Industrialization and Christianity: The Twin Engines of Korean Modernity

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Abstract

The issue at hand is the nature of Korean modernity and its sources. This study is an attempt to analyze the role of agents in the process of social change and compare it to the role of structural legacy of the Japanese colonialism. Recognition of the fact that Koreans acted as primary agents of modernization in their country both before and after the liberation makes the issue of Japanese precedence less relevant, draws a clear line between positive and negative consequences of colonization, and establishes a common ground between the nationalist and post-nationalist perspectives. Furthermore, a theory that interprets modern Korean history in strictly political and economic terms fails to take into account the intangible aspects of the national development, such as national psychology, religion, and family culture. In the context of recent history, the dramatic expansion of Korean Christianity is of particular interest. It is argued that much as the Renaissance and Reformation worked as the twin engines propelling Western Europe into an era of novel scientific, economic, cultural, and spiritual development, so the how-to of technological and economic advancement—part of which was introduced via Japan—and Christianity served as the two driving forces behind the Korean modernization.

I. Introduction

Although Korea is a major international economic player, a debate about the origins of Korean capitalism, industrialization, and modernity is one of the hottest issues in contemporary Korean studies. Alice H. Amsden looked into the Korean “economic miracle” and recognized the country as an example of the “late-industrialized nations” that “catch up” with the world market leaders by means of “pure learning” instead of creating their own proprietary technology (Amsden, 2001). This notion of precedence and “exporting” industrialization to other nations has added fuel to the discussion as to the role of the Japanese colonial legacy in the post-colonial development.

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This paper is an attempt to analyze the role of agents in the process of social change and compare it to the role of the structural legacy of the Japanese colonialism. First, it discusses Korean modernity from three different perspectives: colonialist, nationalist, and post-nationalist. It is argued that recognition of the fact that Koreans acted as primary agents of modernization both before and after the liberation makes the issue of Japanese precedence less relevant, draws a clear line between positive and negative consequences of colonization, and establishes a common ground between the nationalist and post-nationalist perspectives.

The debate in the second part of the study is built upon the classical premise of economics that national growth is created by individuals working to maximize their personal welfare and at the same time advancing the cause of the national development (Smith, 1776/2001). A further inquiry into the dynamics of European industrialization in the late 18th and 19th centuries reveals that something happened in the hearts and minds of human agents that shifted the view of life from one bound by traditional thinking to one driven by rational ideas of labor and profit. Max Weber’s (1904) hypothesis that this pervasive shift of conscience had much to do with Protestantism is the major analytical assumption for this part of the argument. We will reach beyond the exclusive concern with political and economic issues and look at the intangible aspects of the national development, such as national psychology, religion, and family culture.

It is impossible to separate personal success from abstract concepts as faith and persistence, exemplified by the “effort of attention” to achieve desired results. The super-achiever Thomas Edison, for example, went through some ten thousand unsuccessful attempts to create a light bulb. By the same token, it is hardly plausible to separate the story of national development from such intangible yet powerfully motivational forces as national pride and ambition. Although deliberations of this sort might appear somewhat subjective, it is unreasonable to insist that a nation of prevailing strong sentiments would not have an edge over its counterparts in terms of the speed and magnitude of development. The assumption of Koreans that their country is an inherently great nation played a crucial role in the process of formation of Korean modernity (Eckert, 2000:199).

The paper offers an exposition of the internal dimensions of the Korean drive toward modernization. It is argued that the fundamental elements of the Korean national character such as a strong sense of national destiny, ancestral commitment, communal homogeneity, and family coherence, were nurtured, emboldened, and amplified by the work of Western Christian missionaries who arrived long before the controversial Japanese influence manifested itself on the Korean peninsula. Moreover, Christianity ushered in modernity by introducing the system of higher education based on the Socratic approach to the acquisition of knowledge, which is fundamentally different from traditional Korean and Japanese models of education, which are based on Confucianism. Furthermore, Christianity is credited for making a quintessential contribution to restoring balance to the national development, after the one-sided, economy-centered modernization policies of successive military regimes during the first three decades of industrialization.

In sum, it is argued that much as the Renaissance and Reformation worked as the twin engines propelling Western Europe into an era of novel scientific, economic,
cultural, and spiritual development, so the how-to of technological and economic advancement – part of which was introduced via Japan – and Christianity served as the twin engines behind the Korean modernization.

II. Korean Renaissance: Park’s Industrialization

1. Modernity and Its Sources

Korean modernity has undergone a considerable amount of academic scrutiny; nevertheless, there is still an apparent lack of consensus on central issues. On the one hand, there is a unanimous agreement that Korea has successfully modernized according to more or less traditional Western pattern. Korean modernity is indeed in many ways synonymous to Enlightenment and Westernization. It is represented by such values as: progress, equality, liberty, human rights, individual dignity, and lawfulness (Tu, 1997: 10). Besides, it has come to possess unique characteristics that resulted from interplay between tradition, represented by Confucianism, and modernity, represented by Western values. On the other hand, “although the sources of Korean modernity were Western in origin, Korea’s reception of modernity was mediated by a complicated filtering mechanism – a process of translation begun a generation earlier in Japan and one that continued in Korea under colonial rule” (Shin and Robinson, 1999:10).

Hence, grasping the nature of colonial modernity is essential to navigate in the increasingly complex realities of contemporary Korea. Scholars have been polarized in their opinions about whether the roots of this current modernity were exported from Japan during the years of colonial occupation, or were developed independently of colonial experience during the years of rapid economic reforms, implemented by the Park Chung Hee’s government. This issue is at the core of debate between the three contending historiographies. In Part I, I will go over their main tenets and try to synthesize the findings of contemporary research with my own observations. I approached history as “a continuous interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past” (Carr, 1995:30). Understandably, such inevitably subjective view of indisputable objective historical facts (by the nature of facts) renders any subjective historical interpretation (by the nature of interpretation) to become a virtual battlefield between the contending politics of nationalism. So, the task at hand would be to discern between legitimate claims and irrelevant arguments, avoid any possible traps of card-stacking, and observe the golden mean as a guiding principle.

2. Colonialist Perspective

Scholars on the colonialist side of the debate perceive Japanese imperial expansion in comparison to other imperialist countries’ histories and characterize it as a comprehensively positive process of disseminating advanced culture, technology, social institutions, and introducing new industrial relations to the rest of the underdeveloped nations in Asia. Their research is geared to show how colonial development improved the economic conditions of the native population. These scholars purport to view Japan as
an agency of modernization in Korea, its former colony. It is assumed that Japan exported modernity to Korea, which would have otherwise remained backward or inevitably fall prey to the Western colonization. Sometimes, it is also believed that Japan simply had no other choice but to colonize Korea lest it be colonized itself.

Among positive factors credited to the Japanese imperialism, these scholars mention an apparent growth of industrial and agricultural output during the colonial period; strengthening the role of an authoritarian bureaucratic state, which played a leading role in the industrialization of the 60s; developing of an exhaustive infrastructure, consisting of railroads, factories, and power plants; and introducing modern social institutions and advanced cultural norms to the backward Korean society. In an apparent effort to justify Japan’s violation of Korean sovereignty, these theorists argue that colonization brought benefits in the form of industrialization. The key claim is on continuities between this form of exported colonial modernity and the modernity that was developed as a result of Park’s industrialization. Essentially, the assertion comes down to contention that Koreans would not have modernized in the foreseeable future, have there not been the effect of Japanese colonial push (Jansen, 1984; Peattie, 1984; Ho, 1984).

3. Nationalist Perspective

It goes without saying that such view is extremely difficult to accept for Korean nationalists and Western scholars of a nationalist view. After the liberation, the Korean governments in the north and in the south have promoted research and came up with alternative master-narratives that deny the Japanese colonialism any role in the present day Korean modernity. Let’s consider some of the nationalist claims.

First, doubts are expressed as to the extent of endurance of the growth record under the Japanese occupation, taking into consideration fifteen years of severe social, political, and economic unrest after the end of the colonial period. Second, far greater discontinuities between the colonial and postwar eras are emphasized. Even though the Japanese regime was able to exercise its authority through the powerful bureaucratic mechanism it created, the same mechanism did not produce any productive results during the Syngman Rhee administration. Third, because the basic stance of the colonial government toward Korean enterprise was discriminatory, it is asserted that there was no continuity in the nature of business-government relations from the 1930s through the 1960s. Fourth, in the area of the control of lower classes, although an important social precondition for the postwar development, such as labor repression, was created during the Japanese colonial period, more important developments in education and land reforms occurred only after liberation as a reversal, rather than continuation of colonial social legacies (Haggard and Kang et al., 1997:868).

Scholars opposing the colonial continuity assumption trace the turning point in Korea’s long-term growth to political and institutional changes that occurred after the military coup in 1961. Colonial industrialization is considered a “zero-sum” game, which means that what was gained by one side is lost by the other. Some scholars (Hideki; Cheon; Sin; Hideo; cited in Park, 1999b:129) view it as an enclave-style development, established to feed the needs of the Japanese industrial and military
machine without any consideration of domestic social and economic necessities. Nationalist scholars also argue that a “true” Korean modernity was interrupted by the imposition of the colonial regime, thus depriving the country of its indigenous way of industrialization and creating what was called a “distorted” development.

Nationalist scholars have a hard time admitting that Koreans have learned modernity from Japan. They would try to distinguish between the “true” Korean and “tainted” Japanese modernity (Shin and Robinson, 1999:12). More fundamentally, it appears that admitting to the fact would also bring the nationalist perspective alarmingly close to agreeing that Koreans indeed had no capabilities to become modernized on their own had there been no colonization.

4. Post-Nationalist Perspective

Theorists of the third, post-nationalist or “revisionist,” wing argue that the colonial experience should be approached from a multi-faceted rather than binary perspective. In general, they tend to uphold the idea of continuities in historical development and believe in pluralism of interpreting historical events that may have multiple, intended and unintended, historical implications. Revisionists perceive colonial industrialization as “colonial, dependent development,” not sufficient for full-scale modernization but at least substantial enough to shock and dislocate the traditional society and economy and to create an early stage of capitalism that provided the historical precondition for Korea’s economic growth during the 1960s (Park, 1999:130).

Post-nationalist historiography made a début in a wave of iconoclastic studies in the early 1980s after the Japanese government opened access to many important classified archives. This new research brought to light eye-opening discoveries that provided evidence of structural changes of Korea’s agrarian traditional setting into a dependent but still expanding national economy with modern social institutions springing up in the nascent urban environment. Because of post-nationalist’s strong insistence on historical continuities, some nationalist scholars have treated this historiography as a variation of the colonialist perspective. However, revisionists themselves criticize both the colonialist and nationalist views as value-laden, binary, politicized, pervasive, totalizing, and impervious to historical facts. Besides, both perspectives are said to be based on a-historical assumptions like “what if” or what “would have, could have, should have” been if this or that event had not happened, while a historian and sociologist in a post-nationalist era, presumably, “discovers a persuasive interpretation in the mass of evidence” rather than imposes it from the outside (Eckert, 1999:376).

Karl Mosckowitz (1980), Soon-Won Park (1999), Michael Robinson (1998), and Gi-Wook Shin (1996) contributed to a comprehensive study of colonial modernity. Their research embraced “topics of white- and blue-collar workers, intellectual elites, the urban middle class, and peasant farmers, respectively, and demonstrated that Koreans participated directly and indirectly in the construction of a unique colonial modernity – a modernity that created capitalism, modern technology-oriented cosmopolitanism, an urban middle class, and a consumer culture, in the absence of political emancipation” (Park, 1999b:131). Their study of colonial industrialization essentially clarifies the post-nationalist stance towards the issue of Japanese colonialism.
Noticeably, revisionist scholars agree in praising the modernity situation that was “imposed” on Korea externally. Revisionist scholars intend to prove that there are undeniable continuities between the rapid economic development of the late 20th century and the years of Japanese colonial system. On the other hand, there is a unanimous condemnation of racism and discrimination, practiced by the Japanese in the social context of their relationships with the occupants.

In sum, revisionists postulate that although Japan technically became the source and the model of modernization and moreover a window to the West, this was by no means their intention or purpose, as argued by Japanese scholars. Therefore, they claim that modernization was an unintended consequence of colonization and the Japanese in fact did nothing to modernize Korea. It were Koreans themselves who actively learned the ropes of industrialization and tried to assume a new identity in their complicated experience of the colonial situation. While the Japanese always oppressed, discriminated, and rejected Korean modernity by despising all things Korean, Koreans had to cope with this frustrating and humiliating experience and “collaborate by self-denial” (Park, 1999a:95) groping for direction in their trying to adapt to the new realities, imposed on them, thus developing the so-called “hybrid identity,” which describes a personality split, experienced by those who desired to learn modernity from the Japanese, but would never associate themselves with the colonizers and their cause (Park, 1999a:103).

Warren (1980) theoretically anticipates and reiterates this agency thesis in the earlier mentioned studies and refutes the nationalist dichotomy of “autonomous/indigenous” vs. “dependent/distorted” development. Dependency, in his view, is the result of choice and not of colonial domination. And once the choice was made, “the chosen path of development necessarily forecloses other options of combinations of options” (Warren, 1980:167-168), which leaves no ground for the “what if” scenario.

5. The Golden Mean

Let us consider the differences between the nationalist and post-nationalist views. Although they appear to contend each other, upon a closer inspection, they have more in common than may be perceived at the first glance. The revisionists take an intolerable stance towards attempts to legitimize and whitewash the phenomena of Japanese colonization (and in this they concur with nationalists); however, post-nationalists refute the conventional master narrative of the nationalist scholarship with its black-and-white outlook of the colonial period as a binary confrontation between the occupants and the victimized Koreans. Post-nationalist research presents a “detached portrait of the colonial generation” and shows that, contrary to what the “enclave theory” holds, it was not a passive, resisting, and monolith formation, but rather an ambitious, voluntary, and multifaceted generation striving for self-identity in the humiliating and frustrating circumstances of the Japanese colonial regime. Their main argument rests with the statement that mutually enmeshed social forces, such as nationalism, modernity, and colonialism, shaped the identity of Korean colonial experience. Revisionist authors insist on historical continuities, challenge the conventional dichotomy of Korean historiography, and emphasize the “dynamism and multiple possibilities afforded by competing ideas of nation, modernity, colonialism, communism, and militarism in
Whether or not post-nationalist perspective succeeds to discover irrefutable linkages of colonial modernity with modern society, it should be given credit for providing a comprehensive description of the plethora of responses to colonial modernity. This deserves special attention. Particularly, the complicated and suffocating experience of “hybrid identity” explains the strong Korean nationalist sentiment against all things Japanese and in favor of all things Korean. It seems that the black-and-white dichotomy of the nationalist historiography, where images of few collaborators are juxtaposed against the nation of independence fighters, in fact, stems from this subconscious desire to deal with the “fragmentalized identity” formed during the occupation. Conversely, post-nationalist theory postulates that the response to colonial modernity was multifaceted. Revisionists argue that Korean response to Japanese colonialism was ranging from collaboration by self-denial of those who had families to feed and tried to adapt to the experience on the one hand, to the open revolt of those who, for certain reasons, opted for open confrontation with the authorities, on the other hand.

Elaborately presented data shows that the nascent Korean bourgeoisie and industrial force were formed during the colonial years and became the foundation of the further industrial development. And while the workers could use and capitalize on their technical expertise, acquired through the years of inevitable collaboration with Japanese, they were traumatized and frustrated over their psychological experience of oppression, inferiority, and the effects of personality split. This became the ground source of the particular kind of chauvinism that drives Korean nationalist historiography until today.

In sum, while the colonialist and nationalist perspectives seem to be on the opposing extreme poles of debate, the post-nationalist stance is akin to the Buddhist “middle-path” or the idea of the “golden-mean,” advocated in the Greek philosophy. Such centrist moderation is usually the most sensible approach. This approach recognizes that structural characteristics of state, society, and economy of the colonial period are similar to those of the post-colonial development and argues that these structural similarities are consequential for a full explication of South Korea’s impressive postwar economy. Thus, “Japanese colonial influence on Korea, while ruthless and humiliating, was also decisive in shaping a political economy that later evolved into the high-growth South Korean path to development” (Kohli, 1997:886).

6. Rethinking the Role of the Japanese Element

Trying to dissect modernity into “true Korean” and “distorted Japanese,” nationalist scholars have treated the subject rather emotionally than logically. It is a historical fact that modernization process began in Japan since the Meiji Restoration (1868) – at least a few decades earlier than in Korea. As numerous scholars have shown, characteristics of industrialization process in Korea, both during the colonial and Park Chung Hee’s periods, closely followed the Japanese rendering of Western-European modernity. Although Japan unquestionably deserves recognition of its precedence over Korea in this respect, the more prominent issue of its agency in Korean modernization needs to be clarified and qualified.
Was Japan a benevolent agent of colonial modernization in Korea? Highly unlikely. Contrary to the colonialist claims that Japan volunteered to modernize Korea, historical facts and documents have shown that its real motivations and policies for invasion on the peninsula and annexation were aimed solely at blunt extraction of colonial resources and perpetuation of backwardness, rather than providing a chance to modernize. Governor-general’s legal acts and policies stifling native enterprises, limiting career development for Korean government servants, and restricting technological development of industrial force are major illustrations of that.

Additionally, assertions that the Japanese initiated Koreans toward modernization do not have a sound proof, primarily because the will toward modernization must come from within the agent of change, and cannot be automatically stimulated by external structures and institutions imposed from the outside. These causal structures are activated as constraints or empowerments only after the agents subjectively conceive of a certain course of action (Archer, 2003:15). To illustrate the point, let’s consider the example of strong bureaucratic government machine left intact by the Japanese colonial regime and restarted and reinforced by the American military government in 1945. Colonialist scholars insist that such efficient government was one of the main benefits of the Japanese regime bestowed upon Korea. However, even though President Rhee had this grand tool of authoritarian bureaucracy at his disposal for more than a decade, no take-off of the economy occurred. By contrast, the centralized bureaucracy was used to perpetuate unproductive policies and further dissent into economic dependency.

By looking at the agents of change, we may arrive at some important conclusions about causalities and links between the periods before and after the liberation. Considering the continuity thesis, what hurts Korean nationalist pride the most is, probably, the assumption that the Japanese rule was a necessary precondition for modernizing Korea. To agree with this assumption would mean, first, admitting that Korea itself miserably failed to bring structural and cultural changes necessary for modernization, and, second, that Korean modernization came via Japan, their archrival.

How should the Japanese element in Korean modernization be treated then? We obviously can not ignore it as non-existent. Given the nature of structural causality, we may say that the colonial modernity was one of the several elements that were necessary to move Korea away from tradition and toward modernization. This statement does not qualify the Japanese colonial regime as benevolent toward Korean people. All it does is making a fair evaluation of the role of structural influence in the process of social change. The airplane metaphor from Rostow’s (1961) modernization theory¹ might be:

¹ First stage in this metaphor, the primitive society, is when the nation is hampered by its economic inefficiencies like the low savings rate, lack of work ethic and optimistic outlook on life. This stage is characterized by pre-Newtonian science and technology. However, if there occurs a shift in people’s minds to improve their living conditions and they start to accumulate savings and invest in the future by delaying immediate gratification, such society can graduate into the second stage called “precondition for take-off.” Creating privately owned businesses and encouraging investment in new technologies and industries is an indispensable condition for the second stage. During the third, or “take-off” stage, new industries expand rapidly. Profits from these enterprises are reinvested in new plants and infrastructure. These new industries, in turn, stimulate the services to support them. New technology in agriculture as well as in industry causes massive exit from rural areas and the shaping of a new urbanized society.
of help here. In an extension of his aeronautical comparison, Japanese involvement during both colonial and Park’s periods\(^2\) could be interpreted as fuel, necessary for the take-off. Considering the speed of “economic miracle,” we could even compare Korean economy to a spacecraft with fuel tanks that decouple from the rocket after the fuel has been burnt. Once the take-off is accomplished and the rocket overcomes the force of gravity, the empty fuel tanks are discarded as unnecessary burden for the spacecraft’s engine.

The nationalist scholars’ refusal to admit the role of the Japanese colonial presence is in a way a piece of dispensable burden that stalls the progress of historiography and national consciousness with it. Common people seem to have already got over their “Han” (Korean word that could be translated as “deep resentment”) over the past and moved on by forging new, forward-looking relationships with Japan. A growing number of Korean-Japanese married couples is a good illustration of that. Borrowing a concept of “sunk cost”\(^3\) from economics, it may be said that the nationalist historiography is not willing to recognize that the colonial humiliation is a “sunk cost.” Although it is regrettable that colonial modernity came at a hefty price of a forty-year-long national tragedy, after all, the price is already paid and has no relevance to the present and future, because the actual agents, or pilots in the cockpit of Korean spacecraft headed towards modernization, were Koreans, and not Japanese. After all, it is the name of the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, and the first man on the Moon, Neil Armstrong, and not the names of their vehicles, that matter in history.

III. Korean Reformation: The Advent of Christianity

A theory that interprets modern Korean history in strictly political and economic terms fails to take into account the intangible aspects of the national development, such as national psychology, religion, and family culture. In the light of Weber’s theory of correlation between the success of capitalism and the emergence of Protestant ethic in Europe and America, a discussion of Korean socio-religious history seems appropriate in the following section of this study.

The idea that “something happened” in Korea during the early 60s is profoundly intriguing. The post-nationalist perspective has maintained that although Park Chung Hee’s new economic strategy was important, a “full understanding of South Korean

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\(^2\) It is an established fact that Park’s economic reforms were financed from the Japanese coffers and steered along the Japanese modernization roadmap.

\(^3\) A sunk cost is a cost that has already been incurred and that cannot be changed by any decision made now or in the future.
The economic miracle may not be complete without taking into account the colonial past” (Kohli, 1997:886). Extrapolating this line of reasoning, I suggest that a different, but nonetheless important, factor behind the economic miracle of the 60s should be carefully examined and included into discussion. This factor lies apart from the Japanese colonial influence. Not only does it have nothing to do with colonial roots, but also chronologically predates the Japanese colonial influence in Korea. This factor is the role of Christianity in Korean modernity.

The discussion in Part II attempts to show that even prior to the colonial period, Christianity contributed several essential modern elements to the social fabric of the Choseon Korea. The amount of such contribution grew exponentially after the liberation and played a significant role in the process of transformation from tradition to modernity.

1. Korean Religious Heritage

There are the two worlds in the Korean traditional religious ethos: on the one hand, there is the world of the spiritual beings, and, on the other hand, there is the world of the physical reality. This concept of a human being who lives in the physical world surrounded by the spirits of his ancestors permeates Korean religious understanding and practices in all of the three major religious traditions: shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. An individual is believed to be a crucial link between heaven and earth, between his ancestors and descendants. This idea is so central to the Korean ethos that it was embodied in the philosophy behind the creation of the Korean written language Hangeul, promulgated by King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) in 1446.

Shamanism has laid the quintessential pattern and been the most influential in terms of mediating between human life on Earth and the spiritual world. It has exerted powerful influence upon Koreans, their religious affiliation, notwithstanding. Shamanism could be characterized as a “system of religious practices oriented toward the health, harmony, and prosperity of the small family farm…” (Kendall, 1996:522). Shamanist ceremonies traditionally take place on major family occasions: birth, the coming of age, marriage, death, illness, or bringing a substantial material possession such as a new house or a new cow/car into the family unit. These ceremonies emphasize the goal of

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4 Although it is often stated that Confucianism is not a religion but an ethical teaching, it still can be viewed as religion based on the definition that a “religion is what pursues the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly” (Kim, 2004:472).

5 Although Korean is an authentic language, argued to belong to the Uralic-Altaic group, Koreans did not have their own script for a long time, adapting Chinese characters through a system of phonetic representation, known as Idu. However, such system was highly complicated and insufficient. Therefore, King Sejong decided on a radical change, initiating development of a new alphabetical script that would be simple and adequate to the native sounds. For this task he assembled several scholars in a palace called Jiphyun-jeon and personally supervised their work. Remarkably, the script was based on Oriental philosophy of yung-eun (positive and negative). Therefore, on the one hand, all the 11 vowels appeared as a combination of the three pillars of Oriental philosophy: heaven (a dot), earth (a horizontal line) and man (a vertical line) as an intermediary between the two. On the other hand, all the 17 consonants were based on five fundamental letters representing ohaeng (five primary elements: metal, wood, fire, water, and earth). Thus, eight basic characters were modified by adding strokes and could be expanded to represent virtually any human sound.
harmony between the two opposites: spirit and nature, represented by the relationship between *yang* (positive/male) and *eum* (negative/female). By attending to and offering a proper treatment to appease the guarding spirits of a family, the family unit is believed to secure its proper place in the universe, which is manifested by health, progeny, and prosperity.

Confucianism, with its insistence on strong family values, has particularly expanded on this doctrine and defined paying respect to the ancestors, taking good care of the living parents, and being an exemplary parent to one’s own children as the highest virtue of humanity. This virtue is called filial piety. Confucianism teaches that serving parents, who represent all the previous generations of ancestors including the Creator Himself, or Heaven, should be continued not only while parents are alive but also after their death. If all the filial duties are fulfilled sincerely, then many blessing will follow. In the agrarian society, one of these blessings was that of bountiful crops, which in the modern day could be translated into the blessing of material affluence. However, it is important to notice that the most important blessing was that of living a fulfilling life in one’s social position, while the material and other blessings were believed to be like an echo invariably following those who lead a righteous life. Thus, the blessings are a result and a manifestation of a way of life. The cause and effect relationship between wealth and righteousness is important. When wealth becomes the primary objective, Confucian ceremonies lose their intended purpose and are substituted for a mere superstitious ritual – attempts of manipulating the spiritual realm to extract material gains (Kim, 2004:266-267).

### 2. Christianity and the Indigenous Culture

Andrew Kim (2000) argues that “Christian conversion in South Korea did not involve an exclusivistic change of religious affiliation, meaning that it did not require the repudiation of traditionally held beliefs. Instead, millions of South Koreans eagerly embraced Christianity precisely because the new faith was advanced as an extension or continuation of Korean religious tradition” (Kim, 2000:117). It is maintained that convergence of religious traditions and values, rather than an emplantation of a new value system characterized the acceptance of Christianity in Korea.

The process of conversion to Christianity in Korea occurred not as a radical change of beliefs, values, or identities. Rather, much like a hand fits the glove, Koreans experienced no real contradictions between the Christian values and the Confucian ethics. It was a conversion of the traditional religious form with a modern Western doctrine. Indeed, the Golden Rule of Christianity: “Do onto others as you would wish them do onto you” fits perfectly with the Confucius teaching of: “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” (Analects, 15:23) and a similar maxim from Buddhism: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful” (Udanavarga 5:18). A noted historian of Korean church, Samuel Moffet, pointed out that: “Like Confucianism, it [Christianity] taught righteousness and revered learning; like Buddhism, it sought purity and promised a future life; like the shamanists, Christians believed in answered prayer and miracles” (Moffet, 1962:52). Koreans imported the new religion and added to it several new traits and rituals from the traditions of shamanism and
Confucianism. Essentially, the success of the Gospel was based on the affinity of the Christian message to the moral code of the host country and on the skillful theological presentation of this affinity and utility to the believers by the early missionaries and Korean pastors.

Further, the geo-political origin of the Protestant faith, the fact that it comes from wealthy industrialized nations of northern Europe and America, was of particular significance to South Koreans. In preaching the three-fold blessing of Christianity, discussed earlier, Korean pastors appealed to the Confucian/Buddhist principle of just retribution, deeply seated in the Korean mind. This principle holds that material abundance, health, and other blessings follow the righteous, and thus these blessings should be viewed as a token of Heavenly fortune. Koreans were keen on choosing a religion that had a proven record of success in industrialized society for they believed that if they could repeat this record of faith, they would be granted similar prosperity. One of the members of Gaehwadang, Korean Radical Reformist Party, wrote in the 1880s, “When we look at the situation of the world today, the European and American nations, believing in Christianity, are flourishing the most, but in our country (Korea) because Confucianism and Buddhism have all declined, national power has weakened and we have been invaded” (Kim, 2004:357). Just as Korean businessmen have been trying to “catch up” with the West in industrialization process, so have Korean Christians been determined to outdo the West and become the champions of faith for God, like Abraham, Jacob, or Moses, in order to attract God’s blessings to the individual and the nation as a whole.

And outdo they did: doubling every decade since the 1960s to the 1980s, an unprecedented record in the history of contemporary Christianity, Protestant Christians alone represented more than a quarter of South Korea’s 40 million population by 1989 (Kim, 2000:117). Foreigners visiting Korea can’t help but marvel at the vitality and dynamism of Korean Christian churches and the ubiquitous neon-light red crosses dominating the night skyline of virtually every city and town.

The fire of faith has spread beyond Korean national borders and since free travel abroad was allowed, the number of Korean missionaries has been growing. In 2000, according to the most conservative calculations, Korean Protestant Churches sent 8,103 missionaries to 156 countries of the world (International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 2003). Catholic Church of Korea has also been sending out missionaries abroad, but it does not disclose the numbers. In 2004, The New York Times reported that “South Korea has rapidly become the world’s second largest source of Christian missionaries, only a couple of decades after it started deploying them. With more than 12,000 abroad, it is second only to the United States and ahead of Britain” (The New York Times, 2004).

Having outlined the causes and dynamics behind the miraculous spread of Christianity in Korea, it is now important to identify the role that this religion played in Korean modernization. The success of industrialization was not only temporally correlated with the spectacular proliferation of Christianity, but also the former is directly related to the latter as a result to its cause. Just as in northern Europe and the United States of America the “spirit of capitalism” fed on the Protestant ethics according to Max Weber, it is argued that the miraculous development of Christianity in
Korea, which coincided with the similarly remarkable rate of industrialization, was a decisive factor of success in the modernization process that occurred between the 1960s and the 1990s. Following is the discussion of some of the effects that Christianity had on Korean society.

3. Egalitarianism

Although Confucian ethics and the moral code of Christianity do correspond significantly in that they both aspire to unselfish living and higher moral standards, which are necessary for social cohesion and development, there is a significant difference between the two. While Confucianism emphasized highly rigid and stratified social structure, Christianity is egalitarian in its essence, and this characteristic had a profound impact on Korean society. Unlike Confucian ethics, the Gospel appealed more broadly to the underprivileged social strata, encouraging social movements for equality, liberation from poverty, and abolition of gender discrimination, thus causing exponential growth.

The Biblical message, emphasizing human freedom and empowerment,6 has dealt a fatal blow to the custom, common in the Choseon society, of ascribing one's misfortunes to fate, prompted the adoption of a more optimistic outlook on life, and unleashed the dormant creative potential of the broader population. In analogy with Weber’s hypothesis about the role of Protestant ethics in European industrialization, we may postulate that Korean Christianity was partially responsible for breaking up the traditional mode of life and realizing a new, Protestant-type, “rationalized” approach to life, work, and profit. In sum, Christianity strengthened certain beneficial conservative aspects of Confucian society, while challenging other, restrictive elements of the established tradition.

Particularly in the case of women’s rights, Christianity helped to re-evaluate traditional views on women’s social role and their contribution to such important areas as education, work, and family life. Interestingly, Korean women were strongly motivated to convert to Christianity because of its egalitarian teachings that promised the coveted emancipation (Yu, 1991:34). Evangelical work liberated women from their confinement within the four walls of the family home. They could begin to express themselves, discover a new sense of accomplishment by adopting new roles in fields such as education and medicine.

The first women’s educational institution in Korea, the Ehwa Hakdang, was established in 1886 by Mrs. Mary Scranton, one of the first Protestant missionaries to Korea. Although the school began with only one student, because of the patronage of Queen Min, it gradually began to play a very prominent role in the movement for women’s enlightenment and emancipation, and evolved into what is now known as the Ehwa Woman’s University (Underwood, 1926:113).

Apparently, the initiative of Mrs. Scranton inspired Korean women’s rights

6 “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (The Holy Bible, KJV. Gen 1:28).
advocates and set in motion the entire native movement for women’s liberation. In the following decade, individuals such as Park Yong Hyo, Yu Kil Chun, members of the Enlightenment Party, and Suh Jae Pil, the publisher of Dongnip Shinmun (The Independence Paper), recognized that women’s empowerment could get their country on the way of modernization and improve its social, economic, and political standing. They called for mandatory education of girls, prohibition of keeping concubines, and permission of remarriage for widows.

This initiative of individuals galvanized women to organize in groups and work together to improve their lives. In 1898, a school for girls was established by an organization called Chanyang Hoe. Called Sunsong Girls School, it was the first girl-school in Korea without religious affiliation. Its founding organization is also credited for issuing the first declaration of women’s rights in Korea (Korean Women’s Development Institute, 2004).

As Korea began to develop into a commercial society, and increasingly more goods and services that were previously considered luxury items became available to the average person, the contours of class began to blur, and it became more difficult to distinguish people’s status by their clothes, cars, or homes. The formerly impenetrable barriers between different ranks became permeable and the gaps between the rungs of the social ladder diminished, thus creating a more egalitarian society, greater social mobility, larger variety of choice, and encouraging higher aspirations and bigger dreams. The improved living standard and higher expectations raised the level of satisfaction of the common person. Particularly, the lower classes could no longer tolerate their subservient and disadvantaged position and began to contend with representatives of the next highest social level for a coveted position, the next rung up on the status ladder.

It is common to associate modernity with democracy, and because industrialization does facilitate the democratization of society, it is also tempting to consider it a main cause of democratic transformation. However, research has shown that economic development by itself is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the development of democracy in a given country (Fukuyama, 1997; Przeworski, 1996). This point is well illustrated by the case of Korea.

The high social mobility and competition for better social standing, described above, should have hypothetically led to a more egalitarian society with equal opportunities and broader political and civil rights for all. However, in Korea, the aspirations of people for a modern vision that included political and social democratization accompanied by freedom of expression ran against a wall of formidable resistance from a succession of military regimes. Political and civil freedoms were sacrificed for the sake of national economic development. In 1972, the last vestiges of the democratic framework implemented after the liberation were obliterated by the Yushin system, which restructured the government and civil operations to suit the authoritarian style of President Park Chung Hee. The confrontation between the demand for democratization from below and the forces of repression from above created an explosive social situation by the end of the 1970s.

Calls for salvation of Korean democracy were most strongly voiced from the ranks of Korean Christianity. Christians comprised a large percentage of those who were arrested and incarcerated for anti-government activities during the three decades of
military rule. The Christian movement for democratic reforms gave birth to what is called Minjung theology, or theology of the people. Developed in the 1970s, this liberation theology is an amalgam of Korean nationalistic concepts such as Han and fundamental Christian ideas such as that of an individual's worth as a reflection of God. Notable dissident politicians as former presidents Kim Young Sam, Presbyterian, and Kim Dae Jung, Roman Catholic, subscribe to this theory (Lee, 1988:19-20). Kim Dae Jung was particularly strident in his anti-government activities, which brought the wrath of the military rulers upon him: he was kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned, and nearly murdered. On the organizational level, the Catholic Farmer’s Movement, established in 1966, and the Protestant Urban Industrial Mission, established in 1958, were both viewed as dissident organizations by the government, and are examples of a considerable number of Christian-affiliated groups rallying for human rights, higher wages, and improved working conditions for those in lower classes of society (CBCK, 2005; Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1990; Kim, 2005).

On balance, both Catholic and Protestant Christianity were a crucial force for democratization during the modern Korean era, particularly during the period of industrialization. The activities of Christian-affiliated groups and organizations were aimed at eliminating the one-sided policies that were focused only on economic growth and ignored or deliberately stifled the human rights, civil and political freedoms, and democratic institutions, commonly associated with the Western model of modern society.

4. Literacy and Education

Both Catholicism and Protestantism made undeniable and lasting contributions to the increase of literacy and promotion of education in feudal Choseon. Since the late 18th century, the Catholic Church propagated the use of Hangeul, requiring its followers to master the original Korean alphabet. Literacy was made a prerequisite for admission to the Holy Communion (Whittaker, 1983:40). While women were still excluded from the formal educational system, the practice of reading the Scripture significantly raised the female literacy rate.

Although encouraging literacy among the underprivileged was an important contribution of Korean Christianity, its major accomplishment, with more far-reaching consequences for modernization, was the introduction of the Western higher learning on the peninsula. In as much as the European concept of “university” was entirely foreign to the Choseon educational system, the establishment of several tertiary schools by Protestant missionaries in the late 19th century was a quantum leap forward to modernity. This becomes evident when we consider the fundamental difference between the teaching approaches of the East and West and the contrasting views on learning of the fathers of Eastern and Western thought, Confucius and Socrates.

Confucius always insisted that he was a mere “lover and transmitter” of classical knowledge and not a creator of a new school of thought. He perceived of knowledge as a body of objective truths, an inheritance that a student receives from the teacher via a monologue. This explains the high degree of authority granted to the teacher and the emphasis on lecture-style education and memorization of sources in Korean educational practice. The learning process in a hagwon, a private academy, is strictly controlled and
the progress of each student is measured through the admission of standardized tests consisting of multiple-choice questions, or requires the exact replication of the study material.

Socrates, by contrast, believed that knowledge should be discovered by the student himself by means of critical thinking and through dialogue with the teacher. This great thinker went even as far as objecting to any written text because it is not interactive and provides only unvarying answers to questions. Consequently, in the West, a teacher’s authority is questioned by default and knowledge emerges through a dialectical process of questioning and receiving satisfactory answers. Additionally, certain forms of logical reasoning, like that of the syllogism, are employed to analyze the information provided and inferences made by the educator (Meijer, 2005:137).

This fundamental difference between the two approaches to the acquisition of knowledge reveals the extent of the gap between the public school and the university in Korea. It is also an indication of how much Korean students have to adjust when they leave secondary school, which is until now very reminiscent of the *seodang*, the Confucian village school, and enter a university, a pure Western creation (Meijer, 2005:141). Whereas the influence of the colonial past is still present in various elements of Korean public schools, like the ubiquitous school-uniforms and left-hand traffic in the hallways, the Korean university system, although developed in full scale only after the Korean War, has clear Western roots that precede the Japanese occupation by more than two decades.

American Protestant missionaries, Presbyterian Horace Underwood and Methodists Henry Appenzeller, Horace Allen, William Scranton and his mother, Mary Scranton arrived in Korea roughly at the same time, in 1884 (Kim, 2004:365; Underwood, 1926:9). Because of their Bible-centered approach to faith, these missionaries relied on reading the Scripture for educational purposes even more than their Catholic counterparts. A year earlier, John Ross, a missionary in Manchuria, translated the Gospel of Luke into Korean and distributed it in Korea (Kim, 2004:362). These missionaries began their work by setting up churches, hospitals, orphanages, and founding the first modern educational institutions in Korea. Not only have these institutions survived until present, but they also have become bastions of enlightenment and, as in case of the Yonsei University established by Underwood, the most coveted place for those aspiring to a modern higher education degree. By 1910, out of 2, 250 authorized private schools in Korea, 796 were of Western missionary origin (Son, 1985:323). These missionary-founded schools accommodated over 41,000 students, which was a double the overall enrollment in the government schools of that time. Thus, the church de facto was the major provider of a complete system of education in Korea (Kim, 1997).

The results of the early Christian influence on today's educational system are evident. The Confucian Sungkyungkwan University and Buddhist Dongguk University are rare exceptions, while the majority of higher education institutions in Korea have Christian roots: Yonsei University, Ewha Woman’s University, Sogang University, Song Shil University, Hanshin University, Kyemyoung University, Hannam University, and Seoul Women’s College are few examples. Although by 1900 Korean Christians comprised only 0.45 percent of the population (Reynalds, 2003), the early missionaries’ strategy of teaching the original phonetic Korean alphabet through religious literature
and creating new educational and medical institutions were major factors in replacing the feudal social structure with a society that granted more opportunities for women and representatives of underprivileged social classes.

5. National Destiny

The notion of “national destiny,” albeit intangible, figures prominently in Korean history. Strong nationalist sentiment, which can be defined in a broader sense as loyalty and devotion to one’s country and ambition for national progress is perhaps one of the most striking features of both South and North Korea. Carter J. Eckert points out that Korea’s nationalism, defined as a national “will to greatness,” played an important role in the course of the national history. Eckert defines this “will” as “a certain psychic presumption that Korea is inherently a great nation, both destined and entitled to play a leading role in the history of the world” (Eckert, 2000:119).

Koreans have been supported by the idea of national destiny through the years of colonial oppression, rebuilding the nation, and the present global aspirations. A lot of this is implicit in the national psyche, the depositary of centuries of restless movement towards liberation and self-determination; however, there are certain explicit manifestations. Examples are the mythical bear, striving to become human in the dark cave, the intrepid Koguryeo warrior, brandishing his sword in the hills of Manchuria, celebrated women-golfers or baseball players, capturing national headlines with their triumphs overseas, the famed Korean entrepreneurs striving to dominate the world market, “Being the Reds,” or America and Japan bashing, Koreans have been historically driven by their “will to greatness.”

Christianity has appealed greatly to the nationalist sentiment of Koreans. In fact, it has been argued that the most significant factor of the overwhelming response to the Gospel was the staunch anti-Japanese stance taken by Christians during the colonial period. Just as the Communist leaders in North Korea gained their legitimacy from participation in the guerilla fight against the Japanese, so did Christians gain the approval of the South Korean nation through their resistance to the Japanese regime. The celebrated Declaration of Independence of March 1st, 1919, was signed by thirty-three religious and professional leaders of Korea, fifteen of whom were Christians (Whittacker, 1983:63). This is notable given the fact that at that time Christians comprised a mere 1.3 percent, or 200,000 of the total 16 million of the population. Even more remarkably, in the brutal aftermath of the Declaration, during the colonists’ suppression of the March 1st Movement, of 9,458 arrested participants over 22 percent or 2,087 people were Christians (Kim, 1997). These numbers testify that Christianity attracted the most active and socially involved individuals of that time. The Christian refusal to worship the Japanese Emperor and the consequent intense persecution by the colonial regime further forged identification of Christianity with patriotic sentiment.

Additionally, Christian doctrine reinforced the notions of greatness and national destiny, spelled out in books such as Cheonggammnok and embodied in the sectarian religious movements such as the “Dangun Sect” or the Unification Church. Christianity thus strengthened the deeply rooted messianism that regarded Korea as a type of a new Israel. Drawing on easily recognizable parallels between the long and troubled histories
of the two nations, which were invaded, divided, and persecuted on numerous occasions, Christian pastors were able to appeal to profound sentiments of Han and the “will to greatness.” It even became popular to write the name of the old Choseon dynasty as “Chosen,” thus unambiguously referring to the special role of Korea in God’s providence at the return of Christ. Apparently, the idea of a new chosen nation was so powerful that in 1944 the colonial administration completely suspended the activities of the three Christian denominations for their emphasis on eschatology: the Holiness Church, the Seventh Day Adventists, and Fenwick’s East Asian Christian Church. The governor-general must have concluded that the second coming of Christ would be an ominous event for the Empire of the Rising Sun (Moffet, 1962:75). After the liberation, these notions resurfaced with even more zest and power. A testimony to this is well expressed in the following quote from Harold Hong: “We strongly believe that we are now the chosen people of God and that we are under the special providence of God. This strong faith has actually made the Korean church the most rapidly growing church in the world” (Hong, 1983:181). A conviction of this sort undoubtedly served as a motivating factor for the whole Korean nation to compete with the Western Christianity in particular and the industrialized nations in general in order to overtake the rest of the modern world in virtually every aspect of human endeavor: be it religious fervor, free-market savvy, or international sports competition.

6. Ancestral Commitment, Family Coherence, and Work Ethics

Because of its reinforcement of the traditional family values, Christianity should also be partially credited for what has been dubbed as the “Korean economic miracle.” The Confucian tradition, centered on the notion of filial piety, connects society vertically in a very strong way. This resulted in often a more serious outlook on life than was the case in rival societies. Each member of the society is responsible for his or her actions before the family and the clan. The elders and ancestors fulfill a similar function for Confucian work-ethic as does God for the Puritan work-ethic. Thus, it might be argued that by coalescing with traditional Confucian values and adopting certain new customs such as the ancestor veneration rites, Christianity in Korea has reinforced the traditionally strong work ethic, which became instrumental in modernizing Korean society.

In the workplace, Christian values were introduced and reinforced through programs of industrial and army chaplaincy that were established in the 1950s and increased their influence during the 1960s and 1970s. These programs were very successful in factories and mines because of the strategy of dispatching worker-evangelists to spread the Gospel man-to-man in a natural, informal setting. In the South Korean army, where after the civil war the majority of the male population has had to serve for at least two years, these programs became equally important. Research has shown that a considerable number of soldiers were converted to Christianity during their military service. For example, according to the army religion survey of 1955, the proportion of Christians to the total army population increased from five to fifteen percent in just four years (Clark, 1971:255, cited in Kim, 1997).

Industrial and army chaplains were effective because they not only appealed to
the people’s intellect through preaching Christian message but also attracted new converts with their personality and high moral standards. Although it is a generalization, nevertheless, it could be said that when Koreans are faced with a decision, especially in life-changing situations, they prefer soul-searching to brain-storming. Because of this general tendency of Koreans to place more importance on emotions such as “feels right” rather than on intellectual deliberations such as “makes sense,” making friends with the industrial workers and winning their trust through daily interaction in the workplace was a sure way to attract many proselytes to the Christian faith. While chaplains worked hard to propagate their religion and increase membership for their churches, at the same time they acted as role models of Protestant work ethic and reinforced productive habits that aided in the process of industrialization.

Very few observers expected Korea to develop as rapidly as it did in the years following the devastation after the Korean War. Economists have been puzzled by how the Korean economy was able to consistently achieve rates of output higher than the level of input would theoretically allow them to be. Professor Innwon Park of Korea University suggested that the notion of “miracle” was born because economists did not take into account the cultural dimensions of the Korean economic development. Park suggests that workers in Korea were more productive than their counterparts in the West because they received additional support from the family unit. In the West, wives typically file for divorce if they can not see their husbands regularly. In Korea, both wives and children were supportive of their husbands and fathers, accepting their extended work hours and virtual lack of holidays during the first three decades of industrialization. Although this is no longer true for the twenty-first century Korea, it is unquestionably applicable for this retrospective research.

Thus, it has been argued that Korean Christianity did not simply coincide with the country’s rapid economic development, but rather has been an active agent of democratization and modernization, which, together with other political and economic factors, shaped the form of indigenous Korean modernity.

IV. Conclusion: The Hand that Fits the Glove

Korean colonial experience was undoubtedly traumatic because Japanese acted not as benevolent givers, but rather as oppressive extractors of Korean indigenous resources. The nature of discriminatory labor and education policies proves that the colonial government never intended to share the modernity with Koreans. However, it was the oppressed that seized the opportunity for modernization, thus becoming an active agent of social and economic change. From this standpoint, Japan should not be credited for success or failure of modernization process in Korea. Nevertheless, the Japanese should admit the responsibility for the crimes committed by the colonial regime as well as the traumatic consequences of its policies on the Korean nation.

The study attempted to show that, first, the roots of colonial modernity are essentially Korean because of the primary role that Koreans played in modernization and industrialization as human agents of change. Second, Park’s modernization drive in the 60s~70s has undeniably indigenous origins as well. On the basis of these two
premises, it is possible that even without further evidence of continuity, these two periods are linked by the fact that modernization was initiated and realized by the blood, sweat, and tears of Korean people that were propelled by their incessant “will to greatness” in order to establish themselves as an industrialized society and modernized nation.

How close are the nationalist and post-nationalist viewpoints? Although these two perspectives clash over the existence of linkages between the colonial and post-liberation kind of modernity, they, in fact, may not be too much different from each other. Both perspectives come down to one essential point of establishing Korean agency in creating modernity. It seems that nationalist historiography could possibly embrace the issue more broadly, rather than just limiting it to “true” modernity as opposed to a “distorted” one. Things that were distorted, like the hybrid identity of the colonized, should be taken into account. However, these negative experiences should not put a blindfold on historical perspective of Korean modernization as a multi-faceted historical process with both positive and negative consequences.

How close are the colonialist and post-nationalist perspectives? What is different between them? Close enough – to the extent that some might even call the latter “post-colonial.” Indeed, both arguments rely heavily on the recognition of the role of the Japanese colonial regime as a conduit between Korea and the West in terms of introducing the foundations of technological and economic advancement. The pioneering position of Japan in terms of timing of the industrialization process is important, but temporary precedence may not be exclusively causal to the modernization of Korean society. The two perspectives differ in their qualification of the colonial modernization. While the colonialists argue that there were only positive consequences of the Japanese occupation, the revisionists insist on a multi-consequential perspective, which holds that Korean modernity was an “unintended consequence” of colonization.

It is maintained that a review of the external, political, and economic development alone should go hand in hand with an analysis of its internal, religious, and cultural development. The historical precedents of Europe in the late Middle Ages powerfully illustrate the argument. The Reformation and the Renaissance worked as the twin engines propelling Western Europe into an era of novel scientific, economic, cultural, and spiritual development. As the Europeans appropriated the Greco-Roman classics and patriarchal Catholicism for the development of Renaissance culture and Protestantism, respectively, so Korea built upon the foundations of Western technological and economic advancement – part of which were introduced via Japan – and Christianity.

On the basis of strong sense of national destiny, ancestral commitment, communal homogeneity, and family coherence, Koreans were able to thoroughly enmesh these new imports in their traditional culture, which adds an important causal factor to explain why free market economy and Christianity could become powerful factors of positive change and rapid development in Korea, whereas they failed to usher in such development in other Asian or African countries.

It was shown that although Christianity could not boast a significant representation among the Korean population before the colonial period, it nevertheless played a significant role in dislodging the backward mechanisms of Choseon society, reinforcing the viable conservative social norms, and inducing the minds of Koreans toward
modernity via religious, academic, and other modern institutions. During the colonial period, the anti-Japanese stance of Korean Christians resulted in strong identification of this foreign religion with the nationalist cause and contributed toward its remarkable expansion in the decades following liberation.

The issue of post-colonial development is central to the discussion of East-Asian modernity because of the impact of Japanese colonialism. It is truly mystifying how some countries were able to “put themselves together” and break the vicious cycle of underdevelopment: low income, low savings and investment, low prices of primary products, low skills, and low scale of production. The tendency to approach the mystery has been in juxtaposing colonial and post-colonial facts of economy and society and trying to locate differences or similarities between them. This study agrees with the proposition that historical events are of lasting significance and supports the post-nationalist argument that several characteristics of post-colonial development were although unintended but a worthwhile consequence of the colonial modernity. However, it is also maintained that apart from the colonial influence, there was another factor that played a decisive role in the Korean economic miracle. This role is assigned to Korean Christianity. The study has shown that Christianity and industrialization were the twin-engines that propelled the Korean nation toward modernity.

Additionally, in line with the thesis of primary causality of human agents, it was argued that certain elements of Korean national character, such as national destiny, ancestral commitment, communal homogeneity, and family coherence predisposed the success of industrialization at the same time as these same characteristics inclined Koreans to be more receptive to Christianity than their neighbors were. A metaphor of the hand that fits the glove would be appropriate to illustrate this point. So far, the “glove,” or the structure, has been in the spotlight of the discussion; however, the “hand,” or the agents, was presumed to somehow adjust its shape to the specifications of the imported piece of garment. This is by far a gratuitous assumption: both practically, when shopping, and theoretically, when discussing the causes and dynamics of social and economical development. The hand has to fit the glove for the latter to serve its purpose. By the same token, social phenomena should be analyzed from the standpoint that agents play a primary role: they negotiate the influence of the causative factors of structural elements, and the outcome is decided through the unending process of internal conversation within the individual and collective agents (Archer, 2003).

In conclusion, it is important to place the subject matter of the study into proper perspective as related to the general discussion in social theory. How could the case of Korean modernization be relevant to the study of social systems and what implications could this research bear on the scholarly debate in general? The development of civilizations is rarely a quantum leap but rather a relay race that can be characterized by mutual borrowing and “creative adaptation.” Greeks developed their culture by soliciting ideas and narratives from the vast Hellenic world. The Romans, while still under the Etruscan rule, adopted the farming, construction, and weaponry skills of their rulers. In the later period, the Roman culture has also borrowed extensively from its Greek counterpart to produce what is known as the Greco-Roman culture. Our modern Western civilization sprung out of the discovery during the Middle Ages of the ancient documents from the Hellenistic Age, giving birth to the phenomenon known as the
Renaissance.

In the eighties, there was a wide spread anticipation of the advancement of a new “Pacific Era” with the center of civilization moving away from the Atlantic and Europe to the Pacific and Asia. After the slowdown in the nineties of several East-Asian economies, especially those of Japan and the Four Tigers, some scholars have raised doubts in the sustainability of the East-Asian development (Krugman, 1997). Hence, the notion of the new Pacific-centered civilization has lost some of its luster in the eyes of the general public. However, not everyone has given up on the idea. And while the economies of the newly industrialized nations in Asia continue to churn out positive growth rates, the global trend away from the “Old Europe” continues. Thus, living in the time of such global change it is appropriate to consider Korean phenomenon as part of the global tendency, and what has happened in Korea may be as well a sign of the things to come. Most of the points discussed in relation to Korea, to a greater or lesser degree, are part and parcel of the efficient social infrastructure, and the indestructible power and the dynamism of Asia Inc.

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