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## RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON THE FRENCH CAMPAIGN AGAINST KOREA OF 1866

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RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON THE FRENCH CAMPAIGN AGAINST KOREA OF 1866

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REL-499H

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## INTRODUCTION

In October of 1866, France launched a six week long military campaign against Korea, vowing to avenge the deaths of multiple French priests. Although short, this campaign was the result of years of tensions between the two nations, which culminated in a decision made by the Korean Taewongun, the leader of the Choson Dynasty, to execute French Jesuit missionaries and priests that were living and evangelizing in Korea. This conflict was clearly not just political, because the tensions surrounding the campaign, as well as the final breaking point, were religious in nature.

Before the outbreak of this conflict, the Confucian-led government of Korea was oppressive and repressive of other popular Korean religions, most specifically Shamanism and Buddhism. The Korean government used Confucianism as a tool to legitimize its power and agenda, but this was not representative of the majority of the Korean population. Because of this, the oppressed Korean masses were unable to challenge the existing system. This changed with the 19<sup>th</sup> century French Jesuit mission. The mission challenged the Confucian ideals that were dominating the political system of the nation, and it also appealed broadly to Koreans, although it did not provide a completely accurate representation, in accordance with orthodox Christianity, due to its Figurist methods that correlated doctrine to existing Korean religions. Threatened by this newly prominent religion and opposed to Western economic, political, and cultural influence, the government attempted to shut down further expansion by persecuting French missionaries. Unlike the Korean masses, though, the Christian mission was backed up by outside force, creating a serious problem for the Korean government in the form of a military campaign, which ultimately challenged the preexisting Korean political and religious structures. In

response, after the campaign Korea became very isolationist, demonstrating their aversion to Western power and the huge growth in Christianity within Korea.

In order to understand the conflict fully, it is important to understand the factors that were at play on both sides, including the details of the decision that triggered the campaign, the unique nature of Korean religion, the Christian mission within Korea, how easily missionaries were able to translate religious ideas using common language shared by both cultures, sometimes to the detriment of the basis of each religion, and the power and class dynamics both within Korea and between Korean citizens and French missionaries.

A short history of the Catholic mission in Korea will be helpful. The mission began officially in 1827, when the French organization called the Société des Missions-Étrangères de Paris received power to evangelize in Korea by the French government.<sup>1</sup> Before the Opium Wars,<sup>2</sup> which were two wars between China and Britain about the trade of opium, East Asia and particularly China had a very anti-Christian perspective, but in 1844 and 1846, the Chinese government issued edicts of toleration towards Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Missionaries came and evangelized in East Asia for the next several decades. Then, in the 1860s, there was a time of much political unrest and upheaval in the Korean government, due to internal issues of poverty and as a result of recent Western conflict. French Catholic missionaries took advantage of this for the purpose of their mission, and asked for permission for the construction of a temple in Seoul in 1866.<sup>4</sup> Although initially considered by the Korean leader called the Taewongun, it was denied. This was likely as a result of his reluctance towards foreign influence. In the years after Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Choi, Soo Bok. "The French Jesuit Mission in Korea, 1827-1866." *North Dakota Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1968), 18.

<sup>2</sup> First Opium War (1839-1842), Second Opium War (1856-1864).

<sup>3</sup> Choi, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Choi, 23.

missionaries entered Korea freely, Western influence increased heavily because of the political weakness of the Korean dynasty and King Chol-chong. As Western influence spread, so too did Christianity. In addition to this, the Taewongun was cautious of foreign powers because of an 1860 Anglo-French attack on China.<sup>5</sup>

After the denial of the construction of the temple in 1866, French missionaries challenged the decision of the Korean government, and went to court in hopes to rescind the decision and receive permission to build the temple. Leading this challenge was French bishop Simeon-Frances Berneux, who was very influential in the Korean missionary field. Appointed the Fourth Vicar Apostolic of Korea by Pope Pius IX, and the founder of a seminary in Korea, Berneux was a very active missionary, and a natural choice for a leader to step up to fight for the construction of the temple in Seoul.<sup>6</sup> This fight ended badly for those bishops who went to court, though, and they were sentenced to death because of their challenge against the decision of the Korean government. There were nine executions of French citizens sentenced by the Korean government. Among those executed was Berneux, who was sentenced to death on March 6, 1866 and then beheaded the next day.<sup>7</sup> There were two survivors, who then reported to the Chinese government about the executions.<sup>8</sup> When the Chinese government refused to step in, it reached the French government, who stepped up as all those executed were French citizens.

After news of the deaths of French bishops spread to two French officials serving in China, Admiral Roze and Bellonet, they decided to launch an attack against Korea as revenge.

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<sup>5</sup> Choi, 21.

<sup>6</sup> "Newsletter of the District of Asia," (Jan-Jun 2001) "A Korean Martyr for the Society of St Pius X: St Siméon François Berneux, Bishop and Martyr, 4th Apostolic Vicar of Korea (1814 – 1866).

<sup>7</sup> "Newsletter of the District of Asia."

<sup>8</sup> Gomane, Jean Pierre. "Admiral Roze's Expedition to Korea in 1866." *Revue du Souvenir Napoleonien* 391 (1993): 20-23.

Although seemingly rash, there were several other factors that contributed to their quick decision. While Roze was emboldened because of the deaths of French citizens, in the years leading up to this, there were also several deaths of French officials in China, leading to a rise in tension between French missionaries and the East Asian countries in which they served. Also, just days before the news reached Roze and Bellonet of the deaths of the Frenchmen in Korea, the Tsungli Yamen of China had issued a list that limited the powers of French missionaries.<sup>9</sup> This list disregarded the previous treaties that had been signed between France and China which agreed on the religious freedom of the missionaries. The combination of these factors led Roze and Bellonet to the decision that there was no room for diplomacy in this conflict. Instead, military action was the only option. Shortly after, the French Campaign against Korea of 1866 was launched. Unfortunately, this left many Korean Christians defenseless, as it was a general attack against Korea by the French government.<sup>10</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS IN KOREA PRIOR TO THE 1827 MISSION

Now that we have established an historical timeline of the conflict in place, we can turn to the religious dynamics that fed the spread of Christianity in Korea as well as the conflict. It must be noted that there is something very unique about the religious climate of Korea. It is a combination of multiple different faith traditions, all modified for a Korean lifestyle and Korean mindset. Martien Brinkman writes that “Koreans have a Confucian head, a Buddhist heart and a Shamanistic belly.”<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates the complex relationships between these three major religions in the Korean perspective, each of them playing a major role in society and in the

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<sup>9</sup> Kane, Daniel C. “Bellonet and Roze: Overzealous Servants of Empire and the 1866 French Attack on Korea.” *Korean Studies* 23 (1999), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Gomane, 20-23.

<sup>11</sup> Brinkman, M. E. *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?* Routledge, (2014). 129.

Korean mindset, again stressing the distinct and interwoven roles that these religions play in Korean society. It is essential to keep this in mind when thinking about the 19th century religious climate of Korea, because it was not a monoculture in any sense. To do justice to the subject, we must examine all of the basic belief systems of each of these three faiths: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. No one religion can be credited for Korean thought or its perception of Christianity, and it would be inaccurate to assume that was the case. Colin Lewis comments on the prevalence of each of these major faith traditions and their influence on the spread of Christianity within Korea during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He writes of the “pneumatological impact of Shamanism, the soteriological and eschatological influence of Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism’s effect on Christian morality and ideology.”<sup>12</sup> To put this in simpler terms, there are similarities between the doctrines of salvation and final destination in Christianity and Buddhism, the doctrine of a spirit in Christianity and Shamanism, and the social systems centered around morality in Christianity and Confucianism, and Christian missionaries made connections between them and Christianity in order to inspire conversion and prove its compatibility with the already existing religions in Korea.

Confucianism is perhaps the religion that first comes to mind when one thinks of Korean religion. This is because Confucianism was the religion of those in power. Elites, government officials, and scholars tended to adopt this tradition over any other. Certainly, it was incredibly influential on Korean society. Originally Chinese, Confucianism is based on the teachings of Chinese elders and scholars. It should not come as a surprise that a Chinese religion held such strong power in Korea. Chinese influence on Korea goes as far back as the Han Dynasty, which

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, Colin, "The Soul of Korean Christianity: How the Shamans, Buddha, and Confucius Paved the Way for Jesus in the Land of the Morning Calm" (2014).

lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE. Confucian thought also infiltrated Korea early on, introduced as early as 372 CE when a national academy of Confucian thought was created in Korea.<sup>13</sup> During the Choson dynasty in Korea, which lasted from 1392 to 1910, Confucian philosophy was the ideology of the powerful and educated in Korea. This was largely due to the fact that “Korean kings made the Neo-Confucian doctrine of the Chinese philosopher Zhou Xi their ideology.”<sup>14</sup>

Some of the most important concepts in Korean Confucianism adhere closely to what is emphasized in Chinese Confucianism. The most essential concept of Confucianism, both during the Choson Dynasty of Korea and generally, is that of filial piety. Filial piety is, at its most basic level, the responsibility to care for and respect one’s elders and ancestors, but this concept will be explained in more depth later in this essay. Wang Sixiang from Columbia University claims that filiality was the major point that was emphasized in the state-sponsored Neo-Confucian education of Korean citizens.<sup>15</sup> Korean scholars helped to adapt Confucian thought to be fitting for a Korean experience, while still acknowledging China’s superiority in forming this advanced philosophical system.<sup>16</sup> A certain level of respect for Chinese thought was necessary, and that required staying mostly true to what Chinese Confucian scholars thought, making the religion less unique to Korea and less representative of Korean citizens as opposed to Chinese. Key P. Yang and Gregory Henderson write that, “so closely were Confucianism and Korea intertwined during this latter long period (sixteenth century on), that Korean history cannot be understood

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<sup>13</sup> Levi, Nicolas, “The Impact of Confucianism in South Korea and Japan.” (2013). *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, 26. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Levi, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Levi, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Levi, 10.



without Confucianism while the study of Confucianism itself will be greatly enriched by resort to its Korean experience.”<sup>17</sup>

Much of Korean Confucian thought occurred much earlier than the 19th century. The Choson Dynasty, also known as the Yi Dynasty, is the period when Korean Confucian thought and scholarship were at their peak. Although it was the dynasty that held power during the French campaign against Korea in 1866, this was a dynasty that lasted for over six centuries and had an abundance of Confucian thought associated with it. This era began with a strong anti-Buddhist response, which coincided with the rise of the Chinese Ming Dynasty from 1368-1644.<sup>18</sup> This Buddhist influence had come from the Mongol rulers of the Chinese Yuan Dynasty, which lasted from 1279-1368. Once China returned back to Chinese rule from Mongol rule, there was a newfound sense of pride for Chinese thought and culture. Along with this pride came a huge rise in the popularity of Confucianism, at the expense of the freedom of Korean Buddhists. This prompted many scholars to create a school of Neo-Confucianism, which took Confucian ideology and adapted and added to it to fit modern society.

Neo-Confucianism was very popular after a revolution against the Mongols because it outlined societal roles and expectations. Confucianism offered advice about how to most efficiently run a state, which was necessary in Korea post-revolution because of its strong Chinese association. A Confucian school was created in Seoul in the early 15th century, which reinforced the expectation for Korean men to study Confucianism.<sup>19</sup> This is reminiscent of the Chinese Civil Service Examination, which gave government positions to those nationwide who

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<sup>17</sup> Yang, Key P., and Gregory Henderson. “An Outline History of Korean Confucianism: Part I: The Early Period and Yi Factionalism.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1958, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Yang and Henderson, 90.

<sup>19</sup> Yang and Henderson, 90.

tested the highest in exams that centered around Confucian texts. This demonstrates how important was the role Confucian thought played in Korean society at this time. It was not just well-known, but ingrained in the society as a whole, because of the heavy emphasis on social order in Confucianism. The social and political systems in Korea were built around Confucian thought, making it a powerful force within Korean society, although not fully representative of Koreans who followed other religions.

In order to understand what this meant, one must understand what the teachings of Confucianism entailed. Confucianism, as mentioned earlier, placed much importance on the idea of filial piety. This, essentially, encourages men to respect their elders and those who have more power than them, including kings and emperors. Women, on the other hand, were encouraged to respect and serve their husbands, children, and parents-in-law. This reverence for those who are superior or who hold more power will in turn offer great rewards for those who follow it. This reverence includes respect for ancestors and earlier wise Chinese philosophers and leaders. This creates a self-supporting cycle, because Confucian thought encourages people to adhere to Confucian thought. In fact, at times there was a certain fear factor in place that pressured Koreans into following Confucian traditions. For example, Korea persecuted those who did not practice the Confucian custom of ancestral veneration, and even went so far as to apply a death penalty in 1800 that executed those found guilty of not participating in ancestor veneration.<sup>20</sup> For all these reasons, Confucian thought maintained a strong hold on Korean society and thought, while persecuting those who did not practice its tenets.

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<sup>20</sup> Brinkman, 127.

To the followers of Confucianism, it was known as the “True Way”.<sup>21</sup> This presented Confucianism as an exclusivist philosophical tradition, meaning that it was the one right path. Any paths that contradicted it were viewed as being false teachings, which included any other faith tradition that was present in Korea, including Buddhism, Shamanism, and Christianity at this time. The Confucian stance of exclusivism is even made clear in the *Analects of Confucius*, which states, “Strange doctrines are not to be studied. The Master said, "The study of strange doctrines is injurious indeed!”<sup>22</sup>

However, despite the prevalence of Confucianism among the elite of Korean society, it was not the only religion that held sway over the Korean population. Buddhism and Shamanism were the religions of the majority of the Korean people. Both, incidentally, were also products of Chinese influence in Korea, although Buddhism also was a product of Japanese influence in Korea. As previously mentioned, after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in China, there was a strong anti-Buddhist sentiment and a celebration of Chinese thought through the form of Confucianism. This anti-Buddhist thought was strong in Korea as well, and Buddhism was actually a forbidden religion under the Choson Dynasty.<sup>23</sup> Brinkman argues, though, that “Korea has always remained, most certainly culturally, a Buddhist country. . . the country continues to exude a Buddhist atmosphere.”<sup>24</sup> This demonstrates how prevalent Buddhism was in Korea, despite its official ban. Buddhism also held influence in Korean Shamanism, which was another common religion among the Korean masses.

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<sup>21</sup> Mungello, David E. “The Reconciliation of Neo-Confucianism with Christianity in the Writings of Joseph De Prémare, S. J.” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1976. 393.

<sup>22</sup> *Analects of Confucius*. II:16

<sup>23</sup> Brinkman, 132.

<sup>24</sup> Brinkman, 132.

Shamanism was another religion that was oppressed during the Choson dynasty, despite its huge following. Scholar W.E. Griffith explains that “Shamanism is the base of the faith of the Korean people. This holds true especially in the northern region. Despite the influence of Buddhism we will find that no significant change has occurred in the religion of the Korean people over the last 2000 years.”<sup>25</sup> This suggests that Shamanism was the most influential and the most practiced religion of the Korean people.

That is to say, if Confucianism was the religion of the powerful in Korea, it was by no means the religion that was practiced by the majority of the Korean public. At the time of the Choson Dynasty, Shamanism had a large following of adherents in Korea. It was the religion of the masses. It also was a religion that was distinctly Korean. Although it, too, was originally transmitted to Korea through Chinese influence, once it reached Korea, it transformed into something uniquely Korean, dating as far back as prehistoric times. Jin-Woo Lee writes that “Korean shamanism evolved in Mongolian and Manchurian areas along the east coastal area of China. Later a group of people migrated to the Korean Peninsula in search of better climate and environment. As they settled down, there came a natural change in the content of Korean shamanism”.<sup>26</sup> It is common for religions to evolve as they pass on to new audiences, but not for them to change altogether.

Shamanism is a primitive polytheistic religion, with a variety of beliefs. There are a few distinct things that are essential to Korean shamanism. These include the Tan’gun myth, the concept of Hananim, and Mutang and Pansoo. The Tan’gun myth is a creation story of the earth, which details the story of Ung, the son of Hang In, offering a deal to two creatures, a bear and a

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<sup>25</sup> Lee, Jin Woo, "The Influence of Shamanism on Korean Churches and How to Overcome It" (2000), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, Jin Woo, 25.

tiger, to follow his rules in exchange for being made human. The tiger could not follow the rules that Ung had established for them, but the bear did. Because of the loyalty of the bear, she was made into a woman, and gave birth to the son of Ung, named Tan'gun. This is a common Korean belief about the formation of the earth, and these gods are widely recognized in Korean culture. Hananim is another widely recognized god in Korean Shamanism, and is regarded as the god that Tan'gun worships,<sup>27</sup> making it appear that this god is in some way higher than the others. Finally, Mutang and Pansoo are a kind of binary of a female and male shaman. Mutang, the female, is extremely important, and shamanism means the cult of Mutang.<sup>28</sup> The male shaman, Pansoo, is insignificant. This sets up a gender dynamic that alters greatly from the patriarchal norms of Chinese Confucianism and Buddhism, making Korean Shamanism stand out as unique in terms of gender.

#### TRANSLATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE CONFUCIAN ELITE: STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES

Each of these religions became, at some point, an opportunity for Christian evangelism. Both Jesuit priests and Protestant missionaries alike took concepts from these religions and correlated them to Christian doctrine. As a result, Christianity in Korea did not much resemble Christianity in France, which caused tension on both sides. Roman Catholic leaders believed that this evangelism was changing Christian doctrine, and Koreans also felt that it was changing the doctrine of their preexisting religions. The evangelism of Korea contributed greatly to the French

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<sup>27</sup> Oak, Sung-Deuk. "Shamanistic Tan'gun and Christian Hanaanim: Protestant Missionaries' Interpretation of the Korean Founding Myth, 1895–1934." *Studies in World Christianity* 7.1 (2001), 42-57.

<sup>28</sup> Lee, Jung Young, 136.

Campaign against Korea of 1866, largely because of the efforts taken by Christian missionaries to conform Christian doctrine to preexisting religious systems in Korea.

During the time of the Choson Dynasty, Christianity was spreading in Korea at a rapid rate. Before this, though, Christianity had existed in East Asia prior to Christian evangelism in Korea. In fact, Christianity was introduced to Korea in the same way that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism all were- through China. Throughout the time of the Choson Dynasty, Koreans traveled to China on tribute missions annually. While in modern-day Beijing, at the time called Peking, Koreans discovered books about Christianity, and brought them back to Korea to study and learn.<sup>29</sup> This sparked a huge rise in curiosity about Christianity, and as a result the Christian population in Korea rose significantly. As Christian missionaries began to come to Korea to evangelize and spread the teachings of Christ, they often marketed Christianity as being compatible with the ideas of other pre-existing religions in Korea, specifically Confucianism, “and synonymous with Western science,”<sup>30</sup> which legitimized it even more.

In fact, though, it appears that missionary work was not actually necessary for the rise of Christianity in Korea. Many consider its rise to be a miracle, or a “spontaneous birth, without direct evangelization.”<sup>31</sup> During a discourse before the pope in 1924 celebrating the martyrdom of French missionaries in Korea from 1838 to 1846, one missionary told of the introduction of Christianity into Korea, by saying,

The Church of Korea has perhaps offered a unique example in the annals of modern missions, having originated toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in a rather spontaneous manner (that is, not through direct evangelization, but through the sole action of divine grace upon arid souls seeking the religious truth). Just as the Wise Men from the Orient after studying the ancient prophecies followed the star which led them to Bethlehem, so

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<sup>29</sup> Choi, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Choi, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Chung, David. *Syncretism: the Religious Context of Christian Beginning in Korea*. Edited by Kang-nam Oh, State University of New York Press, (2001), 3.

did the doctors of Korea, in the isolation of their solitary domain, study the books in which they hoped to find an explanation of the world. To them as well appeared a mysterious light which shone on the writings that had providentially fallen under their perusal.<sup>32</sup>

Missionaries were not deemed necessary for Korea to be exposed to Christianity, because they discovered it on their own. Instead, missionaries were essential because Korean Christians wanted their guidance in their time of persecution by their Confucian government. David Chung writes that “the missionaries to Korea were brought in by the repeated requests of an already established and very active Christian body in the peninsula.”<sup>33</sup> In addition to this, they searched for and requested a priest to guide them through their trials, “who could lead them and officiate at the sacraments for them during the period of their tribulation.”<sup>34</sup> Essentially, a large population of Koreans discovered Christianity on their own through their travels to China, without the help of foreign missionaries during the century before the official French mission to Korea.

This all occurred in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the Société des Missions-Étrangères de Paris was allowed by the Korean government to once again to enter the country and do missionary work. This means that by the time the official mission to Korea arrived in 1827, there was already an existing Christian population in Korea. However, Christianity was strictly banned in China and Korea before the edicts of toleration were passed in 1844, so Korean Christians faced much persecution. There was persecution of both French missionaries and hundreds of Korean Christians in the first several years after the entrance of missionaries in 1827.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Chung, David, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Chung, David, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Chung, David, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Choi, 18.

In order to prevent further persecution of secret Christian societies, early Jesuits decided to adopt a top-down approach to evangelism.<sup>36</sup> This meant that, instead of reaching out to the masses, who were mainly associated with Buddhism and Shamanism at this time, Jesuit missionaries preached mostly to government officials, nobles, and other elite members of society. They attempted to create as little conflict as possible with the ruling doctrine of Confucianism, in order to avoid further violence. In doing so, they treated the doctrines of Christianity and Confucianism as if they were compatible, and found ways to demonstrate this. This made Christianity more attractive to Confucian followers, and also avoided conflict with the predominantly Confucian government, at least temporarily.

This tactic was not unusual for Christian missionaries at the time. As early as the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, they used this same method when setting up missions in China. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit priest who was well-known for his mission work in China, was the person who was credited with mastering this technique in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Christian missionaries, Jesuits in particular, advertised Christianity as compatible with indigenous religions of the places they visited. Another Jesuit missionary, Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare, also dedicated his life to demonstrating the compatibility between Christianity and Confucianism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> Prémare studied in depth the classic works of Confucian literature, and wrote two books that drew strong lines between the stories and teachings of Confucianism and those of the Christian scriptures. He read Confucian texts such as the *Book of Changes*, the *Analects of Confucius*, and the *Mencius*, which were all considered foundational and important texts in the Confucian philosophy. In 1725, Prémare published a complete version of a text he had been working on for

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<sup>36</sup> Choi, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Mungello, 390.

<sup>38</sup> Mungello, 300.



several years, *Vestiges des principaux dogmes Chrétiens tirés des anciens livres chinois*.<sup>39</sup> A few years later, he released a letter called *Lettre sur le monotheisme des chinois*. In both of these texts, he gives examples of compatibility between Confucianism and Christianity. He states that both religious traditions hold the view of monotheism, or the belief in only one god.

Prémare, along with other European philosophers and theologians contributed to this mission of proving compatibility. These Christian “translators” were called the Figurists, and among other things, they argued that there was a shared doctrine of the Logos.<sup>40</sup> They believed that there was a significant amount of crossover in the stories of Confucianism and Christianity. For example, both traditions have a story of a flood. Figurists claim that the flood from the story of Noah in Genesis in the Hebrew Scriptures is the same flood told about in the story of the Chinese sage Yao.<sup>41</sup> These scholars devoted themselves to finding confirmation for Christian scriptures in the texts of Confucianism. If this confirmation was found, it would reinforce the doctrine of Logos, or Word of God, because it would prove that both of these texts were divinely inspired and coming from the same God.

Prémare’s *Lettre sur le Monotheisme des Chinois* listed several examples of times in the Dao I Ching that included references to one supreme god or one supreme intelligence. Prémare writes, “We read in the Chouë-koua these words: “The Lord will come out of the East; and Tchou-hi says that the Lord he is the sovereign master of heaven (and earth).”<sup>42</sup> Prémare, and other Figurists, were able to create a connection between this and Christian doctrine. In their

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<sup>39</sup> Mungello, 390.

<sup>40</sup> Mungello, 391.

<sup>41</sup> Mungello, 391.

<sup>42</sup> Prémare, Joseph-Henri de. *Lettre Inédite Du Père Prémare Sur Le Monothéisme Des Chinois*. G. Pauthier, 1861.

interpretation, this sovereign master of heaven and earth must have been the same God as the God of the Bible.

Equally, if not more, revealing of inter-religious dynamics are the Korean responses to the Figurists' arguments. Korean scholars also took interest in Catholicism during this time. Sungho, a Korean scholar, studied and was receptive to the ideas introduced by Jesuit missionaries.<sup>43</sup> He inspired two schools of Korean thought that were responding to Western ideas during the mid to late 1700s, one of which was receptive to Catholicism and the other which was not. One of the members of the anti-Catholic thought in Korea was Shin Hudam, another Neo-Confucian scholar who reviewed the texts created by Jesuit missionaries, refuted these ideas and claimed they were incompatible with Confucian thought. He took issue with the idea of an immortal soul in Christianity, and wrote, "The soul depends upon its existence on the bodily form, and as the bodily form degenerates, it also disperses and returns to nothingness. How can a soul be an independently existing entity!"<sup>44</sup> In Confucianism, the concepts of remaining body (baek) and soul after death (hon) are linked. When one dies, the soul leaves the body and dissipates in the air. Shin also took issue with the idea that Catholics presented of humans possessing three souls. Two of those souls were corporeal, and the last is purely spiritual.<sup>45</sup> This was illogical to him, and he also claimed that this contradicted the idea of feeling pain in Hell and feeling pleasure in Heaven. If the souls were simply limited to the bodily experience, and then disappeared after death and only the spiritual soul remained, this made it impossible for that soul to be receptive of pain and pleasure.

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<sup>43</sup> So-Yi Chung. "Introducing Christian Spirituality to Joseon Korea—Three Responses from Confucian Scholars." *Religions*, vol. 9, no. 11, 2018, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 3.

Another problem that Shin noticed with Christian thought was that the idea of eternal life removed the accountability of Christians to live a good life on earth.<sup>46</sup> In Confucianism, the philosophy is based entirely around social order. If life on earth is viewed as a temporary, fleeting stop on the way to an afterlife, this would not encourage people to live a good and responsible life during their time on earth. Suddenly, earthly life becomes less valuable. Confucian thought sees that right action produces blessings in this life, while Christianity promises blessings after death. So-Yi Chung states that, “in the eye of a Confucian scholar, as a result, the more one emphasized the rewards of the afterlife, Heavenly pleasures, and even the resurrections of the body that Jesus promised, the further one would be from the moral commitment in this world and a genuine sense of self-cultivation.”<sup>47</sup>

Other Confucian scholars disagreed completely with Shin Hudam’s anti-Catholic thought. Jeong Yag-jong Augustinos also immersed himself in the study of Jesuit texts and Christian thought. He attempts to answer the question raised by Shin Hudam about how the feelings of pleasure and pain in Heaven are felt if bodily feeling is gone. He writes, “When the body is birthed, the Lord of Heaven attaches it to a supernatural soul. A human being, therefore, takes pleasure and displeasure even in things that lie outside the body.”<sup>48</sup> The divine fusion of physical and metaphysical reality provides a shared capacity for pleasure and pain, even when the physical body no longer remains,

To challenge Shin’s ideas about the lack of accountability that comes with eternal life, Jeong leaned strongly on the idea of God as an ultimate judge. Just as earthly leaders work to establish order in this world, God has a sense of order in the afterlife. He understands whether

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<sup>46</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 5.

people have behaved badly or wickedly on earth, and will act accordingly in his judgment of them.<sup>49</sup> There is no need to worry about whether people will not be held accountable for their actions, because there is a totally just God who will judge them after their death and determine if they are worthy of being rewarded or punished for their actions. This, in turn, gives people motivation to follow earthly codes of conduct and to be a responsible citizen during their time on earth, because it will result in whether they will be punished or rewarded in the afterlife.

Although Christianity is, in essence, a religion that revolves around belief rather than action or practice, Jeong argues that this is not an excuse to be a wicked person during one's time on earth. Instead, with God as a judge over one's life, there will be incentive for people to be good and just, so there will be no problem with people being evil or disregarding the standards of society if they adopt Christian thought.

Jeong also believes that punishment and reward on earth is unjust itself. For example, "there are many good people in this world who are poor, and many wicked people who are rich."<sup>50</sup> Because of this, God is a much better judge than any earthly ruler. Humans cannot know each other's intentions. There is also a limited amount of wealth on earth, which causes inequity between people. He asks, "for instance, there are three ministers in a country, but if there are ten people who are worthy of becoming ministers, with only three seats, how can all of them be made ministers?"<sup>51</sup> This points to an inherently flawed world that cannot possibly justly reward each person. Heaven, on the other hand, does not have this problem of limited riches or privileges. God knows each person's intentions and can therefore act with more true knowledge than someone on earth in judging whether someone was a good person or not. This diversity in

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<sup>49</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Chung, So-Yi, 7.

Korean response to Figurist efforts to correlate Christian and Confucian ideals demonstrates how Christian ideas stimulated questioning of basic Christian as well as dominant Confucian tenets.

Meanwhile, Christianity, too, held some resistance to the missionary strategies of the Jesuits in Asia. Prémare, the French missionary, and other Figurists, were punished and denied by the Catholic Church in Rome during their mission to demonstrate compatibility between Confucianism and Christianity. The four Figurists, namely Prémare, Joachim Bouvet, Jean-Francois Focquet, and Jean-Alexis de Gollet, were denounced by officials in the church.<sup>52</sup> An organization of the Catholic church which was in charge of overseeing evangelism in non-Christian countries, known as the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, or just Propaganda, claimed that these scholars “destroyed the veneration of the Old Testament by exalting the Chinese Book, I Ching.”<sup>53</sup> The I Ching is also known as the previously mentioned *Book of Changes*. However, the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes* was incredibly important in Confucian thought, and so respecting it and claiming that it had truth was necessary for Prémare and the other Figurists to market the compatibility between it and the Holy Bible. The Propaganda ordered a recall of Prémare’s writings, but it is unclear whether he ever actually recalled them.<sup>54</sup> It is unlikely, though, that all copies were suppressed, as there was a second recall order issued in 1736, after Prémare’s death.

Resistance to the Figurist arguments of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was not limited to just Korean or Christian thinkers. Within China, the Yung Cheng emperor issued an edict in 1727 denouncing Christianity and denying its possible compatibility with Confucianism, largely due to the fact

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<sup>52</sup> Mungello, 392.

<sup>53</sup> Mungello, 392.

<sup>54</sup> Mungello, 392.

that Confucianism was an exclusivist philosophy.<sup>55</sup> As noted above, Confucius himself said that studying false teachings was damaging. Only the ideas taught by Confucius constitute the True Way, and anything that contradicts or challenges them would be considered a false teaching. The 1727 edict states that Christianity is a false teaching because it does not have the antiquity of Confucianism, which is an essential part of the Confucian teachings because it depends upon the wisdom of the ancient sages. Regarding and respecting the teachings of the sages is a part of filial piety, and Christian thought contradicts the teachings of the sages, specifically on topics like the afterlife.<sup>56</sup> It reads, when translated into English

Take for example the Westerners' worship of T'ienchu. Now, T'ien, by means of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements, transforms and produces all things. Therefore it is said that all things have their origins in T'ien. It, then, is the Lord, the controlling power. From ancient times on have there ever been people who did not know the reverent T'ien or teachings which did not do so? What difference is there in the case of the Western religion's revering of T'ien? (The difference emerges) when they say that T'ien came down to earth and transformed itself into a man in order to save mankind. It appears that these far-fetched words merely use the name of T'ien in order to beguile the rash and ignorant into following their religion. This is the heterodoxy of the West.<sup>57</sup>

This edict goes on to conclude that Chinese teachings are conducive to life in China, and Western teachings are compatible with Western life. These two, however, do not coincide and are not transferable. This argument was responsible for the late 18<sup>th</sup> century ban on Christian missions in China and Korea mentioned previously, and led to the already high tensions that were at play when Jesuit missionaries reentered Korea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, discrepancies between Christianity and Confucianism continued to be discovered by scholars and religious leaders on both sides.

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<sup>55</sup> Mungello, 393.

<sup>56</sup> Mungello, 394.

<sup>57</sup> Kim, Sangkeun. *Strange Names of God : The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci's "Shangti" in Late Ming China, 1583-1644*. P. Lang, 2004, 188.

The Confucian and Christian concepts of afterlife and life on earth were entirely incompatible, according to both leaders in Korean and Chinese Confucian thought, as well as officials in the Catholic Church. This mission to reconcile competing ideas was studied in depth, and in response, missionaries made several attempts at answering the questions that arose from critics on either side. However, it eventually resulted in a sense of betrayal. By the mid-1800s, some Koreans had come to believe that Christianity was compatible with their Confucian ideology. Soo Bock Choi writes that “closer contact with the Jesuits and their writings revealed that Christianity was not necessarily compatible with Confucianism. The government branded Christianity as heterodox.”<sup>58</sup> This was a fairly extreme measure by the Chinese government that was intended to keep Christianity from Korea and China and reduce the spread of Christian ideology. However, Christianity still continued to spread, which caused tension within the government and set the stage for the political action taken against Christian missionaries that led to the French campaign against Korea of 1866.

#### TRANSLATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE BUDDHIST AND SHAMANISTIC MASSES

Christian missionaries also, eventually, began to preach to the Korean masses, who were immersed in Buddhist and Shamanistic traditions. They used a similar tactic as they had for Confucianism, meaning that they also found areas of compatibility between Christianity and these other traditions in order to create a sense of familiarity with Christianity in those to whom they preached. Just as in Confucianism, there were certain ideas that translated well, such as monotheism and social ethics, the same was true in both Shamanism and Buddhism. These two, actually, more easily facilitated conversion than Confucianism. Confucianism was the religion of the powerful, meaning that it was the religion of the educated. Scholars and academics had the

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<sup>58</sup> Choi, 18.

ability to make up arguments against or for Christianity and its compatibility with Confucianism, but the same cannot be said for Buddhism and Shamanism. The connections that were made went largely unchallenged, but it is still important to know what made Christianity appealing to these groups of people and why it was so successful.

There were two major targets that Christianity latched onto in Korean Shamanism: the Tan'gun creation myth, and the doctrine of Hananim. The Tan'gun myth, especially, demonstrated the closest connection between Christianity and Shamanism. Missionaries found a wealth of parallels between this story and some Christian doctrines. Mentioned before, the English translation as provided by scholar Chewon Kim is as follows:

In olden times there was Hang In. His son, Ung, born of his concubine, desired for himself an earthly life and wanted to be among human society. The father, knowing his son's intention, looked down upon the San Wei and the T'ai Po (the T'ai Po peak of the San Wei mountains?) and came to the conviction that his son might bring some benefits to mankind. The father gave his son three talismans and let him go. Ung descended with three thousand followers unto the top of Mount T'ai Po under the trees of the sacred altar which place was called the Divine Place. He had command over the Wind Noble, over the Lord of Rain and the Lord of Clouds. Therefore he had to attend to the planting of grain, the regulation of human life, of sickness, of punishment, and he had to judge good and evil; in short, he had more than three hundred and sixty affairs to direct. In this world he directed all metamorphosis. At this time there were a bear and a tiger who lived together in a cave. They often prayed to the god Ung (because) they wished to be transformed into human beings. Ung gave them a miraculous wormwood stalk and twenty beads of garlic. He instructed them to eat this and not to see the sunlight for one hundred days – then they would easily acquire human form. These (herbs) the bear and tiger took and ate. They (following the instructions) remained in seclusion for three times seven days (only) and the bear acquired the body of a woman; but the tiger had not been able to abstain (from looking at the daylight) and so it was not possible for him to obtain a human body. The bear-woman could find no one to marry, whereupon under the trees of the altar she prayed to become with child. Ung changed his form and married her. She became pregnant and bore a son and his name was Tan Gun Wang Chien.<sup>59</sup>

It was inevitable that Christian missionaries would observe a kind of Trinity in this story. In fact, missionaries claimed that the three figures, Hang In, Ung, and Tan Gun represented the Father,

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<sup>59</sup> Kim, Chewon, 44.



Spirit, and Son, respectively.<sup>60</sup> The myth can also be altered to fit different narratives. A ruler of heaven who sends his son to help the earth might be representative of God and Jesus. There are action based covenants made between Ung and the tiger and bear, which can parallel the Old Testament covenants made in order to receive blessings. Listening to the instructions of God will award blessings, in the case of the bear, but, like the tiger, if one does not heed the warnings of God, they will receive no blessings. Finally, there is the presence of the son of a divine being and an obedient human who is born to his mother on earth and becomes an earthly ruler. This could easily be presented as a parallel to Jesus.

In addition to the Tan'gun myth, Christians also drew connections between the Shamanist idea of Hananim.<sup>61</sup> This is the most supreme god in Korean Shamanism. Missionaries were also able to market this as proof of monotheism. Practically, though, Shamanism appeared to have been a form of primitive polytheism, rather than a monotheist or Trinitarian theism.<sup>62</sup> Brinkman states that "this choice for the name Hananim is often seen as one of the most important factors for the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea."<sup>63</sup> It offered a unique Korean identity in Christianity, equated the persecuted and underrepresented Shamanism with Christian ideas, and allowed them to use their own name for God. This was perhaps the most effective method for conversion of Koreans. Although some Confucian scholars were impressed by the efforts of Christian missionaries to reconcile the differences between Confucianism and Christianity, there was also much backlash by leaders. In the case of Shamanism, the citizens who practiced were

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<sup>60</sup> Oak, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Oak, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, Jin Woo, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Brinkman, 129.

already persecuted. Therefore, Shamanism became a perfect opportunity for Christian evangelism.

Buddhism, too, was an excellent opportunity for Christian conversion in Korea. Like followers of Shamanism, Buddhists were persecuted due to the anti-Buddhist sentiments in Korea during the Choson Dynasty. One of the most compatible elements between Christianity and Buddhism was a shared doctrine of heaven and hell.<sup>64</sup> The Buddhist doctrine of heaven is less straightforward than that of Christianity though. For example, in Buddhism there are “many paradises promised in all ‘ten directions’ under the jurisdiction of a host of Buddhas.”<sup>65</sup> This variety of heavens was largely ignored by Christians and Koreans alike in favor of a more familiar concept of one ultimate god and one afterlife. As previously discussed, this shared idea of heaven did not sit well with Confucian scholars, but was the main thing that drew Korean Buddhists to Christianity. One additional doctrinal similarity was the premise that there would be a savior in both Christianity and Buddhism. In Buddhism, this can be attributed to the doctrine of the Buddhist *bodhisattvas*, and more specifically, the prediction of a future Buddha, the *Maitreya*.<sup>66</sup> Christian missionaries were able to take this idea and present this as a representation of Jesus. The Holy Spirit can also be portrayed as the equivalent of the Buddhist *bodhisattva* called *Kwan Yin*, which is “honored as the embodiment of compassion and wisdom.”<sup>67</sup> These preexisting ideas in Buddhist thought made it easy to draw parallels between them and Christian doctrine, and influenced further conversion to Christianity.

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<sup>64</sup> Chung, David, 125.

<sup>65</sup> Chung, David, 138.

<sup>66</sup> Brinkman, 132.

<sup>67</sup> Brinkman, 132.

## THE ETHICS OF INTER-RELIGIOUS EXCHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF WESTERN COLONIALISM

Having now described the basis of Figurist techniques of translation and arguments, we can now ask about the ethics of such an approach. As Christianity is an exclusivist tradition, it seems impossible that it could be compatible with any of these other religious traditions. The Catholic Church obviously took issue with it, when they urged Prémare and other Figurists to denounce their teachings in Korea. This certainly seems to provide an inaccurate view of Christianity. What was presented in Korea as a doctrine that is compatible with other faiths was not true Christianity, according to the Catholic Church, because Christianity cannot actually exist alongside these faiths in its fullness. Confucianism, too, is an exclusivist religious tradition, and is ultimately incompatible with Christianity if it is to be fully believed and adopted, with the assumption that all other religions contain false teachings.

Questions arise about the translation of certain texts. Many of these primary sources were oral traditions, or were written in different languages. The translation of the Tan'gun myth used as a previous example is especially relevant here. Interestingly, in this specific translation in Kim, there is language that is reminiscent of the Bible. For example, the phrase "three time seven days". Matthew 18:22 uses similar language when it says "seventy times seven". This is likely a translation of the myth done by Christians, in order to create more direct parallel. This calls into question how much the rest of the story remains true to the narrative, or how much it has been altered to fit a Christian narrative directed towards Korean shamanists.

These missionaries also are seemingly imposing a Christotelic view on the myths and doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. Where a story already exists, Christian missionaries find it to be a representation of Jesus. Of course, none of these stories were

originally written with Jesus in mind, so it is unfair to truly say that they are representing Christ. This remains a problem, because it provides a compromised view of Christianity as well as the religions that it attempts to use as parallels to Christianity. When this was noticed by Confucian scholars, there was a sense of betrayal and distrust, which led to some of the tensions between the Confucian government and Christian missionaries.

This then begs the question of the power dynamics at play during this time. The Confucian government in Korea, specifically, was a power dynamic that must be examined. They held the power, but they did not accurately represent the Korean people. Persecution was very prevalent, and it affected not just the Christian missionaries who were executed, but also the Korean public. Those who practiced Shamanism and Buddhism were persecuted and punished for their religious beliefs, forced to follow laws that did not apply to them.

Once Christian missionaries reached Korea, this already existing issue seemed to draw more light to itself. Christian missionaries perhaps took advantage of the weak and powerless state of the uneducated and poor Korean public, but it was not a problem that was nonexistent before their arrival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Choson Dynasty was Confucian-centric, and tended to ignore the needs and beliefs of the general population of Korea. This was also shown through their inability to control issues such as poverty, famine, and rebellion. However, a conflict rooted in religion is what triggered the French response to the execution of French Christian missionaries. More specifically, Christianity, the religion of a foreign power is what triggered a military conflict between France and Korea, which was expressed through the French Campaign against Korea of 1866.

Religion and political power often go hand in hand. This is evident in the case of Korea during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The social ethics of Confucianism were implemented as a tool in society,

and any religions which challenged this existing social order were shunned. Confucianism played an essential role in the ability of the Korean government to possess so much power. Confucianism fulfilled the supporting role of religion in order to legitimize the political elite, and challenges to this religious structure threatened the existing social structure of Korea, which explains their strict isolationist response after the conflict. Heinz Eulau claims that “the validity of the continuance of organized religion in society is that its insights, derived from the past, commend themselves to the present experience of humanity.”<sup>68</sup> Confucianism did not fit the needs or spiritual beliefs of the majority of the Korean population, but they did not hold the power to challenge the government. Once a new religion that was more ready to adapt to the needs of Korean spirituality, with a strong political backing in the form of the French government, arrived in Korea through an official mission, this power of Confucianism within the Korean government was challenged.

Although other factors were at play, the French campaign of 1866 was a result of the culmination of mounting religious tensions in Korea. These tensions existed long before Christian missionaries entered the country, but their arrival and resistance to the government only aggravated the situation. Anger erupted because there was little trust between the Korean government and the Christian missionaries. Religion was used as a tool in Korea by both sides, and this was challenged completely when France launched its campaign in October of 1866.

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<sup>68</sup> Eulau, Heinz. “Religion and Power.” *The Antioch Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1945, 251.

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