



[FAQ](#)
[Search](#)
[Memberlist](#)
[Usergroups](#)
[Profile](#)
[You have no new messages](#)
[Log out \[ perryisa \]](#)

**cForum Forum Index -> The Religion & Culture Web Forum**

### Split Topic Control Panel

Using the form below you can split a topic in two, either by selecting the posts individually or by splitting at a selected post

New topic title

Forum for new topic

Author	Message	Select
Anonymous	<p>Posted: 04 Oct 2007 21:55 Post subject: October 2007: Beleaguered Success</p> <hr/> <p>Welcome to the Religion and Culture Web Forum's public discussion board for October 2007. In this thread you will find the invited responses from Daniel Bays, Kelly H. Chong, Donald Clark, Hyojae Lee, Paul C. H. Lim, and Elizabeth Underwood.</p> <p>To leave your own response to Timothy Lee's essay or to another posting, choose "post reply." In order to submit a comment, you must register with a personal user ID and password.</p> <p>Debra Erickson Editor, Religion and Culture Web Forum</p>	
Anonymous	<p>Posted: 04 Oct 2007 22:18 Post subject: Hyojae Lee's response to Timothy Lee</p> <hr/> <p>In the 1990s, I, born and educated in a Korean Evangelical Christian family, was working as a journalist for a daily news company in Korea and experienced Christian church and culture both outside of the church (as an observer) and inside (as a member). My impression of Korean Christianity at that time is well summarized by Lee's sentence: "in the 1990s, Korean Evangelicalism underwent a much more ambiguous and troubling development." It is true that Korean Protestantism (or Evangelicalism) was successful in recruiting new believers. The number of church members, especially in the Evangelical church, continuously increased.</p> <p>However, it is hard to conclude that Protestantism or Evangelicalism was "the most successful" religion in Korea at that time. A survey</p>	

conducted by Gallup Korea in January 2004 shows that the highest rate of membership increase during the last two decades belonged to Buddhism (5.6%), rather than Protestantism (4.2%). Buddhism was also the largest religion in total number of members, meaning that Koreans came to prefer Buddhism to Protestantism. Nevertheless, the development of Protestantism was true and it was [i]ambiguous[/i] and [i]trouble making[/i] in Korean society in the sense that the development of Korean Evangelicalism was not necessarily positive for either the Korean church or Korean society more broadly.

Lee argues that Korean Evangelicalism enjoyed significant successes in areas such as civil society, politics, and economy. Lee also insists that Korean Evangelicalism had “the most impact” or highest influence in these areas. Lee asserts that the proportions of Evangelicals or high-profile church members in the areas of politics and enterprise, as well as Evangelical church-related social organizations, are evidence of the influence of the church.

But some questions arise about this assertion. How can this evidence justify his assertion that Evangelicalism had the most impact on Korean civil society? What does Lee mean by “influence” or “impact?” How did they influence or impact Korean civil society? Lee does not show how Korean Evangelicals changed politics and business or experienced the kingdom of God in their fields of employment. Moreover, Lee does not introduce successful model case(s). Mere numbers, aside from additional evidence, do not demonstrate Evangelical influence on Korean society. From my experience and observation, Lee’s assertion that Korean Evangelicals’ numerical success translated into an equal level of social influence is not persuasive. □

I believe that the Gospel, not the number of believers, influences society as well as individual lives, transforms both of them to become more ethical in their choices and actions, and leads nearer to the kingdom of God in this world. While working as a journalist, I sensed that Korean Christians longed more and more for such external successes as Lee describes, losing their reputation among non-believers in the process. For this reason, Korean Evangelicalism’s success in “the attainment of wealth, position, honors, or the like” is truly beleaguered. If Christians measure success by such secular goals, that success will be beleaguered in the end, simply because those goals are not Christian.

Today, most Korean Christians feel that Christians are losing their influence even in the realm of religion. Lee mentions the many unqualified seminary graduates and Evangelicalism’s exclusivist soteriology as main causes of the “beleaguered success.” From my point of view, these are not causes, but the effects of causes. Many scandals happened in 1990s. Lee witnesses to the ways that those involved significantly misunderstood the Gospel and failed to live out the Gospel. While the effort of most Evangelicals was focused on personal conversion, that of non-Evangelicals was on political and

social achievement rather than gaining souls.

During those years, it was not easy to find Christians who understood and lived out Christian salvation as the continuing process of conversion, sanctification and glorification. This misunderstanding produced "cheap grace" (a term used by Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and promoted the proliferation of poor seminaries and unqualified graduates. I think that the fundamental problem of Korean Evangelicalism in 1990s--and today--is theological: what is the Gospel and what does it mean to believe in the Gospel? I can agree with Lee's overall conclusion that Korean Evangelicalism's development was ambiguous and troubling, but I differ in my assessment of it.

=====

Hyojae Lee

Senior Pastor, Mustard Seed Church, Vancouver, BC

Th.M. Candidate, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

Journalist, The Chosun Ilbo, Seoul

Anonymous

Posted: 05 Oct 2007 16:50 Post subject: Paul Lim's response to Timothy Lee

Professor Timothy Lee has once again done a great service to an increasing number of scholars interested in the history of Christianity in Korea with this on-line article, originally a chapter in his co-edited volume – with Robert E. Buswell – [i]Christianity in Korea[/i] (University of Hawaii Press, 2006). Six years prior to that, Professor Lee has published a finely nuanced article in [i]Church History[/i] on the March First Movement of 1919, a key event hitherto under-explored which sheds much light in the nexus between politics of resistance and Protestant attitudes toward the Japanese occupation in Korea.

I have found in both these articles complex and multifaceted accounts of the history of Christianity in Korea vis-à-vis its traditional religious structures, political contexts, cultural influences; through it all, Lee remained nonpartisan and judicious. For the rest of this response to Lee's article, several salient themes will be highlighted, along with them a few questions and counter-perspectives to further engage the author – and the readers – in a lively conversation.

The three major areas of evangelical engagement within the Korean social and cultural matrices that Lee further explores are: social and civic activism, political participation, and economic contribution, and it is the second aspect which deserves a further scrutiny. Lee presents in great detail the rise and fall of Kim Yonug Sam whose presidency was from 1992 to 1997, and the evangelical cooperation (or cooptation?) with Kim's candidacy. It was a triumph both of regionalism (Kim Yonug Sam is from [i]Kyong-sang[/i] province, the province of all of Kim's immediate predecessors: Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-woo, whereas Kim Dae Jung was from [i]Juh-la[/i] province), and of Protestantism over against the Catholicism of Kim Dae Jung, the famed

political dissident who would follow Kim Young Sam as president in 1998 and become a Nobel laureate in 2000.

Lee's detailed portraiture of the complex relationship between "Church and State" notwithstanding, I had hoped he'd provide a bit more critical assessment of the over-zealous efforts on the part of the church leaders to elect a Christian president with little regard to the specific policy directions and aspirations. Perhaps it was a case of "Blue House captivity of Korean evangelicalism"? One can only wonder and would hope that Professor Lee would provide some insights into this increasingly complexifying question, especially with Lee Myong-bak, another Presbyterian elder in a mega church in Seoul, as a key runner for the 2007 Presidential election: is a Christian President to be preferred to a non-Christian one irrespective of political acumen and track records? To what extent is it actually better for Korean society as a whole, not just for the evangelical constituency? Another interesting juxtaposition would have been the role of evangelical religion in the last two elections here in the US and that of Korea.

One of the lacunas in the current literature on Korean Christianity is the impact of modernity and consumerism on Korean evangelicalism. As I heard one Korean scholar mention to me that when you are so concerned with winning the lost, there is little time for self-critical reflection on methodology. Korean Christianity is certainly a by-product of the frequent revival meetings, all-night and early morning prayer meetings, and lest we forget, a great number of church growth seminars, be they the Donald McGavran types or the Bill Hybels type. And quite frankly, those interested in church growth as a movement – divinely ordained or humanly engineered, the line of distinction runs rather blurry – are not going to demonstrate much keen interest in critical analysis of the cultural matrices of the Korean society. □

What I was hoping for in vain was for Professor Lee to take that line of analysis. In a few places, Lee certainly alludes to them, especially in his last sentence: "now Evangelicalism is not only [i]in[/i] Korean society but also [i]of[/i] it" (emphasis added). This is precisely that warrants a more sustained look. Just as David F. Wells of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has provided incisive in-house critique of American evangelicalism – in [i]No Place for Truth[/i] and [i>Losing Our Virtue[/i], especially – lamenting the market-driven mentality of many mega-churches, perhaps it would serve the Korean church well if scholars of the stature of Lee could provide similar accounts.

One of the crucial questions for further research that Lee's paper raises, is: "Are these terms 'authentic Korean' [i]and[/i] 'genuine Christian' oxymorons?" With Christianity putatively being a "Western import," thus inextricably linked with things American, the backlash of anti-American sentiment has not helped the cause of Protestantism in Korea. One can travel to Seoul, for instance, and notice an interesting, if not intriguing, growth of English-speaking worship services. The Lingua franca of the world has effectively gone from French to English.

It is this capacity for adaptation that has kept Christianity at the forefront of religious imagination and praxis in Korea, albeit at a significant cost, as Lee alludes.

Whether this was overtly the strategy of the leading Korean evangelicals or not (one can think of the British evangelicals of the earlier part of the twentieth-century, for instance, of John Stott, etc., who intentionally targeted the Oxbridge socio-economic and educational elites) the message sent to the rest of the Korean society has been that the recent form of Korean Protestantism is decisively geared toward the "healthy and wealthy." Overwrought identification with the prevailing cultural mores without its prophetic stances has weakened the credibility of the Korean church vis-à-vis the secular public. This interrelated question of contemporary consumer-driven culture and Christianity in Korea certainly deserves a further look. My hope is that Lee and others will take this next phase of investigating the nature of Korean Christianity which, as he puts well, is in and of the Korean society.

=====

Paul C.H. Lim  
Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity  
Vanderbilt University Divinity School

Anonymous

Posted: 05 Oct 2007 17:40 Post subject: Daniel Bay's response to Tim Lee

Thanks to Tim Lee for posting this piece on Korean Protestantism. It is adapted from his excellent recent co-edited book on Christianity in Korea, which has seventeen essays by Korean, Korean-American, North American, and (one) British scholars. These range from macrostudies to microstudies, from the 18th century to the present, and in many ways will constitute a sort of benchmark set of studies upon which future efforts can build. The academic study of Korean Christianity is still in its early stages, and this volume sheds light on the way ahead. Lee's contribution here was to outline the considerable success of that variety of Protestantism in Korean garb which Lee calls "evangelicalism."

I have no quarrel with any of the "facts" in Prof. Lee's essay, including some very interesting survey data, although I have great suspicion of the figures taken from D. B. Barrett's reference works on Christianity around the world, both historically and at present. But that's another matter. I learned the most from this essay in the discussion of how pervasive is the influence of evangelicals in society and politics, and in discussion of the scandals which have tarnished the public image of evangelicalism (much as they have in the U.S.).

I would like to contribute to this forum, however, the idea that we need some different terminology, or nomenclature, for some of the

phenomena which have emerged in Protestantism over the past century, not only in Korea but in other parts of Asia and the global East and South more broadly. "Evangelicalism" itself is an ambiguous term, of course, with both historical and contemporary meanings and usages, European and North American. There have been Evangelical Lutheran churches since (I suppose—I'm not a Western church historian) the 16th century, and at least a couple of others using the word as part of a title, the Evangelical Free Church and the Evangelical United Brethren. But generally evangelicalism refers to a movement broader than any denomination, and sometimes to a particular set of theological beliefs.

All these usages derive from Western history and experience. How useful is it to apply this term to Korea, or to China (where I have struggled with the issue), when it is so slippery even on its home turf, the West? I have written quite a lot about Pentecostals in Chinese church history, but I am increasingly repentant of using it casually in describing Chinese Christians. For example, I have no problem describing the early missionaries who went out from the Azusa Street revival to China in 1906 and after as "Pentecostals," but I wonder if I should use it to describe those Chinese who became believers with more or less similar sets of beliefs and behaviors. Might that make me tend to put the Chinese phenomenon in a box, and to not see unique Chinese aspects that are important? Yet what other word would have even as few drawbacks, if not more?

The same is true of the word "fundamentalism." As Joel Carpenter and others have shown so well, Fundamentalism has a particular set of meanings in American religious culture, grounded in events in North America. What then does it mean to call the famous Chinese pastor Wang Mingdao, who spent 20 years in prison because of his stubborn adherence to a rigid code of beliefs and conduct, a "Fundamentalist?" Historians of China and Korea encounter stubborn adherents to a rigid code of belief and behavior among some adherents of Neo-Confucian thought and philosophy in the last few centuries. Are these men "fundamentalists?" By calling them that, are we overstressing ideology/belief and underestimating the ethical and behavioral aspects? This reminds me of debates over the same term in the Fundamentalism Project at the University of Chicago several years ago.

With the advent and rapid rise of new approaches to the study of Christianity in history, led by Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and more recently Philip Jenkins and others, "missiology," or "missions history," has been displaced by "world Christianity" studies. Although the latter appears the same to some extent, it really isn't. Could the same be true for our use of the term "evangelical" for certain Protestants in Korea and China?

=====  
Daniel H. Bays  
Calvin College

Anonymous

Posted: 10 Oct 2007 18:38 Post subject: Elizabeth Underwood's reply to Timothy Lee

---

Timothy Lee's accounting of the recent trends and troubles of Evangelical Protestant Christianity in South Korea should be of interest to, and has the potential to promote discussion among, many readers and members of this forum, not merely those interested in the course of events on the peninsula itself. Indeed, I would suggest that these trends provide an opportunity to rethink some of the recent sociological discussions and assessments of the course of religion in the 21st century.

As Lee states, the remarkable – even phenomenal – growth of Protestant Evangelical Christianity in Korea through much of the 20th century is a well-known story. From the first few decades of Protestant missionary activity in Korea (dating to 1884), the developing church there was promoted and upheld as “miraculous” to the Western Christian world via missionary letters and other writings. Throughout the 20th century, the case of Korea has been variously presented as an example of successful missionary methods to be replicated in other fields, as an illustration of indigenized Christianity, and as a seminal model of church planting and mega-church development.

More recently, the growth (or “success” – to use Lee's terminology) of Christianity in Korea in the latter half of the 20th century has been used as evidence that modernization and religious growth can occur simultaneously (a direct challenge to some versions of secularization theory) and that a competitive religious market will foster religious growth.

Yet while observers from outside of Korea continue to use numerical church growth as their primary measure of Korean success, within Korea, concerns about the course of Korean Christianity have been expressed for decades. Schisms and competition among churches for members, while resulting in overall numerical increases “to the fold,” also fostered conflict between denominations. As the Korean economy grew, so too did opportunities for financial scandal, in the Church and in society. Even before the 1990s there was great concern that what the Church had gained in numbers was more than offset by what had been lost in terms of theological or spiritual depth. And, as Lee details, by the mid-1990s the public at large saw the Church as “more interested its size and influence than in seeking truth.”

Lee does not speculate much on what the implications of these recent troubles of the Church might be for Evangelicalism in Korea, let alone for trends in other countries where religion has seemed to expand its influence in recent decades. Yet I would like to suggest that they present a challenge to desecularization and supply-side theories of religious growth. It is only in the past few decades that South Korea has achieved a full liberal democracy, and much like secularization of

Spain increased dramatically after the ousting of Franco, it seems likely that the impact of secular trends would have increased following the political changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Increased political freedom, an expanded secular press, and the rapid creation of a middle-class society have all altered the landscape in which the Church existed in Korea in the 1990s. Corruption, present well before the decade, is much less likely to be tolerated in today's Korea, and more likely to result in scandal, whether coming from within or outside of the Church. Hypocrisy is more likely to be noted and the motives of Evangelicals are more likely to be challenged. It seems hardly surprising that numerical growth of the Church would stall in the face of this changed landscape.

=====

Elizabeth Underwood  
Eastern Kentucky University

Anonymous

Posted: 10 Oct 2007 18:52 Post subject: Kelly Chong's response to Timothy Lee

---

Prof. Timothy Lee has contributed a highly informative piece on the current nature and state of Korean evangelicalism. Despite the well-known success of evangelical Protestantism in South Korea throughout the last century, the reality of Korean evangelicalism's uneven development since the 1990s is an issue that cries out for closer analysis. By examining the internal challenges experienced by Korean evangelicalism and the impact of these on evangelicalism's relationship to the larger society in the 1990s, Professor Lee attempts offer us an insight into Korean evangelicalism's present and possible future struggles.

To start with, I must mention that I particularly appreciate Professor Lee's clarification of the distinction between Evangelical and non-Evangelical Protestantism in South Korea, as this distinction is not one often highlighted in typical scholarly or non-scholarly discussions on Korean Protestantism. As he notes, the conflation between the two groups is so commonplace that the distinction between the two groups is often not even made. Furthermore, it is also that case that the predominantly evangelical nature of South Korean Protestantism is simply not well known, particularly to those not familiar with Korea; in my experience, many people are often surprised to hear that the denominations which are assumed to be "mainline" or "liberal" in the United States can be deemed "evangelical" in the Korean context. Professor Lee's clear articulation of this distinction in the South Korean context is highly useful and important.

In regard to his analysis of the challenges faced by Korean evangelicalism starting in the 1990s, I have a few wishful remarks. With the statistical and survey data that Professor Lee has to work

with, he persuasively establishes the historical dominance of Korean evangelicalism in the South Korean religious landscape and its continued vitality in the South Korean society into the 1990s -- albeit beleaguered -- especially in terms of its size and reach.

In terms of Professor Lee's analysis of evangelicalism's actual "influence" on South Korean society and politics however, I was left wanting to know more about what exactly [i]were[/i] the nature and shape of this evangelical's influence on Korean society, going beyond such things as election outcomes. The fact that a large number of Korean political figures (and some [i]chaebol [/i]leaders) religiously affiliate with evangelicalism is one thing, but how exactly does evangelicalism, as an institutional force and a collective and individual belief system held by these individuals and their constituents, actually shape and impact the social and political processes of South Korean society? To adequately assess the impact of evangelicalism on Korean society, one of the questions that Professor Lee is concerned to address, fleshing out this process would seem to be an important task.

Moreover, I am curious to know about some of the [i]sociological[/i] reasons for the relative decline of Korean evangelicalism in the 1990s, both in terms of its rate of growth and general popularity. It seems safe to say that public ambivalence toward Christianity, from both within and outside Christianity, is nothing new in South Korea. But what are some of the larger sociological reasons that the church began to experience a slowdown in growth in the 1990s? I am in agreement that this downward trend is probably due to more than just a series of scandals besetting evangelicalism in the 1990s -- scandals that helped worsen the historical perception of Korean Protestantism's "hypocrisies" and other shortcomings -- and the glut of unqualified pastors which further sullied evangelicalism's reputation. What did the decline have to do, for example, with the changing demographics of South Korea in recent years or the general changes in social mores? A particularly intriguing question is: what does this trend have to do with the transformations, if any, of the attitudes or status of women in recent years and the changing relations of gender and family?

Korean women, who have always constituted not only the majority of the Protestant membership but the major motive force behind the expansion of Korean evangelicalism, are now joining the workforce in higher numbers than ever before (this shift has been most perceptible since the mid 1980s). There are also some significant cultural shifts -- though it is not entirely clear yet what form this is taking -- among the new generation of women and youths within the context of ongoing economic restructuring, increasing consumerism, and intensifying economic and cultural globalizing processes. Given that Korean evangelicalism has always been "of" the society, that is, an institution that has survived and thrived by virtue its symbiotic relationship to South Korea's cultural and social environment, a particularly intriguing question is to what extent these recent "crises" of South Korean evangelicalism has to do with the church's inability to adapt flexibly to

the ongoing changes in the South Korean society. It is most interesting to speculate what will happen to the Korean evangelical church if it fails to be successful in retaining its youth and female membership.

Split selected posts

Split from selected post

All times are GMT



Powered by phpBB © 2001, 2005 phpBB Group