

## Christianity in Korea or Korean Christianity? *Kristietība Korejā vai korejiešu kristietība?*

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### Abstract

Taking into account all pros and cons, Christianity, which came into Korea from the West can be truly qualified as ‘Korean Christianity.’ It has by no means weakened Korea’s specific identity; instead, it has absorbed many local traditions (including Korean shamanistic practices), promoted Korean national self-confidence during its colonisation by Japan, given impetus to the modernisation of society through the dismantling of the class system, and thus also allowed the Korean tradition of Confucianism to be reborn under new circumstances.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Korea, Buddhism, Shamanism, Confucianism, modernisation, independence.

Any efforts to draw strict divisions between civilisations based on Christianity as the foundation of Western identity as opposed to ‘Eastern religions’, for Eastern identity do not reflect the multifaceted reality of the world, nor do they provide an answer to the question why the societies in Europe, the United States and Asia are in fact so different. A 2014 study, for example, showed the enormous rise of Christianity in China and suggested that the People’s Republic of China (officially an atheist country) “[..]is now poised to become not just the world’s number-one economy but also its most numerous Christian nation.”<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, China is increasingly offering its own non-Western identity as an alternative on both the national and international scale, emphasising its social stability and harmony, and underpinning this concept with values inherent in traditional Chinese culture and found in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and other classics.<sup>2</sup> In regard to Christianity in the Near and Far East, let us remember that the modern Western superpowers have never spared Christians more than other hostages in

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<sup>1</sup> The Telegraph Group. China poised to lose its atheist tag in just 15 years // *Gulf News*. April 26, 2014, A 16.

<sup>2</sup> Wu, You. “The Rise of China with Cultural Soft Power in the Age of Globalization”. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 5, May 2018, pp. 763–778.

political-military situations. For example, the Nagasaki area, which was destroyed by an American atomic bomb, was a centre of the Christian faith in Japan, and therefore “in a single flash the Truman administration killed more Christians than in the whole history of Japanese persecution.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, we may express astonishment regarding South Korea, which until recently prepared the world’s second-largest number of Christian missionaries, surpassed only by the United States.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to understand that Christianity has by no means weakened Korea’s specific identity; instead, it has absorbed many local traditions (including Korean shamanistic practices), promoted Korean national self-confidence during its colonisation by Japan, given impetus to the modernisation of society through the dismantling of the class system, and thus also allowed the Korean tradition of Confucianism to be reborn under new circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning many factors have dictated the incomprehension of European (and Western) missionaries when becoming familiar with the Korean religious mentality. The Asian religions that prevailed in Korea focused on the earthly life, while in Christianity the afterlife is more important. Besides, the original sin theory of Christianity was not the case of Korean thought. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when early Catholic mission started in Korea, it was dominated entirely by Neo-Confucianism supported by the ruling Chosŏn dynasty – and the ruling *yangban* class imposed upon its subjects the importance of faithful service to society and Confucian moral ethics.<sup>6</sup> This sparked a number of disagreements between missionaries and Korean scholars, which eventually led to persecution of Catholics starting with 1801 and continuing as mass executions over the several next decades.<sup>7</sup> From the point of the agnostic, rationalist and society-oriented Confucianism, the Christianity was at best a curious superstition, some kind of marginal Buddhism or even less worthy pursuit.<sup>8</sup> The theory of heaven and hell was perceived as psychologically understandable desire, rooted in the selfish nature of human beings.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Christianity was considered as destroying the social order, because it placed God above parents and the king in contrast to Confucianism, which stressed the paternal relationship between the king and his people, as well as filial piety as the most essential virtues.<sup>10</sup> Why, then, the Christianity, despite its initial failures started its

<sup>3</sup> Dougill, J. *In Search of Japan’s Hidden Christians*. Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Moll, Rob. “Missions Incredible. South Korea sends more missionaries than any country but the U.S. And it won’t be long before it’s number one.” *Christianity Today. A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction*, 2006. Available at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/march/16.28.html> [accessed January 3, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> See: *Introduction to Korean Spirituality*. Seo Jinseok and Kaspars Kļaviņš (eds.). Riga, University of Latvia Press, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Choi, Jai-Keun. *Early Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Hwang, Kyung Moon. *A History of Korea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Choi, Jai-Keun. *Early Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005, p. 213.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

victory march in Korea? First, it was because in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Kingdom of Great Chosŏn, regardless of the official ideology of harmony, stability and human enlightenment was on the brink of a social explosion. As a hierarchical society based on birth and bloodlines, the Chosŏn Dynasty, due to external and internal disturbances, developed into a cruelly oppressive social system, where people with lower status were under lifelong oppression.<sup>11</sup> Discrimination of women,<sup>12</sup> widespread slavery, bound servitude<sup>13</sup> and strict segregation of society<sup>14</sup> were based on ruthless corporal punishment and absolute control. If we use the method of analogy in the assessment of historical events, the situation in Korea at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could be to a certain extent compared to the Roman Empire during its collapse, when the Christianity as the ideology of the oppressed social strata gained increasing adherence, yet in the Korean case the new religion came from the West and barbarians – unlike Germans, these were ‘barbarians from the oceans’ – Western imperialists (Americans, the French) with whom open conflicts had to be faced.<sup>15</sup>

A special feature was that the Western ‘barbarians’, among whom Christian missionaries represented handlers of peaceful dialogues rather than invaders, charmed with their knowledge of technology, which had been gaining recognition already since the successful Jesuit activities in China. At the same time, the Confucianism gradually lost the freshness of a teaching based of empirical principles, which dictated increasing openness among the ruling social layers with regard to “Practical Learning.”<sup>16</sup> Yet the decisive factor was that in 1910, when Korea fell under Japanese rule, Koreans did not associate Christianity, which had already gained considerable approval, with any doctrine forced from outside. On the contrary, it became a uniting force within the anti-colonial resistance movement and remained such until the Japanese collapse as a result of World War II. The official persecution of Christianity in Korea ended 1884 and since then Protestant missionaries started to enter Korea in large numbers, and as a result Korea became known as ‘wonder of the modern mission.’<sup>17</sup> These were specifically Protestant missionaries who pioneered the introduction of modern education, which promoted patriotism and desire for national independence amongst Koreans during the Japanese colonisation.<sup>18</sup>

However, the adoption of Christianity in Korea also had deeper social and psychical-emotional reasons. It should be taken into account that Buddhism,

<sup>11</sup> Joon-sik, Choi. *Folk-religion. The Customs in Korea*. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2006, pp. 3, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Hwang, Kyung Moon. *A History of Korea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Choi, Jai-Keun. *Early Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Hwang, Kyung Moon. *A History of Korea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 123–127.

<sup>16</sup> Choi, Jai-Keun. *Early Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Oh, Kang-nam. “The Christian-Buddhist Encounter in Korea”. Buswell, Robert, E.; Lee, Timothy S. *Christianity in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006, p. 373.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

which Buddhist monks from Korea once introduced also in Japan, had deep roots in Korea. However, the Chosŏn Dynasty had oppressed Buddhism in favour of the leading Confucianism, until Buddhism became almost exclusively the religion of women and rural people<sup>19</sup>, gaining an ever-increasing influence on the folk-religion of the rural population.<sup>20</sup> This part of population was psychologically ready for the message of Christianity, which, like Buddhism, is more based on practical persistent improvement of one's own qualities rather than formal performance of rituals accepted by ruling elite of civil servants.

Another even more important phenomenon in promoting Christianity as a religion of revelation is Korean shamanism. One can fully agree with Donald Baker: "Many Koreans preferred the individual variations and the personal emotional release allowed in revival meetings because that was the sort of religiosity they had grown accustomed to in shaman rituals."<sup>21</sup> Like shamanism, spiritual ecstasy also occupies a significant role in Christian Mysticism, especially in the religious awakening movements of Protestantism (Great Awakening) in Europe and the USA in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries – Protestant missionaries introduced the methods they practiced in Korea. At the same time, Korean congregations adopted many elements from shamanism. Seeing of visions, the interpretation of dreams, the active search for personal connection to the spiritual world (God)<sup>22</sup> in Korea were automatically associated with shamanic practices, hence, intensive prayers were perceived as analogous to in-depth meditations characteristic to shamanism. Along with slaves, shamans under Chosŏn rule belonged to the lowest social layer (ch'ŏnmin)<sup>23</sup>, which in certain cases might have promoted the appeal to the Christian egalitarianism, at the same time identifying themselves with the majority of rural population, from which the ruling *yangban* elite had gradually distanced themselves.

The crucial question remains: what factors could have facilitated harmonization of the aspects of Christian teachings, which so radically differed from their world outlook, – concentration on *afterlife* and the concept of *original sin* – with the Korean religiousness. To understand this, one has to imagine the situation of the majority of the Korean people – peasants – from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Absence of rights in the face of the ruling stratum and hardships of existence in situations of danger and illness were often associated by them with either benevolence or disfavour of the many spirits and deities, which created

<sup>19</sup> Oh, Kang-nam. "The Christian-Buddhist Encounter in Korea". Buswell, Robert, E.; Lee, Timothy S. *Christianity in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 372.

<sup>20</sup> Joon-sik, Choi. *Folk-religion. The Customs in Korea*. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2006, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, D. "Sibling Rivalry in Twentieth-Century Korea: Comparative Growth Rates of Catholic and Protestant Communities". Buswell, Robert E.; Lee, Timothy S. *Christianity in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 293.

<sup>22</sup> Klavins, K. "Comparative Review of Korean Religions". *Introduction to Korean Spirituality*. Seo Jinseok and Kaspars Kļaviņš (eds.). Riga: University of Latvia Press, 2019, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Choi, Jai-Keun. *Early Catholicism in Korea*. Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2005, p. 19.

a synthetic and specific Korean ‘folk-religion.’<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the proportions of ‘evil’ and ‘good’ spirits are very difficult to define in this regard. Apparently, folk-religion did not fill the emotional vacuum that the absolute majority of rural dwellers felt in the circumstances of absence of social and economic rights where shamans were able to offer technical assistance to satisfy daily necessities, healing of illnesses and handling of secret areas of human relations, but failed to provide a greater moral satisfaction and motivation for existence, which became more and more acutely needed during the shocks Korea experienced at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The assistance of ‘house spirits’ no longer sufficed. The niche was filled by Christianity. Comparing with analogous developments in the environment of East European (Baltic) peasants who adopted Christianity rather late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>, or in South Eastern Asia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – Christianity here probably offered “[...] a refuge from the domination of these demanding spirits in a different vision of the cosmos. This was a predictable, moral world in which God would protect the devout from all that the spirits could do and would eventually be rewarded by an afterlife in paradise. The powerless too would be rewarded if they lived a life of personal virtue.”<sup>26</sup> At the time of extreme changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Christianity became increasingly present in daily lives of Koreans, the apolitical Christians, “... who in the past would have turned to shamanism for otherworldly assistance in obtaining the good things of this world, chose Christianity instead as a more appropriate, effective, and modern tool to the same end.”<sup>27</sup> In this way, the Christian *afterlife* orientation was paradoxically incorporated in the world outlook and mentality of East Asian population, which traditionally concentrated on *this life*. It is more difficult to explain the acceptance of *original sin* among Korean Christians, which is indeed deeply rooted in the European spiritual tradition and which gained new popularity in the West at the times of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the following renaissance of empirical science based on understanding of religion in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> One can partly agree with the finding by Donald Baker that “The doctrine of original sin allowed Korean converts to Christianity to escape the conundrum of trying to reconcile belief in human perfectibility with the experience of moral failure by abandoning the traditional belief that human beings could reach moral perfection through their own efforts. Instead, Christianity in both its forms offered what was

<sup>24</sup> Joon-sik, Choi. *Folk-religion. The Customs in Korea*. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2006, pp. 89–101.

<sup>25</sup> *Introduction to Korean Spirituality*. Seo Jinseok and Kaspars Kļaviņš (eds.). Riga: University of Latvia Press, 2019, pp. 17–19.

<sup>26</sup> Steenbrink, K. *Catholics in Indonesia 1808–1942*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003, p. 221.

<sup>27</sup> Koo, J. H.; Nahm, A. C. *An Introduction to Korean Culture*. Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1997, p. 194.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, P. *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

to Koreans a relatively novel solution – supernatural assistance from God above.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, we must not forget the numerous changes brought around by Koreans themselves both in Christian preaching and content, thus creating synthesis with earlier Korean spiritual teachings and traditions among which shamanism certainly occupies one of the central places. Seo Jinseok confirms that Korean Protestantism has a number of regional characters rooted in Shamanism, none of which are grounded on biblical teachings nor are they regularly emphasised in other Christian countries, and thus are found only in Korean Protestantism, especially Pentecostal churches.<sup>30</sup> As typical manifestations of local Korean Christianity S. Jinseok mentions several examples, for instance: a statement that physical good fortune in this world is the most important goal for the believers; that in order to pursue goals believers are permitted to use the sorcery techniques etc.<sup>31</sup> Along with Shamanism, Confucianism has also left its mark on Korean Christianity (Confucian influence is present in church hierarchies and structure, etc.)<sup>32</sup>

Taking into account the considerable importance of Christians in organising modern Korean education and the movement of independence from Japan's colonial oppression between 1910 and 1945<sup>33</sup>, almost the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century in Korea became a Christian victory march. According to the Korean culture review published in 1997, many Koreans at that time are characterised, as follows: “[...] look at how much more enthusiastic they are about Christianity than most of their neighbours around the world are and come to the conclusion that Korea is destined to become the next centre for world Christianity, the new Israel, as many Koreans call it, the home of the latest chosen people of God. Few would go as far [...] that a new messiah has been born in Korea.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, such increased self-confidence led to more extensive isolation of the Christian community in Korea as opposed to other religions in Korea and spiritual practices inherited from the past, especially complicating relations with followers of Buddhism. Similarly to fundamentalists of Judaism and Islam – Christian fundamentalists traditionally considered their faith as the only true religion. Unfortunately, Korean Christianity, as a part of this world perception, was supporting Christian exclusivism.<sup>35</sup>

When discussing modernisation problems and latest developments in Korea, we must not forget that Korea is a country of extremely ancient civilisation where

<sup>29</sup> Baker, D. “Sibling Rivalry in Twentieth-Century Korea: Comparative Growth Rates of Catholic and Protestant Communities”. Buswell, Robert E.; Lee, Timothy S. *Christianity in Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006, pp. 292–293.

<sup>30</sup> Jinseok, S. “Outlines of Korean Shamanism”. *Introduction to Korean Spirituality*. Seo Jinseok and Kaspars Kļaviņš (eds.). Riga: University of Latvia Press, 2019, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Koo, J. H., Nahm, A. C. *An Introduction to Korean Culture*. Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1997, pp. 195–196.

<sup>33</sup> Even the author of the first Constitution of the Republic of Korea in 1919 that, unfortunately, was not implemented, was a Christian – Ahn Changho (1876–1938).

<sup>34</sup> Koo, J. H., Nahm, A. C. *An Introduction to Korean Culture*. Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1997, pp. 197–198.

<sup>35</sup> Sang-yil, Kim. *Studies on Religions of Korea*. Seoul: Association of Korean Native Religions, 2006, p. 45.

other spiritual and cultural trends, which are not related to Christianity, have a very long history. In the context of Buddhism, let us remember the importance of Korean thinker Wŏnhyo (617–686) in East Asian intellectual tradition, or the influence of Yi Hwang (1501–1570) on the development of Japanese Confucianism. The inconspicuous presence of Taoism is felt virtually everywhere – in the Korean lifestyles, mentality, martial arts, design, interior decoration, painting and gardening.<sup>36</sup> The Korean pluralistic, multifaceted identity has been and remains contradictory to the postulation of exclusivism and failure to accept other religions by many Christian congregations. Reminders by Korean intellectuals that for the Korean Christians, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism should not be considered as the faiths of ‘others’, but as ‘ours’, or at least, part of ‘ours’, are fully justified.<sup>37</sup> Generally (universally) oriented contemporary Korean thinkers call to reject the typically Western Cartesian/Newtonian mechanistic worldview, which sees the world as constructed from many separate parts, accepting a new vision of reality that is based of interrelatedness of all phenomena instead.<sup>38</sup> Already in ancient times Korean philosophy in the context of East Asia demonstrated an extraordinarily flexible ability to synthesize the principles of different teachings and schools,<sup>39</sup> bringing to the foreground the need for “harmonization of all disputes.”<sup>40</sup> Christianity is not at all the only ‘modern religion’ in Korea. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Korea was in many aspects a country of intensive spiritual seeking where, starting with the ‘opening’ of Korea (1860–1910), through Japanese colonial rule (1911–1945) until the present day, a number of new ‘national religions’ have been created, for example, *Tonghak* (established in 1860), *Won-Buddhism* (founded in 1916), *Taesun Jinri-hwoe* (founded in 1978), not to mention the numerous meditation centres, self-cultivation clubs and *ki*-training groups (equivalent of Chinese qigong).<sup>41</sup> In addition, none of the newly created Korean ‘native religions’ favour exclusive nationalism. Instead, “[...] they urge individuals to perform their duties as members of an international society.”<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of all modern challenges, criticism and inevitability of an active dialogue of cultures, Christianity in Korea still remains a powerful force uniting people of most varied professions and interests. What is the explanation of such success attained by Christianity? First of all, the undeniable role of Korean

<sup>36</sup> Shaofeng, Wang. The influence of Taoism on Korean culture. Available at: [http://congress.aks.ac.kr/korean/files/2\\_1358745277.pdf](http://congress.aks.ac.kr/korean/files/2_1358745277.pdf) [accessed January 3, 2021].

<sup>37</sup> Sang-yil, Kim. *Studies on Religions of Korea*. Seoul: Association of Korean Native Religions, 2006, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Leaman, O. *Key Concepts in Eastern Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> Sang-yil, Kim. *Studies on Religions of Korea*. Seoul: Association of Korean Native Religions, 2006, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Hairan, Woo. “New Religious Movements in South Korea Focused on Contemporary Situation.” *Journal of the Korean Academy of New Religions*. Special edition, KANR, August 2010, pp. 1–12.

<sup>42</sup> Yee-heum, Y. “Introduction”. Yee-heum, Y., Sang-yl, K., Suk-san, Y., Kwang-soo, P. *Korean Native Religions*. Seoul: Association of Korean Native Religions, 2005, p. 5.

Christians in promotion of national education during the period of the nation's opening (1860–1910) is general knowledge, like their contribution to the patriotic Korean independence movement under Japanese colonial rule (1911–1945). However, at the complicated times of social transformation after the nation's independence (1946–1960) (overshadowed by the ghastly Korean War (1950–1953)), during the following period of rapid industrialization (1961–1980), and later – with the beginning of the post-industrial period (1981 to present day) – arguments of patriotism, nationalism or religious exclusivism would not be sufficient for gaining permanent attraction amongst the population. An evidence is the sad experience of many Eastern European countries, where upon the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the circumstances of regained independence the Christian church allied with the dominant stratum of the newly rich, which, being unable to establish true democratic traditions and prevent the emerged social inequality, continued to furnish the population with narrow-minded slogans of patriotism, nationalism or religiously motivated predestination. After Korea was liberated from the Japanese occupation, the US Army arrived and established a military government, replaced by Syngman Rhee's (1875–1965) government in 1948 (the so-called "First Republic of Korea" that lasted from 1948 until the fall in 1960). Although President Rhee himself was a Protestant like a number of pro-American and anti-communist Protestants who supported him, Christianity in Korea was not merely an "ideological counterforce against dangers of communism" as the US geopolitical strategists wished it to be; Syngman Rhee's rightist regime overturned as a result of civil uprising and the following economically successful yet antidemocratic military government of General Park Chung Hee (1917–1979). The Christian feeling of fairness and egalitarianism made them oppose the big business dominance, interference of foreign powers (especially the USA that supported the dictatorship and wild capitalism in Korea) and the authoritarian government, unafraid of kidnapping, torture and imprisonment. As a result, the Korean Christians created the 'Minjung theology', or 'Minjung Sinhak': theology of the people (Korean: 민중신학), which held one of the central roles in fighting for human rights and freedoms, resulting in ensuring a truly functioning democracy in Korea.<sup>43</sup> One may fully agree with a finding by Konstantine Vassiliev that "[...] both Catholic and Protestant Christianity were a crucial force for democratization during the modern Korean era, particularly during the period of industrialization."<sup>44</sup> Looking at the versatile role of Christianity in the Korean history it is possible to draw certain parallels with the overall East Asian processes.

<sup>43</sup> Hwang, Kyung Moon. *A History of Korea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 264–265; Vassiliev, K. "Industrialization and Christianity: The Twin Engines of Korean Modernity". *Korea Review of International Studies*, 2005. Seoul: Korea University, p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> Vassiliev, K. "Industrialization and Christianity: The Twin Engines of Korean Modernity." *Korea Review of International Studies*, 2005. Seoul : Korea University, p. 93.

## Conclusion

Both Chinese and in Japanese Christianity had an important bearing upon the national-patriotic movement (let us remember, among others, the Taiping Rebellion from 1850 to 1864 in relation to freeing the Chinese from Manchu-led Qing dynasty, or activities of a Japanese patriot, Christian Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933), who is known as the author of the famous work “Bushido: The Soul of Japan” (1900), in which samurai ethics were for the first time thoroughly explained to the Western reader).<sup>45</sup> However, in general it has to be concluded that in Korea, whose ‘opening’ to foreign influences has taken place later than in Japan and China, the influence of Christianity has been (and remains) much greater. From the vantage point of regulating the mutual relations of people, standards of conduct and work ethics, Confucianism, which was adopted from China and transformed by the Korean Christianity to fit the needs of a democratic society, used to be and still is extremely important in Korea. This development is very accurately described by K. Vassiliev, who stresses that, although Confucian ethics and Christianity both support unselfish living and higher moral standards, contrary to Confucianism, which emphasizes highly rigid and stratified social structure, Christianity is egalitarian in its essence, and this characteristic has had a profound impact on Korean society. Whereas during the Korean Kingdom (1392–1910) Confucianism developed from an initially rational teaching of public administration into the official state religion that justified the reign of the oppressors (the aristocrats and educated men)<sup>46</sup>, Christianity appealed more broadly to the underprivileged social strata, encouraging social movements for equality, liberation from poverty, and abolition of gender discrimination.<sup>47</sup> Taking into account all pros and cons, Christianity, which came into Korea from the West, can be truly qualified as ‘Korean Christianity.’ Surprisingly, the entire Korean history, in its turn, is the evidence of its population’s capacity of creative and flexible use of foreign influences for the needs of local society, at the same time retaining general human values and ideals.

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## Kopsavilkums

*Izsverot visus par un pret, no Rietumiem nākušo kristietību Korejā var kvalificēt kā "korejiešu kristietības" versiju. Tā nekādā ziņā nav vājinājusi Korejas īpašo identitāti, absorbējot daudzas senas vietējās tradīcijas, veicinot nacionālās atbrīvošanās kustību kolonizācijas laikmetā, atbalstot sociālo taisnīgumu un sabiedrības demokratizāciju postindustrializācijas laikmetā.*

**Atslēgvārdi:** kristietība, Koreja, budisms, šamanisms, konfuciānisms, modernizācija, neatkarība.