CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Korea is crucial in North-east Asia both strategically as the chief crossing between China and Japan and politically as the nexus of interest of China, Japan, Russia and the United States (Map 1). In its current state of division, Korea is a serious threat to global stability and a potential source of widespread conflict. Yet this key component in North-east Asian relations is under-researched and neglected compared to the study of China and Japan. Furthermore, the religious dimensions of Korea's history have tended to be obscured by political readings (Wells 2009:60–80). Surprisingly for a country with long Confucian and Buddhist traditions, within the span of 250 years, Christianity – in various forms – has had a deep impact on Korea and Koreans, including in what is now North Korea. It has played a prominent role in social and political events in the last two centuries; it continues to be a major factor in public life in the South; and it is conspicuous by its suppression in the North. Therefore the study of Korean Christianity and its history is vital for a proper understanding of recent Korean history and for any attempt to resolve the conflict between the Koreas.

From the point of view of the study of religions, Korea presents a rare example in which a substantial proportion of the population has converted to Christianity in a country where other world religions are already established. The planting of Christianity among the ancient religions of Korea and its rapid growth to 30 per cent of the population in South Korea is without parallel in Asia in modern times and demands explanation. In this process, the faith has been shaped by the Korean context and accommodated itself to Korean culture in ways which shed new light on the nature of Christianity and its relation to other religions and spiritualities. The interaction of Christianity with the religious plurality of contemporary South Korea is also a fruitful field for investigation.

However, in the study of world Christianity, South Korea is not only a matter of missiological or ethno-religious interest. With nearly fourteen

million mostly middle- and upper-class adherents, Korean Christianity is emerging as a major player in the global church. Its wealth, extensive diaspora and vibrant world mission movements are able to impact developments in other parts of the world (S. C. H. Kim and Kim 2008).

This book analyses the dynamics and aspirations of Christianity within the wider historical context of modern Korea. It asks why Christianity took hold in Korea to a much greater extent than it did in almost any other Asian country. What is the nature of Korean Christianity, and why is it so? How, and to what extent, has Christianity impacted events and developments on the Korean peninsula over the past two or three centuries? What role might the Korean churches – in Korea and abroad – play in the future, especially with regard to relations between the two Koreas?

RESEARCHING KOREAN CHRISTIANITY

As its title suggests, this book focuses on the relationship between Christianity and its Korean context. It seeks to analyse a Christianity that has been shaped by that context and is in some sense Korean. This task is challenging. First, much of the early recorded history of the Korean churches is colonial mission history, that is, the story of Western missionary initiatives towards Korea rather than about Korean reception of the gospel and agency in its spread. Both the main nineteenth-century source on Catholic history by Charles Dallet (1874a, 1874b) and the early Protestant histories by Paik Lak-geoon (Lakgeoon George Paik) (1970 [1929]) and Allen D. Clark (1971) used mainly mission sources, although Paik was often critical of mission work. Recent Korean scholars, however, notably Yu Hong-ryeol, Choi Seok-u and Yi Won-sun for Catholicism and Min Kyoung-bae and Yi Mahn-yol for Protestantism, emphasise that Koreans themselves took the initiative in bringing Christianity to their homeland, either by their own activities or by inviting missionaries in. These and subsequent historians have recovered documents, used Korean sources whenever possible and read between the lines of the mission accounts. Researchers and institutions such as the Institute of Korean Church History (Catholic; established in 1964) and the Institute of the History of Christianity in Korea (Protestant; 1982) have gathered archives of Korean materials, and the Korean Christian Museum was established at Soongsil University, Seoul, in 1954. (It was originally founded by Kim Yang-sun in 1948.) More recently, online collections have been developed (e.g. at the Center for Korean Studies, UCLA). Our aim is a history of the Korean church and of evangelisation rather than a history of foreign

missions. From this perspective, Christianity is the latest in a series of religious and cultural influences on Korea. Because Christianity was received within the the world-view and culture created by earlier ways of life and philosophies, this study is informed by studies of the wider context of Korean religions (notably, Grayson 2002; D. Baker 2008).

A second challenge is that much Christian history is a history of the church as an institution rather than of the Christian community. While these works are valuable and necessary, a history of Korean Christianity must include the perspectives and activities of the people, that is, the laity – women as well as men. Christianity became Korean during two centuries of tremendous social and political upheaval in which institutional church life was impossible for many years at a time. During these periods it was obvious that the church subsisted in the lay community. The Catholic Church emphasises this in the attention that its official compendiums give to martyrs (MEP 1924; J. Kim and Chung 1964). Similarly, from the 1970s, Protestant historians draw attention to grassroots activities, especially in the works of Yi Mahn-yol and in the three-volume history produced by his institute (IKCHS 1989, 1990; IKCH 2009). Attention to lay concerns increased the integration of Christian history with the people's history and the study of the relationship of churches to nationalist and social movements. A study of Korean Christianity should be set within Korean history in general, particularly social history, and it should go beyond official church histories to discover the stories and views of Korean Christians.

Third, by writing about Korean Christianity as a whole we hope to overcome denominational divides that have blighted historiography. The most obvious challenge here is that there appears to be not one but two Christian histories in Korea: Catholic and Protestant. It is true that the origins, political experiences and institutional histories of these two parts of the Christian church in Korea are quite distinct. Catholic missionaries mostly had little to do with Protestants, who had a heritage of resistance to Catholic influence. Another reason that the recorded histories are separate is that early Catholic mission historians wrote mostly in French and other continental European languages, whereas Protestants generally used English. Consequently, Catholic histories do not usually refer to Protestant history; it is as if Catholicism is the only form of Christianity to be found in Korea (J. Kim and Chung 1964 is an exception here). For their part, Protestant histories either disregard the Catholic Church altogether as discontinuous with the Protestant movement (e.g. Lee Eok-ju 2010) or they record the early martyr history of Catholicism as a precursor to the

Protestant story, and even 'the seed of the church' (e.g. A. Clark 1971); but after that they largely ignore the continuing Catholic presence and growth, giving the impression that Catholicism is now superseded by a new and more dynamic movement. Even more misleading, in Korea Protestants are generally referred to as 'Christians' but this term is not applied to Catholics, who are known as 'Catholic'. A Protestant historian of 'Christianity' is thus under no sense of obligation to include Catholicism.

Since the late 1980s, some historians have attempted to tell about the development of Protestantism and Catholicism in the same volume or in the same article but they continue to treat them in parallel, not intertwined, thus perpetuating the division (D. Clark 1986; Yu Chai-shin 2004; Buswell and Lee 2006; Grayson 2006). It is true that institutionally there was no overlap between them; moreover, successive governments treated them separately and the census lists them as two different religions. However, both Christian communities operated within the same social and religious context, and in practice there was significant contact and collaboration between the two groups, especially in periods of national crisis. Their encounters were sometimes constructive and at other times antagonistic. Furthermore, the two forms of Christianity in Korea exhibited a 'sibling rivalry' (D. Baker 2006b). The fierce competition between them was not only over their comparative growth figures. Protestants demonstrated their awareness of Catholic history when, for instance, they identified Protestant martyrs and stressed the vernacular nature of Protestant churches. Similarly, Catholic historians responded to Protestant activity and were sensitive to criticism, such as the accusation in the 1970s that they lacked social concern. Our aim is to integrate Catholic and Protestant histories into one complex story, using the word 'Christian' to cover all strands of the religion.

Korean Catholic history has become much more accessible through the series by the Institute of Korean Church History (2009 onwards) for which nine volumes are projected. However, Protestant historiography is very fragmented, with many separate denominational histories (e.g. Lee Jae-jeong 1990; Ryu Dong-sik 2005a, 2005b). When it is used in general, the term 'Protestant' sometimes means only the Presbyterians and Methodists whose missions entered together in 1885 and the union activities that they encouraged. More often it is extended to include other groups such as Holiness, Baptist and Salvation Army, but sometimes it refers only to the Presbyterians who are the dominant group. The bifurcation into Catholic and Protestant histories not only neglects the extent to which they are interlinked but also tends to obscure what is a complicated ecclesiastical situation. It excludes the Orthodox Church altogether; Anglicans in Korea,

who are Anglo-Catholic, do not fit in either category; and Protestants have not always wanted to include Pentecostals and some evangelical churches under the Protestant umbrella. Moreover, Protestant–Catholic duality and Protestant denominationalism have led to the neglect of ecumenical and interdenominational organisations and activities. We include, as far as possible, all forms of Christianity in Korea. We shall use 'Protestant' to include all the post-Reformation denominations, although sometimes Pentecostals and Anglicans are specified separately.

Korean Christianity is wider than Christianity in Korea and this presents a fourth challenge: to consider diaspora and mission movements. The oppression and instability of the Korean peninsula from the 1860s onwards produced migration movements and a large Korean population outside the peninsula. From the early twentieth century onwards, this diaspora was largely Protestant and there was a reciprocal relationship between the churches inside and outside Korea. Since the late 1980s, the Protestant overseas missionary movement has ranked among the largest globally and is in many respects integrated into the diaspora. We shall treat diaspora congregations, denominations and missionary movements as an integral part of Korean Christianity.

A fifth challenge is the dualisms which polarise Korean Christianity and bias historical perspectives – of which Catholic–Protestant may be considered one. Gender relations is an important interpretative framework for Korean society whose significance for historiography is overlooked (Wells 1999). Most Korean churches, like Korean society, are separated into men's and women's spheres, but histories of Korean Christianity – like most history, and for reasons which are well known – tell the story mainly from male perspectives. We aim as far as possible to bring in women's history, the records of which may need to be found in other sources. Moreover, the partition of Korea, the Korean War and the Cold War polarised Korea ideologically. As far as possible, this is a history of the whole of Korean Christianity, including in North Korea, but since after 1945 the church communities in the north were largely destroyed and North Korea has been closed to historical enquiry, the history of the South is inevitably given greater attention. The stand-off between the Communist North and the liberal-democratic South which continues today produced leftist and rightist theologies. For example, in Protestant churches in the 1970s and 1980s particularly, two different histories were being told: one presented South Korean Protestant history as a narrative of successful church growth by the efforts of missionaries and Koreans, and by the use of certain methods (Ro Bong-rin and Nelson 1983). The other portrayed

Christians as a socially active minority suffering at the hands of colonists and dictators for the sake of the oppressed minjung or masses (Kim Yong-bock 1981a). We intend to show how these views were responses by different actors to a common set of circumstances. They constitute one example of the perennial division among Christians according to their response to cultural change: conservative and progressive. For late twentieth-century Protestants this division was often termed 'evangelical' and 'liberal', respectively; for Catholics it was defined by their resistance to, or embrace of, the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. While these distinctions are relevant, we hope to demonstrate that the complexity and diversity of Korean Christianity and Korean culture transcends such simple classifications.

There is a growing body of literature on Korean history and Korean Christianity. We have tried our best to read as widely as possible and to consult both primary and secondary sources in Korean, English and, occasionally, French. A list of sources cited is given in the Bibliography, and Harvard-system references are used to verify, amplify or qualify the discussion. A technical challenge for Korean historiography is the multiple systems of romanisation for Korean script. There is no perfect system for romanisation; each has advantages and disadvantages. We have chosen to follow the system adopted by the South Korean Ministry of Culture in 2000.[1] The McCune-Reischauer system is the most widely used in Korean studies but is difficult for the non-specialist because it uses diacritical marks and has to be specially learnt. The Ministry of Culture system can be read by anyone immediately and those who have mastered McCune-Reischauer can easily understand what is intended, although it may look unfamiliar at first. The new system is increasingly used by younger scholars, and scholars in South Korea are strongly encouraged to adopt it. It is also the most widely used on the Internet, especially because inputting diacritical marks into search engines is awkward. As Koreans define their own history, we envisage that this system will prevail, and its use in this volume signifies the contemporary approach of our book. An exception to our use of the Ministry of Culture system is where the reference is to a published work in Korean which includes English details. In this case, the spelling of an author's name has been retained, and similarly for the Anglicised names of public figures. As the system allows, we also make exceptions for common surnames such as Cheong, Kim, Suh, Yi and Lee and for internationally known places, terms and figures (e.g. Pyongyang, Hangul and Park Chung-hee). We choose to use a hyphen between the syllables of personal names to clarify pronunciation.

[1] Japanese romanisation is according to the Hepburn system, and Pinyin is used for Chinese words.

In all names of individuals, following Korean practice, the surname appears first to avoid confusion. When first used, the baptismal or Christian names of Koreans (where known) are given in brackets, as are the Western-style names by which they may be more commonly known (such as Syngman Rhee). There are relatively few Korean family names so, to avoid confusion, Korean names are given in full in the references. Also in the bibliography, where the publication is in Korean we give the title of the book or article in Korean script (Hangul) with an English translation, giving preference to that of the author. Finally, we have chosen not to use italics for Korean or other foreign-language terms, since these occur frequently in this volume.

Six chronological chapters follow this introduction. Since we are discussing Korean Christianity in all its forms, the period divisions are according to national history and do not correspond with dates significant for any particular church. Chapter 2 deals with the first century of Christian presence, which was in the form of Catholicism. Chapter 3 takes up the story from the opening of Korea by Japan until its annexation by the same in 1910, during which time Protestantism entered. Chapter 4 covers the period of colonial rule until Korea's liberation by Soviet and Allied forces in 1945. Chapter 5 deals with the development of the churches in the South before and after the Korean War until the turn of the 1960s, and with the fate of the churches in the North. Chapter 6 covers the three decades of military dictatorship in South Korea during which the economy and the churches both experienced spectacular growth and Christian-led movements for human rights and democracy eventually overthrew the dictatorship in 1987. Chapter 7 brings the story up to the present. It covers developments with respect to the North, changes in the church scene in the South, the Christian diaspora and missionary movements.

PERTINENT FEATURES OF 'TRADITIONAL KOREA'

For the remainder of this chapter, we set early Korean Christianity within its Korean context by drawing attention to key features of Korea's religious history before the arrival of Christianity and make a few salient remarks about Korea's 'traditional' culture. Readers familiar with premodern Korea may wish to go straight to Chapter 2.

The overall religious history of Korea is of state endorsement of a series of distinct religions – indigenous Korean religion, Buddhism, Confucianism – and of popular practice which in many cases utilised whichever rituals were perceived to be of most practical help. Religions out of favour were suppressed and even persecuted by the state (Grayson 2002; D. Baker 2007a).

Prehistoric Korean peoples believed in a world of 'spirits' with which certain unusual persons, known as shamans, were able to communicate through 'techniques of ecstasy', including exorcisms known as gut (Hogarth 1999). This practice was part of a folk religion concerned with obtaining the power of the gods, dealing with harassment by aggrieved spirits, assuaging the greed of the ancestors and creating harmony within conflicting forces.

From the fourth and fifth centuries, the people of the Korean peninsula came increasingly under the influence of China, and the kingdoms of Korea adopted a Sino-centric world-view. This was expressed ritualistically as sadae, 'serving the great', and by a tribute relationship which reached its height in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (Fairbank 1968). China did not generally interfere with Korea's internal affairs, but Korea's filiality limited its foreign relations, which partly accounts for its relative seclusion (D. Kang 2010). The annual mission which travelled from Seoul to Beijing via a well-defined route became acquainted with the latest developments in China and the known world. Korea's only other bilateral relationship was with Japan, which involved warfare as well as diplomacy and trade, and the nature of which in the premodern period is contested. Through its orientation to China, Chinese religions – including Confucianism, Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism – entered Korea in combination. But by the end of the sixth century it was the Buddhists, who also claimed a direct link with India, who were patronised by the rulers of each of the three kingdoms of Korea. Buddhism was adopted by the unified kingdom of Goryeo (918–1392) as the national ideology in the belief that its practice would protect the nation and cure the land. It held sway in cultural and political circles for the better part of a millennium (Grayson 1985:16–62). Korean Buddhists developed Seon, or meditative Buddhism, which in Korea is text centred and has a highly developed doctrine. Alongside this elite form of the religion, popular Buddhism also accommodated aspects of traditional Korean religion. It thrived in a form heavily influenced by the shamanistic emphasis on intercession for the people's prosperity and happiness and by the recognition of various buddhas, bodhisattvas and other supernatural beings that appealed to the people. Devotion was directed particularly to the Amitabha (Amita) Buddha of the Pure Land, the Healing Buddha (Yaksa Yeorae), the Maitreya (Mireuk) or Future Buddha and the Avalokitesvara (Gwanseeum), the goddess of compassion (R. Robinson, Johnson and Thanissaro 2005:220–34; Mitchell 2008:245–74).

Under Mongol domination, a number of myths surfaced about the heavenly origins of the Korean people. The most well known, which appeared around 1280, told how Hwanung, the son of the heavenly being

Hwanin, descended from heaven onto Mount Taebaek and mated with a bear-woman (Ung-nyeo), producing a son, Dangun Wanggeom, who in 2333 BCE set up a capital at Pyongyang and founded the nation of Joseon. Dangun was an important deity in shamanistic practices and was one of a trinity of gods (Samsin), together with Hwanin and Hwanung. The myth served a convenient political purpose at the time it emerged – helping Koreans to unite and throw off the Mongol yoke (Hogarth 1999:257–72; Jorgensen 1998) – and it reappeared later in ethnic nationalism.

After nearly five centuries, in 1392 the kingdom of Goryeo was supplanted by the kingdom of Joseon under the Yi dynasty, which lasted another half a millennium, and Buddhism was replaced as the preferred religion of state by neo-Confucianism. The folk religion was despised publically as superstition by both Buddhist and Confucian elites. Its practice was marginalised, and it became mainly an activity of women specialists who could sometimes exercise power on wider Korean society this way. However, its thought-world of spirits remained pervasive in Korean society. The mudang (shaman) – generally female – either inherited her role or was identified after prolonged suffering or 'disease of the spirit' (sinbyeong) which compelled her to recognise the demands of the spirits (Hogarth 1999:45–62). She used forms of divination to tell fortunes and discern the spirits, gave practical or medical advice and made offerings to the gods. If matters were serious, she communicated with angry or playful spirits in a trance-like state and exorcised or placated them through ecstatic dancing to the beat of drums (Kendall 1985; Kim Chong-ho 2003).

As a rationalist reform movement following the school of the Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi, neo-Confucians expressed the basis for the moral living and sage-hood that had been central to the teachings of Confucius as conformity with the Ultimate Reality. By introducing a metaphysical dimension into what had until then been largely an ethical and practical philosophy in Korea, they provoked a clash with Buddhism, which offered a different metaphysic (Grayson 2002:100–104). They rejected Buddhism as superstition and blamed its focus on self-enlightenment and belief in life after death for a loss of social order in Korea (Deuchler 1992:103–4). They deemed Buddhist monks lower class (cheonmin), accused them of corruption, exiled them and banned their temples from cities and centres of power.

The new dynasty imposed neo-Confucianism as the ideological basis for its polity and societal norms. Through its balance of power with the centralised monarchy, which was the main reason for 'the extraordinary stability' of Joseon (Palais 1975:272), the neo-Confucian aristocratic elite

launched possibly 'the most ambitious and creative reform experiment in the East Asian world' (Deuchler 1992:27). This allowed them over the next five centuries to transform Goryeo from the top down, by both legal and ritual means, into Joseon, the most complete of Confucian societies (Map 2). Although King Sejong devised the elegant and simple Hangul system to represent the Korean language, the scholar-officials insisted on Confucian education and Chinese letters as the prerequisite for public service. Korean philosophers held their own among the Chinese. In particular, the sixteenth-century figures known as Toegye and Yulgok provoked on-going debate on the nature of Reality and in particular the relationship between the impersonal but dynamic principle (i or yi), the basis of all existence, and the material or life force (gi), which produces change by the actions and reactions of the yin and yang forces (eum and yang in Korean). In political terms, this was a struggle between those who insisted on preserving moral righteousness at all costs and others who advocated socio-political involvement (Keum Jang-tae 2000; Tao 2000:115–25).

After 1644 when the Manchus displaced the Ming dynasty in China and also invaded Korea, Koreans doubted whether these 'barbarians' could fulfil the mandate of Heaven. While they continued the tribute relationship with the new Qing dynasty, Korean scholars began an intellectual reordering of the world in which China was no longer the centre or necessary to authenticate Korean polity or culture. Joseon now saw itself as the faithful interpreter of the Confucian tradition and the last bastion of civilisation (Haboush and Deuchler 1999:3; Haboush 1999:87).

'Late Joseon' is what is generally referred to from the perspective of modernity as the 'traditional' or 'premodern' Korea in which Christianity first gained a foothold. Late Joseon society was aristocratic and bureaucratic. It was dominated by a number of kinship groups or clans that claimed their patrilineal descent from a distinguished common ancestor. They alone had access to education, public office, social status, economic privileges and political influence (Deuchler 1992:6–12, 294–99). Together these kinship groups formed a practically endogamous class or aristocracy of about 10 per cent of the population which became known as yangban. Each kinship group was also associated with a particular geographical area in which it had large landholdings, often including a Confucian academy or seowon (Haboush 1999:88–90). The yangban formed the pinnacle of a three-tier system in Korea. Below them were the yangin or sangmin, 'commoners' or peasants who lived off their own land or – more commonly in the southern half of the peninsula – worked for the yangban as tenants. At the bottom of society were the cheonmin who were bonded servants or were outcastes