

Missionaries of a Korean Model of Development: Pentecostalism, Asian Modernity, and the Mission of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Cambodia

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Development studies have recently paid attention to religion as an emerging and important vector of development.¹ Religious actors involved in very different countries have deeply influenced and shaped the processes of modernization of local societies. They have been actively involved in the creation of education systems and the development of health care and social welfare programs. This was certainly the case of South Korea after the Second World War. Christian missionaries, notably American Protestants, who arrived in the Korea at the end of 19th century played a significant role in the country's modernization.² These missionaries were seen by many Koreans as symbols of a religious modernity and as harbingers of new prosperity.

The flow of missionaries into South Korea began to reverse in the 1980s. By the 1990s South Korea was sending thousands of missionaries to other countries, and by 2000 it ranked as the second largest missionary sending country in the world in its number of overseas missionaries, trailing only the United States.³

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- 1 Philip Fountain, Robin Bush, and R. Michael Feener, eds., *Religion and the Politics of Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015).
 - 2 On Christianity and modernity in Korea, see Shin-yu Chai, ed, *Korea and Christianity* (Seoul: Korean Scholar Press, 1996); Kyuhoon Cho, "Protestantism, Education, and the Nation: The Shifting Location of Protestant Schools in Modern Korea," *Acta Koreana* 19.1 (2016): 99–131; Han-sik Kim, "The Influence of Christianity on Modern Korean Political Thought," *Korea Journal* 23.12 (1983): 4–17; Suk-man Jang, "Protestantism in the Name of Modern Civilization," *Korea Journal* 39.4 (1999): 187–204; and Dae-young Ryu, "Understanding Early American Missionaries in Korea (1884–1910): Capitalist Middle-Class Values and the Weber Thesis," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 113 (2001): 93–117.
 - 3 Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, "The Recent Korean Missionary Movement: A Record of Growth, and More Growth Needed," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27.1 (2003): 11–17; Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, "The Protestant Missionary Movement in Korea: Current Growth and Development," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32.2 (2008): 59–64; and Steve Sang-Cheol Moon, "Missions from Korea in 2016: Sustainability and Revitalization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 40.2 (2016): 181–85. While Moon's most recent

This remarkable growth took place across a broad range of denominations. Korean mission had a global horizon but concentrated especially in Southeast Asia. Along with the Christian gospel these missionaries propose a model of ‘Asian modernity.’ While being involved in humanitarian and charitable work, they seek to embody the ‘success story’ of South Korea and present it as a Protestant model of development. In this chapter I analyze the case of the largest Pentecostal Church in South Korea: the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC). This Church also claims to be the Church in South Korea sending the largest number of missionaries abroad.⁴

I examine the work of Korean missionaries in Southeast Asia, more specifically in aid-driven Cambodia, and their effects on local populations.⁵ I study how and why they act like development actors while seeking Cambodian converts and building a network of churches. This analysis shows how charity and development programs participate in the ‘national branding’ of South Korea, and how the Full Gospel Church presents Pentecostalism as an icon of Korean hypermodernity, which is offered as a model for attaining prosperity to the poor in Southeast Asia. In so doing I seek to shed light on the ways in which a political goal—the promotion of South Korea as a pre-eminent economic actor in the region—relies on a conjunction of religious and development work deployed through an elaborate techno-bureaucratic organization.

A Traditional Link with the Korean State and Its Policies

Since the formation of the Republic of Korea in 1948, religion and politics have been formally separated. However, even if this separation is explicitly specified in the Korean Constitution, there have always been ambiguous relations between the Korean state and the country’s religions. This ambiguity is not

review of South Korean mission decries a recent significant drop-off in the growth rate of missionary sending it also notes that there are currently over 20,000 Korean missionaries working in 171 countries around the world.

- 4 It is difficult to know the exact number of missionaries the Church sends abroad. Since 2010, Church leaders have frequently noted that have been sent by the Church. However, according to a survey that I conducted based on documents published by the Church, I estimate the total number at 636 missionaries which have been sent to 57 countries (until 2011).
- 5 See Hui-yeon Kim, *Le Soft power sud-coréen en Asie du Sud-Est: Une théologie de la prospérité en action* (Bangkok: IRASEC, 2014) and Hui-yeon Kim, “Les pentecôtistes coréens en Asie du Sud-Est: Exporter la ‘théologie de la prospérité’ pour assurer son salut,” in *Chrétiens évangéliques en Asie du Sud-Est: Expériences locales d’une ferveur protestante*, eds. Pascal Bourdeaux and Jérémy Jammes (Rennes: PUR, 2016), 209–25.