has noted, "For many Koreans, therefore, an acceptance of the gospel was viewed as a means of improving their social and financial standing, attaining advantages in an unfamiliar social context and sharing in the national prosperity" (Kim 2002, 302).

As the number of self-proclaimed Christians has grown, so has the number of self-proclaimed Buddhists. Because of the Christian example, joining a religious organization has come to be seen by many Koreans as a way to proclaim their modernity. Religious activity in Korea may not have increased, but the way Koreans define their religiosity has. Not only are they more likely to adopt a special religious affiliation, they are more likely now than they were in centuries past to ask themselves doctrinal questions, such as whether or not they believe in God.

They are more likely to ask themselves such doctrinal questions because they are more likely to have others ask them such questions as well. One aspect of urban life, in contrast to village life, is the greater role of the market. Villagers tried to live relatively self-sufficient lives. That is next to impossible in an urban

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environment. People living in cities are dependent on markets for their food, their clothing, and their housing. They also are exposed on a daily basis to a cultural market, with various people trying to sell them cultural products. Those cultural products include not only books, magazines, and entertainment but also religion. Religious proselytizing may have been re-introduced to Korea by Christians but urbanization provided the perfect environment for it to flourish. A religion market fits in well with the other market-saturated aspects of modern urban life.

The "Non-Religious"

Nevertheless, there remain about 46% to 50% of South Koreans who say they have no particular religious affiliation. Why is that? What makes them resistant to the allure of the religious market? Are they less religious than other Koreans or have they held on to the traditional non-doctrinal, non-congregational, and non-exclusivist approach to religion? Many of those who do not affirm a religious affiliation when talking with a census surveyor may actually be religious (i.e., may believe in supernatural beings) and engage in behavior others would consider religious (such as prayer) even though they do not identify with a specific religious community.

For example, the clients of shamans do not necessarily say that they have a religious affiliation (although many of them will, if asked, identify their religion as Buddhism). And powerful new religions such as Daesun Jinrihoe, which claims to have 6 million members, do not even appear as a distinct category alongside Buddhism and Christianity in either government or Gallup surveys. Yet Daesun Jinrihoe has collected contributions from enough followers to build one university north of Seoul, as well as another one farther south, and also build a couple of modern general hospitals in the Seoul area. This apparent gap between the invisibility of Daesun Jinrihoe in religious surveys and its success in fund-raising may be because its members have not adopted modern concepts of religion and religious affiliation. They may still hold on to the traditional assumption that only religious professionals have religious labels and therefore do not give themselves religious labels when answering questions from surveyors.

Whatever the reason, whether those who answer "none" to questions

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about religious orientation are simply more comfortable with the traditional rather loose approach to religiosity or perhaps are not attracted by any of the products they see in today's religious market, a comparison of census figures from 1995 with those of 2005 as well as the comparable Gallup figures suggest that Korea has settled into an equilibrium of believers and non-believers each claiming about half of the potential religious market (Kim et al. 2009) That, plus the small difference between the number of self-proclaimed Christians and the number of self-proclaimed Buddhists, makes Korea's religious culture, its religious market, if you will, unusual on this planet for its competitive nature and therefore makes it a fascinating site for investigation into the role and appeal of religion today.

The label "religious market" is appropriate in discussing modern Korea's religious culture because proselytizers use various means such as preaching in public, building impressive structures hard for those passing by to miss (much like the way a shopping center is designed to attract the attention of potential consumers), and distributing "advertising brochures," that have counterparts in the consumer market. Moreover, religious proselytizers try to build brand loyalty as well, by telling those they have enticed into their churches or temples that they have made the right choice, a choice that shows they are better informed, more intelligent, or maybe just have better taste than their neighbors who are members of competing religious organization or are not religiously affiliated at all (Galmiche 2015).

That raises the question, if there are so many products available in Korea's religious market (there are dozens of indigenous new religious movements in Korea as well as several imported religions),[8] why the vast majority of those who say they have a religious affiliation say they are either Catholic, Protestant, or Buddhist?—The 2005 census found only 1% of the population claiming a religious affiliation other than Buddhist, Catholic, or Protestant. Why have the "big three" done so much better in Korea's religious market than others, including the traditionally important traditions of Confucianism and shamanism?

8. For a look at how many new religious movements operate in Korea, see Kim et al. 1997. For an English-language introduction to the more visible of the indigenous new religions, see the Association of Korean Native Religions 2005.

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The Losers in the Religious Marketplace

Shamanism does not show up in the surveys, even though there may be from 100,000 to 300,000 practicing shamans in Korea today, because most Koreans do not consider it a religion. Instead, it is seen as folk customs. Shamanism is usually studied in Korea by anthropologists rather than by professors in Religious Studies departments. Neither the Korean government nor Gallup includes shamanism as an option for people to check when they are asked what their religious affiliation is. And, more importantly, shamanism does not market itself as a religion. It has no central organization that can package it as a religious product. It has no large worship halls that can attract the attention of people who happen to walk by it on the street. And shamans do not proselytize. They rely on word-of-mouth from their clients about the effectiveness of their rituals to attract more clients.[9]

Confucianism, on the other hand, does show up in surveys. However, each successive survey has shown a decrease in the number of people who proclaim that Confucianism is their religion. In 2005, only 0.2% of the population, a little over 100,000 people, gave Confucianism as their religious affiliation (Tonggyecheong 2005, 32). That's down from the already low 0.5% in the 1995 census. This low number is despite the fact that, as Chang-won Park pointed out, "more than 70 percent of the total South Korean population participates in traditional ancestral ritual. For instance, a recent Korea Gallup survey showed that on the morning of New Year's Day, 77.8 percent of the respondents were participating in Confucian ancestral ritual, while 15.4 percent were conducting Christian ancestral ritual"(Park 2010, 194). Even though the then head of the Korean Confucian association attempted in the 1990s to win recognition for Confucianism as a religion, the vast majority of the Korean population continue to see it more as culture and philosophy rather than as a religion, despite the continued popular of Confucian rituals[10] (*Jugan Joseon*, April 29, 2013). What is the reason for that?

It is probably because Confucianism does not fit the imported (Christian)

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9. For more on the difficulties the modern definition of religion causes for shamanism, see the recent doctoral dissertation by Kim 2011.
10. That was the second attempt in the 20th century to turn Confucianism into a modern-style religion. For the equally unsuccessful first attempt, see Keum 1989.

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paradigm of what a religion looks like. It does not have weekly worship services. It does not have participatory services in which everyone can join in singing hymns (This is unlike Korean Buddhists, who now often include hymns in regular Sunday services). It does not have a professional clergy. It does not have a body of divinely revealed scriptures. It is non-theistic and has little, if anything, to say about the supernatural realm or life after death. And it does not proselytize. In fact, the official Confucian association does not do much of anything. There are 234 Confucian shrines still open in South Korea, but visitors to those shrines are more likely to see elderly men playing cards to kill time rather than a Confucian ritual. Moreover, at a 2014 Confucian ritual witnessed by this author at the Hyanggyo (Confucian shrine) in Andong, one of the most Confucian places in Korea, many of the people who had dressed up in ritual garb to watch the ritual (they did not participate in it) had been brought in from outside that district, since there were not enough active Confucians in that area to create a respectable crowd.

Confucianism, therefore, has failed to gain traction in the modern religious market. Despite the continued popularity of both its rituals and the ethical rhetoric (references to filial piety, propriety, loyalty, sincerity, etc.) it provides, it has not been able to package itself in a way that makes it attractive in the current religious market. Christianity, both the Protestant and Catholic versions (the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Church have not done as well), have, on the other hand, done quite well, together claiming the allegiance of around 30% of the Korean population. The Christian success can be explained by the fact that the religious market in Korea today is defined by the Christian paradigm of what a religion should look like. In other words, Christians defined the parameters of the race for believers in which they are competing.

The Viability of Buddhism in the Modern World

However, how can we explain the fact that mainstream Buddhism has also done very well? At almost 23% of the total population of South Korea, it is the largest single religious community in Korea. To thrive in the contemporary South Korean religious market, as Buddhism has clearly done, growing from 8 million strong in the 1985 census to 10.7 million in 2005, it has had to

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appear modern, as well as have participatory rituals and have a respectable image (people need to feel that joining that religion gives them pride and/or status). In addition, it had to have international connections that heighten its respectability. On top of that, it had to display deep roots so that it could gain respectability from the patina of age rather than appearing to be something new and still striving for broad acceptance.

Mainstream Buddhism has all those characteristics. Whereas it once was seen as a religion for the uneducated in rural areas (thanks to the Joseon dynasty policy of excluding temples from cities), it now has modern temples inside cities, including the massive Neungin seonwon in Gangnam, considered the most modern part of Korea, and Bulgwangsa not far away near the upper-class shopping mecca of Lotte World. Bulgwangsa produces books and videos, as well as maintaining a website, to enhance knowledge of Buddhism among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Neungin seonwon runs a "Bulgyo daehak" (Buddhist college) to the same end. Moreover, many Buddhist temples, imitating the Christian model, have Sunday morning services with sermons and hymn singing (it is no longer unusual to spot a piano in the main sanctuary of a Buddhist temple) and Sunday "dharma school" for the young. There are now even Buddhist proselytizers on the streets on Seoul, using the same tactic Christian churches have used to attract people into their worship halls.

In addition, mainstream Buddhism in Korea, supported by the presence of many national cultural treasures in its older temples, promotes itself as a repository of Korean tradition, playing up its deep roots on the peninsula. It also has given itself an international presence, by attracting non-Koreans into temples both in Korea and overseas (the best-known example is the Italian-American Harvard graduate who became famous under his monastic name of Hyeon'gak seunim). Mainstream Buddhism has managed to grab its substantial share of the current religious market by wrapping its traditional teachings in Christian-style packaging, and enhancing that packaging with references to its millennium and a half links with Korean cultural identity, making its product more attractive to religious consumers.[11]

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11. This is despite the occasional scenes on South Korean television of monks fighting with each other at the main temple of the largest order, Jogye-sa, and also occasional revelations of financial impropriety by leading monks and even the forging of educational qualifications.

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The Stark-Finke hypothesis mentioned at the beginning of this article, that "the overall rate of religiousness will be higher when pluralism is greater," appears to apply to Korea. A competitive religious market led to increasingly religiosity (or to at least an increase in organized religiosity and religious membership), especially between 1960 and 2000. Buddhism has flourished because it was stimulated by the competition from Protestants and Catholics, and has learned from them how to operate in a modern religious market.

A Slowdown in Growth of Religious Affiliation

Stark and Finke (2000, 219) also suggest that "Beyond a certain point, the market is saturated and additional competition and diversity do not increase the overall level of religious participation." That is one possible explanation for the slowing of the rate of growth of the self-proclaimed religious after 1995, growing from around 50% to only 53% in the 2005 census and then back down to 50% in the Gallup survey of 2014. However, when approximately half of the population remains unclaimed by any specific religious organization, it is difficult to say that the market is saturated. A better explanation may lie in the relationship between urbanization and growth in religious communities. By the second half of the 1990s, Korea's cities could not hold any more people, and the growth of urban populations had stalled. At about the same time, religious growth (except for the Catholic Church, according to census but not Gallup figures) has slowed. When you no longer have people moving to cities and trying to find new communities to associate with, religious organizations have a smaller pool from which to draw new members.

However, the suggestion that too much competition might hinder growth might be applicable to the recent stagnation, and possibility even decline, in Protestant growth rates. The government found 8.76 million Korean Protestant Christians in 1995, 19.7% of the population. That number shrank slightly to 8.61 million in 2005, 18.3% of the population. We'll have to wait for the results of the 2015 census to see if that is a statistical anomaly or signaled the start of a long-term trend. Gallup found 20% of the population to be Protestant in 1997, and 21% in both 2004 and 2114, suggesting that stagnation is a reality (Gallup Korea 2015, 19). The problem for the Protestant community is competition within that community. There are now at least

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252 different Protestant denominations—of which at least 200 are sub-denominations of the Presbyterian Daehan Yesugyo Jangnohoe ("Yejang"). Many of those sub-denominations have their own seminaries to certify their own clergy. That is a large jump from the 128 Protestant denominations and sub-denominations in 2001, signaling a much more competitive environment within Korean Protestantism (*Christian Times*, July 18, 2014).

Korean Protestant pastors do not compete only with Catholics and Buddhists for parishioners. They compete among themselves, even sometimes competing with members of the same sub-denomination. The goal for many pastors is to build a large congregation, and then to "plant churches" staffed by former assistant pastors who will maintain a relationship with the mother church. This sometimes leads to what critics call an "edifice complex," an emphasis on building a complex of church buildings larger than what a rival pastor down the road has. It can also lead to some pastors confusing church income with personal income, as we saw in the 2015 conviction of the founder of Korea's largest single church, the Youido Full Gospel Church, for embezzling $12 million dollars (*Christianity Today*, Feb. 24, 2014).

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, is spared such internal competition, since there is only one Korean Catholic Church and it is controlled by a highly articulated hierarchy. Moreover, Catholic priests are not given ownership of their churches, so they do not treat them as their personal property and are less likely to have an "edifice complex." In addition, unlike in much of the rest of the world, there have been no major sex scandals involving priests in Korea. That has made the Korean Catholic Church the most respected religious group in Korea (Choe 2014). It is also well known in Korea that, to become a Catholic, you have to undergo instruction. In other words, you have to be educated. Koreans, thanks to their Confucian tradition, have long respected education. This combination of lack of sex scandals, lack of open internal competition and financial corruption, and the association of Catholicism with education have given the Catholic community an edge over its rivals in recent decades. So has the switch from Latin to Korean for the language of the primary Catholic ritual, the mass, and the sharp rise in the number of Korean, rather than foreign, priests starting in the 1960s (Baker 2013). Those changes, plus the public image advantages it has over its competitors, has allowed the Korean Catholic Church to grow at a rate faster than the growth rate for the number of its churches and to grow at

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a rate commensurate with the rate of growth in the number of its priests. Between 1995 and 2005, according to church authorities, the Korean Catholic Community grew from 2.95 million to 5.14 million, and it is still growing at a rate of about 100,000 a year. Clearly the Catholic Church has been able to put forward a product that appears less tarnished than those of its competitors and thus has become more successful in the religious market than they have been over the last couple of decades.

Religious Groups on the Sidelines

What about other religious groups which have not fared as well in the religious marketplace? One such group is Won Buddhism, usually considered the most respected of all of Korea's new religions (it is now a century old). Won Buddhism has combined many superficial features of Christianity (worship halls with pews and pulpits, for example), as well as the Protestant disdain for religious statues (there are no Buddhist statues in Won temples), with doctrines that are clearly Buddhist (Baker 2012). It also has an, albeit small, international presence with believers in North America and Europe. Yet the 2005 census found only 130,000 Won Buddhists. That is an improvement over the 87,000 found in 1995 but, nevertheless, Won Buddhism remains far behind the big three.

Why has Won Buddhism remained so small? There are far fewer Won Buddhist temples in Korea than there are mainstream Buddhism temples or Christian churches. And there are far fewer "salespeople," Won Buddhist clerics. But that may be a consequence of its small membership more than it is a result. The main problem facing Won Buddhism is that it has failed to carve out a distinctive brand. Won Buddhism may confuse Koreans because it calls itself Buddhist but holds its weekly services in buildings that look more like churches than traditional temples, and its worship halls have only a circle behind an altar instead of the three or five Buddhist statues usually seen in that location in a traditional Buddhist temple. Those who want the comfort of traditional Korean religion usually prefer to go to a temple that looks traditional. Those who like the modern appearance of a Christian church usually prefer to go to a church. Won Buddhism has yet to establish itself as a third alternative in the eyes of most Koreans. In order to flourish in a

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competitive market, including a religious market, it is important to have a clear identity that distinguishes you from possible competitors. Won Buddhism has failed to do that.

Anglicanism faces the same problem. It, too, has had difficulty carving out a distinct identity in the religious market, one that would appeal to a significant segment of the consumers of religion. Anglicanism is often confused with Catholicism, both because of its rituals (which are even called *misa*, the Korean term for the mass), and because of the terminology it uses for God (it uses *Cheonju*, the same term the Catholic Church uses for God) and for its ritual specialists (Anglican priests are called *sinbu*, just as Catholic priests are). Even its clear international connections (the main cathedral in Korea is located next to the embassy of the UK in downtown Seoul) have failed to give it the visibility it needs to stand out in the marketplace and attract religious consumers (Kim 2013). Like Won Buddhism, the Anglican Church in Korea has failed to create a brand that distinguishes it in the eyes of potential members from its competitors.

Conclusion

The market model is not the only way to understand the religious culture of Korea today or why certain religions have fared better than others. But it does appear to shed some light on why the dramatic transformation religion has undergone in Korea over the last century has taken the shape it has. Before the entrance of Catholicism into Korea at the end of the 18th century, there was no active religious market there. Buddhists and shamans were not allowed to openly challenge Confucianism for dominance, and Confucians often refrained from trying to take over areas of ritual life in which Buddhist monks and shamans had established a significant presence. In other words, there were "religious products" in pre-modern Korea but not much selling was going on.

That changed when Christianity entered Korea and introduced the notion of proselytizing, of competing with other religious communities for members. Korea today looks a lot different than it did in 1800 or, for that matter, than it did in 1900 or 1960. Much of that difference can be attributed to Korea's economic growth—there is more money available for proselytizing, and more money for those who are already members to contribute to religious

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organizations and support campaigns to attract more members to those organizations—and to its urbanization—and the resulting need for new communities to replace the communities left behind in rural areas—but neither factor would have had the impact on religion they have had if Korea had not developed a vibrant and unfettered religious market, one that has produced one of the most diverse and competitive religious cultures on earth today.

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Abstract

Half of the population of the Republic of Korea says they have no religious affiliation. The other half is divided among Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics. This equal division among believers and non-believers is a relatively recent development. Until a few decades ago, the vast majority of Koreans proclaimed no religious affiliation. As a result of both urbanization and proselytizing, the number of the self-consciously religious increased dramatically over the second half of the 20th century. However, no single religious community has been able to dominate this transformed religious landscape. Instead, three major religions have emerged as the clear winners in the competition for adherents: Buddhism, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism. Those three religions have been more successful than alternatives such as Confucianism, shamanism, and new religious movements in adapting to the competitive religious market that prevailed in the Republic of Korea in the 20th century. Their success is due to their ability to gain the attention of potential members amidst crowded urban environments by defining themselves as compatible with modernity, and by creating unique brands that distinguish them from their competitors.

Keywords: Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, non-religious, competition

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