

Building Cultural Bridges: American Women Missionaries in Korea 1885 – 1910

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the role of American women missionaries to Korea and how they built cultural bridges that Korean women crossed to become Christian converts. American women missionaries opened their homes to and deliberately sought out relationships with Korean women, relationships centered on evangelism, a common search for Korean language literacy, a shared identity as women and on something missionary women termed a “friendship.” These actions by the American women missionaries created opportunities – bridges – for Korean women to step into Christianity along a uniquely female path. The bridges I discuss are the intentional actions by women missionaries to make connections with Korean women, the creation of spaces within American homes that met Confucian expectations for women and the production of a “middle ground,” a conceptual space of (mis)understanding and new understandings that facilitated cross-cultural interaction. These bridges helped a significant number of Korean women to convert to Christianity and also shed light on the development of a syncretic Korean Christianity.

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Introduction

I began to attend the fall and spring Bible institutes held in Pyeng Yang and superintended by Mrs. W. A. Noble. Pyeng Yang is 300 li or about 100 miles from Hai Ju which distance I walked each fall and spring for some years...after five years of strenuous travel and studying I received my diploma.¹

주룰루 Chu Lulu (westernized name: Mrs. Lulu Chu Kim)

Between 1885-1910, missionaries opened Bible institutes specifically for women throughout the country of Korea which thousands of women attended.² Mrs. Lulu Chu Kim along with hundreds of other Korean women traveled long distances by foot to learn from American women missionaries. These women were not school age girls. They were young mothers, middle-aged women and grandmothers and they were also newly converted Christians. In fact, Korean woman converts far outstripped Korean male converts in these early years.³

In this thesis, I explore the role of American women missionaries to Korea and how they built cultural bridges that Korean women crossed to become Christian converts. By cultural bridges, I mean ways in which people recognized differences in culture and performed concrete actions, such as language acquisition, to develop and facilitate cross-cultural relationships. In doing this, these women missionaries played a crucial role in the development of Christianity in Korea. American women missionaries actively evangelized among the female population of the country and the large number of women converts can be seen in early mission photographs attending Bible institutes and conferences in very large numbers.⁴ (See image below)

¹ . W. Noble, *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea* (Seoul: Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985), 63.

² Donald N. Clark, *Missionary Photography in Korea: Encountering the West through Christianity* (New York : Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2009), 177.

³ Clark, *Missionary Photography in Korea*, 177.

⁴ Allen D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea* (Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1971), 101–102.



Undated (but pre 1920) photograph labeled "Bible Class for Country Women, Pyeng Yang" Swinehart, ed., *Korea, Handbook of Missions, 1920* (Federal Council of Korea and the Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1920), 45. ⁵ Used with Permission.

In 1886, when the first woman Protestant missionary arrived in Korea, Confucianism thoroughly dominated the society of the small country.⁶ Confucianism and its values, traditions and belief systems differed greatly from the Judeo-Christian traditions of the United States. In Confucian society, women lived segregated lives from men, only interacting with their direct male relatives and only at specific times. They resided behind walls in separate quarters and rarely traveled during the day, unless almost completely covered.⁷ Women left their natal homes

Clark, *Missionary Photography in Korea*, 177. See photograph.

⁵ Swinehart, ed., *Korea, Handbook of Missions, 1920* (Federal Council of Korea and the Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1920), 45. While this picture was most likely taken beyond the years of this study, it points to the foundation created by the missionaries in the early years.

⁶ For one look into Korean Confucianism see; John Berthrong and Evelyn Berthrong, *Confucianism: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 2014). According to the authors, Korea proclaimed itself the “most Confucian State” after the defeat of Ming dynasty in China by the Manchus. These scholars and others agree that Korea was the most Confucian state in East Asia.

⁷ Jin-Hee Chun; et al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 50.

in arranged marriages as early as 13 years old and most were illiterate.⁸ These differences concerning women are often expounded on in early missionary writings. For example, when American missionary George Gilmore first arrived in Korea he wrote in 1890, “to any one asking what is the most noticeable difference between social life in America and Korea, the answer must be the seclusion of women.”⁹ Despite the isolation, missionaries were able to reach this secluded population.

Due to local customs, male missionaries found it difficult to interact with Korean women, so their early communications to America called for more women to enter the mission field. “What ought to have the attention of our Woman’s Boards,” George Gilmore wrote in the Methodist’s women’s journal *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, “is that lady missionaries are as absolute a necessity as the more usual men.”¹⁰ As a result, all the major Protestant denominations sent American women to the Korea mission field with the express directive of reaching the very culturally different Confucian women with the “gospel”.¹¹ Despite cultural differences American women missionaries connected with Korean women, converting many to Christianity. In this thesis I ask how they built the connections – the bridges – that transcended the differences. I argue they did so through purposeful acts aimed at meeting and communicating, in essence, connecting with Korean women.

⁸ Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 35–40; Kwang Soon Lee, “Korean Women’s Understanding of Mission the Role of Women in the Korean Presbyterian Church” 1986, 70.

⁹ George W. Gilmore, “Social Phases in Korea,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* XXII, no. 1 (July 1890): 3.

¹⁰ Gilmore, “Social Phases in Korea, 4.

¹¹ Swinehart, ed., *Korea, Handbook of Missions, 1920*, (Federal Council of Korea and the Interchurch World Movement of North America, 1920). As of 1920, 124 men served as missionaries in Korea from the four major Protestant denominations, but 200 women missionaries resided in the country. (Foldout in the back of the book.)

American women missionaries opened their homes to and deliberately sought out relationships with Korean women, relationships centered on evangelism, a common search for Korean language literacy, a shared identity as women and on something missionary women termed a “friendship.” These actions by the American women missionaries created opportunities – bridges – for Korean women to step into Christianity along a uniquely female path. The bridges I discuss are the intentional actions by women missionaries to make connections with Korean women, the creation of spaces within American homes that met Confucian expectations for women and the production of a “middle ground,” a conceptual space of (mis)understanding and new understandings that facilitated cross-cultural interaction. These bridges helped a significant number of Korean women to convert to Christianity and also shed light on the development of a syncretic Korean Christianity.

Other scholars have written on the role of women missionaries in Korea. Hyaewool Choi argues American women missionaries played a role in the development of ideas of the twentieth century Korean “modern woman” as well as promoted education for girls in Korea.¹² Katherine Ahn argues American women were an intricate part of the success of the Korea mission by outlining the history of their work.¹³ Works by Jane Hunter and Ian Tyrell address the role of American women missionaries to Asia and their work in social reform.¹⁴ These works, however, do not focus on the very first encounters between American missionaries and Korean women. Nor do they explicitly look at the way the American women spanned the considerable cultural

¹² Hyæweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways: Seoul-California Series in Korean Studies, Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

¹³ Katherine H. Lee Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*, 1st edition (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2013).

¹⁴ See: Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

and language barriers between themselves and Korean women. This thesis focuses intently on the initial contact between American women missionaries and Korean women in the first years of the opening of Korea to the west, the years of 1885 -1910, and the ways in which everyday interactions between the women facilitated the cross-cultural exchange of a religious idea.

The historian Natalie Zemon Davis wrote on a historical methodology known as “decentering” history in an essay entitled “Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World”. According to Davis, in “decentering” history, historians look to the stories of working people, “subaltern” classes, women, and people of non-western ethnicity to construct the interconnected processes of global history. Sources such as slave recollections, journals of ship captains and doctors give insight into way ideas cross cultures. The best way “to enhance the historian’s global consciousness while sustaining his or her love of the concrete story,” Davis wrote, “is to focus on cases of cultural crossing.”¹⁵ In “decentering” Korean mission history, I look at the individual letters, journals and reports of women missionaries to Korea to tell the concrete story of missionary activities and along with Davis, I look for ways in which ideas crossed cultures. The stories of individual women missionaries in their day-to-day interactions on the mission field illuminate the exchange process through which a religious idea, Christianity, became Korean.

In looking at the cross-cultural encounter of American women missionaries in Korea I examine three ways they “crossed cultures” and created bridges with Korean women. In order to establish a context for my analysis, in the first chapter, I explore the cultural background of the American and Korean women. Confucian proscriptive ideals for women framed Korean women’s cultural paradigm and late nineteenth century ideas on the superiority of the white race

¹⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World,” *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (May 1, 2011): 197, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2303.2011.00576.x.

and of Protestant values framed American women's. In the second chapter I describe the intentionality of American women missionaries in making connections with Korean women through acts of commensurability – purposeful actions to understand and accommodate different cultural paradigms. The third chapter examines the idea of space and how American women produced spaces that facilitated interaction. The fourth chapter of my thesis discusses the development of a “middle ground” of congruity between American and Korean women based on language (mis)understandings and a lack understanding and marginalizing of Korean culture on the part of women missionaries.

American women missionaries built cultural bridges with Korean women in intentional actions of commensurability; they purposefully worked to create connections between themselves and Korean women. By “cultural commensurability” I am referring to an idea put forth by Sanjay Subrahmanyam. By looking at the cross-cultural encounters between Indians and Persians and between Christians and Islamists in the early modern era, Subrahmanyam questions the idea that cultures are largely impermeable spheres that are “inaccessible to those who look in from the outside.”¹⁶ He purports that encounters between cultures are made; they don't “simply happen.”¹⁷ People are the makers. People build the bridges.¹⁸

American missionaries' efforts in evangelization, which included activities such as Korean language acquisition, visits to Korean women's homes, and teaching Korean language literacy to Korean women show a deliberate effort to bridge a cultural gap. American women

¹⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 155.

¹⁷ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 212.

¹⁸ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Interview by Carol Nappi, “Interview with Sanjay Subrahmanyam,” accessed December 3, 2014, <http://newbooksinhistory.com/2012/12/05/sanjay-subrahmanyam-courtly-encounters-translating-courtliness-and-violence-in-early-modern-eurasia-harvard-university-press-2012/>.

missionaries to Korea spoke Korean with Korean women. They visited Korean women, often. They ate Korean food, traveled according to Korean expectations for women, and thus created junctures of shared experience. Although the American missionaries remained culturally very different, they created a ‘nearness’ through shared experience with Korean women as fellow wives, mothers and women.

Georg Simmel’s ideas on the stranger also provides the foundation for my argument, as American women were, on the one hand, strangers to Korean women, but on the other hand, their new neighbors.¹⁹ Simmel states that “in spite of being inorganically appended to it, the stranger is yet an organic member of the group...Only we do not know how to designate the peculiar unity of this position other than by saying that it is composed of certain measures of nearness and distance.”²⁰ This idea of being appended to a group which produces a “nearness and a distance” is an important characteristic for spanning cultural gaps. This “nearness and distance” works as a bridge as the facilitator can produce “nearness” through gender identification or language familiarity that produces a space for mediation. American women missionaries produced “nearness” through shared identity as “women” and through a common language, Korean.

The creation of spaces in American women missionaries’ homes that conformed to Confucian expectations of space for women and opening those spaces for interaction with Korean women is the subject of chapter three. American women missionaries’ spatial decisions

¹⁹ Many American women missionaries talk about the ways in which Korean women often came to just look at them and marveled at their clothes, their hair, their belongings and the ways in which they interacted with each other and their husbands.

²⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis, 2011), 176. This quote is from Simmel's work “Exkurs über den Fremden” translated by Kurt Wolff. See note 10. pp. 212.

concerning their homes proved to be an important ingredient in their ability to bridge cultural divisions. American women did not remodel Korean homes to western standards or build western-style homes in order to evangelize. They built them because they were familiar – they were a haven of familiarity in a strange land.²¹ However, they did modify or build spaces particularly to accommodate Confucian Korean women and opened that space for interaction. These spaces then became an important dynamic in facilitating cross-cultural exchange.

In analyzing the use of space, the manner in which I state women perceive and experience the space in their home is significant. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard addresses the ways in which humans perceive spaces as being ‘warm’ and ‘safe’.²² According to Bachelard, images of homes are powerful forces in the human psyche. Often humans dream of that safe place, that hut in the woods that is intimate and warm or the house standing out in the cold with the light shining through the window that seems to tell us that the house is waiting for us, ready to welcome us in its warmth and protection against the cold. These images produce strong attachments to the home, an intimate refuge.²³ Far from home, in a strange and foreign land, American women remembered their homes as warm and inviting places and wished to reproduce that space in Korea. They reproduced it in ways, however, that included gendered space for Korean women.

Ideas by sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas are also enlightening in reference to the space in American women’s homes in Korea during the late nineteenth century. According

²¹ Many Korean missionaries talk about their western style homes as an “oasis” in an otherwise strange world.

²² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (1958; repr. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xxxv, 111.

²³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 3-37. See Chapter one "the house. from cellar to garret. the significance of the hut".

to Habermas, “the line between private and public sphere extend(s) right through the home. The privatized individuals step out of the intimacy of their living rooms into the public sphere of the salon...”²⁴ According to Habermas, public discussion and dissemination of personal ideas of reason takes place in the private spaces of homes.²⁵ American women missionaries’ homes became such a place for propagating ideas of Christianity.

In the third chapter, I focus on the development of a “middle ground” as a bridge. In *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 – 1825*, historian Richard White argues that creative misunderstandings lead to assumed perceptions of the other in a cross-cultural encounters which in turn lead to mutually understandable practices. In using White as a foundation, I argue that productive discourse, which includes understandings and misunderstandings, helps to bridge a cultural divide as, over time, new understandings emerge. In developing a “middle ground” as a bridge, both sides in a cross cultural encounter believe that they are communicating well as to an ideology or doctrine, but miscommunications and misunderstandings as to that concept, such as Western Christianity, exist. They proceed, however, to interact as if they both understand each other. It is in the ignorance of these misunderstandings and in assumed understanding that mutual interaction continues and, over time, new, hybrid cross-cultural understandings emerge changing the relative position of all involved.²⁶

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991), 45.

²⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.*, 9.

²⁶ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Anniversary edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 52–53.

I see productive understandings, misunderstandings, and assumed understanding as instruments in creating bridges between Korean women and American missionary women. Korean women did not always understand Christianity in the same ways that the American women missionaries did. But, American women often assumed Korean women understood or should have understood Western Christianity in the same ways as they taught it. Also, in missionaries' marginalization of Korean religious customs, they did not perceive that Korean women were developing their own interpretations of Christianity. It is in this "middle ground" of understandings, non-understandings and assumed understanding that many missionaries and Korean women do not see differences and a "middle ground" becomes a bridge for cross-cultural interaction. It is also within this "middle ground" that new understandings, of Christianity new syncretic Korean understandings, developed.

By looking at the quotidian activities of American women missionaries surrounding evangelism, this study suggests that actions of women missionaries in building cultural bridges with Korean women helped Christianity gain a foothold in Korea. The concentration of the study on language and the development of a "middle ground" also help to illuminate ways in which syncretism started in Korea, on the ground, in the interactions of individuals. Overall, this thesis adds depth and complexity to previous historical interpretations of missionary work by adding to the conversation on commensurable acts in the cross-cultural encounters of missionaries as well as the role language misunderstandings and ideas of cultural superiority helped to produce a unique Korean Christianity.

Historiography

In situating my work in the conversation on women missionaries and cross-cultural encounters, as well as on the rise of Christianity in Korea, I build upon cross-cultural, religious

syncretism and mission work arguments already presented by historians. The work of these scholars lays a foundation for looking at the work of women missionaries in Korea.

Literature on Women Missionaries

The root of the word “missionary,” *missio*, was a Latin word which meant, “a sending off.”²⁷ Missionary literature often referred to missionaries as “sent ones” and missionaries did “go.” Missionaries traveled and lived in areas of the world far flung from their home and as a result experienced and encountered vastly different cultures. For historians, missionary lives, writings and experiences have helped elucidate cross-cultural encounters and historians have mined their extensive archives in search of answers to historical questions posed by the study of cross-cultural encounters.

In the past twenty years, scholars of women’s history began to look beyond the male-centric mission literature to ask questions about the work of women in missionary endeavors as well as their role in transnational intersections. Post-colonial historical work on male missionaries revealed much about the imperialistic ideas and methods of early missionaries. Examination of the work of missionaries in sixteenth century colonial context often showed their essential contribution to the process of colonization.²⁸ Along with the salvation message, many missionaries to the New World brought a message of imperialism and subjugation. So as historians began to look at women missionaries, many of their first questions centered on the role

²⁷ “Mission,” Dictionary.com, accessed August 19, 2015. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mission>

²⁸ For information on imperialism and missionaries see: Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil: 1500-1600*, annotated edition (University of Texas Press, 2013) In this work Metcalf outlines the early years of Portuguese rule in Brazil and the essential role played by Jesuit priests.; Yanna Yannakakis in *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008) examines the role of Dominican priests in the Oaxaca region of Mexico. For a look at ways Protestant missionaries assisted in the subjugation and subjection of indigenous peoples see: Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

women missionaries played in imperialism, colonization and racial dominance – how did it compare or contrast to the imperialistic ideas of male missionaries?

Historians argue that women missionaries took their own brand of imperialism to the mission field.²⁹ During the nineteenth century, more and more American women entered the mission field and historians often described their type of interventionism as “domestic” or “moral” imperialism, an imperialism that contained a good dose of western morals and soap.³⁰ Historian Myra Rutherdale in her work, *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* argues that the physical appearance of the aboriginal people in the Canadian Northwest was a central concern of women missionaries and that soap played a central role in changing that appearance from “dirty” to “clean”. Missionary literature is replete with references to dirt and the removal of such in the homes and on the bodies of indigenous peoples.

In *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire*, Ian Tyrrell argues that American imperial history cannot be looked at only through the ideas of formal empire as seen in American economics and politics, but must also include the nation’s export of Protestant morals, which helped shape America’s cultural expansion.³¹ These morals included cleanliness, but also included the exportation of Christian ideas on family and communal life, which greatly contrasted with and did not fit the cultural expectations of indigenous populations.³²

²⁹ Many historians have written about women missionaries and the type of imperialism they brought with them to the mission field. For a study on American women missionaries’ imperialistic ideas in China, see Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*. On the intersection between British women missionaries, imperialism and feminism see Susan Thorne, “Missionary-Imperial Feminism,” in *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, ed. Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkeaus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

³⁰ Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man’s God*, 31.

³¹ Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*.

³² Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*.

Missionary women did not disseminate moral imperialism on their own; they got help from women back home. According to Patricia Hill, American female mission societies were the single largest organized women's movement in America in the late nineteenth century.³³

Encouraged by women on the home front, missionaries took middle class ideas of cleanliness, domesticity, child rearing and education, hand-in-hand with the gospel message, to the mission field – seemingly giving these ideals of western culture equivalence with salvation.

“Domestic imperialism” also sparked an interest by scholars in the way missionaries talked about the “civilized” and the “other than civilized”. In *The Gospel of Gentility*, Jane Hunter wrote on women missionaries' efforts to “civilize” the “uncivilized” Chinese. Hunter argues that the mostly middle-class women missionaries “mounted a moral crusade based on premises of social elitism which played up to their perceptions of themselves as guardians and founts of civilization,” a crusade, according to Hunter, which was “scarcely less imperial for being domestic.”³⁴ Jane Hunter also addresses the question of how indigenous women converts fit into Chinese society after conversion. She argues that identifying as a Christian woman in China during the early twentieth century created a distance between the Chinese women and their families and placed them outside the bounds of normal Chinese societal expectations, creating a crisis in identity.³⁵ Missionary ideas of white racial superiority, superiority of the Christian religion and marginalization of indigenous culture and society characterized much of women missionaries' work on the mission field.

³³ Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920*, First Edition edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985). Patricia Hill's study of the American foreign mission movement is a work, which uncovers the vast network of small female mission societies existing in churches all across America. These networks combined to form the largest movement of women in America at a time when women organized in suffrage and temperance movements.

³⁴ Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 173.

³⁵ Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*. See chapter 8.

Peter Phan's work on Christianity in Asia also illuminates the effect western ideas of race and Christianity purported by missionaries had on converts. Due to western ideas of Christianity, new Asian converts to Christianity questioned their identity. Was Jesus really a white-faced savior? What does it mean to be an Asian, African or South American Christian? In addressing over a century of western influence in the Asian continent, Peter Phan speaks of a distinction desired by Asian theologians when talking of the church. Instead of speaking of churches that are *in* Asia, Phan argues, Christian theologians should instead distinguish the Asian church as the church *of* Asia.³⁶ Christianity wrapped in ideas of racism and western values often produced ambivalence in native identity and eventually a desire to adopt, according to Phan, in relation to Asia, a "Christianity with an Asian Face."³⁷

In my thesis I add to this conversation on missionaries, imperialism and race by showing that American women missionaries' ideas of cultural superiority blinded them from seeing ways in which Korean women incorporated their own beliefs into a Korean Christianity. By pre-emanating American Protestant culture and values and marginalizing Korean cultural ideals, American women missionaries did not see the ways in which Korean women were adapting Christianity into their cultural paradigm. These actions by Korean women expose the root of a developing syncretic Korean Christianity.

Cross-Cultural Interactions

In light of a type of "domestic" imperialism and ideas of race that seemed to characterize women's work in missions, historians began to ask how these ideas manifested, practically, on the ground. What type of cross-cultural interaction did women missionaries facilitate? Historians

³⁶ Peter C. Phan, *Christianity With an Asian Face*, (Maryknoll: Obis Books, 2003), 125.

³⁷ Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, title. The title of Phan's book succinctly expresses the desire Asian theologians have to no longer be subject to a western-style Christianity.

such as such as Jan Hare, Jean Barman, Karen Seat, and Jane Hunter argue that in work often characterized as “woman’s work for woman”, women missionaries worked in fields such as social work, medicine and education (mostly in institutions for school age children). Historians show this mission work produced mixed results. In *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, Jan Hare and Jean Barman argue, that while the missionary women who started a school in the Canadian Northwest had good intentions, the school they started became a place of confinement and forced subservience.³⁸ According to Hare and Barman, middle class North American ideals of cleanliness, diet, confinement, proper behavior and type of education often conflicted with the values and lifestyle of the indigenous population. Dogmatic beliefs in the superiority of western culture, when set against the indigenous population determined to retain their own culture, led to almost prison-like conditions. Women missionaries in many schools did little to incorporate native culture or respond to the “real” needs of the community.

The approaches of a few mission schools and programs differed. According to historian, Karen Seat, missionary educators in Japan, in response to the country’s rapid modernization and opening of public schools for women, reacted by devising progressive curricula that extended beyond preparing women to be good Christian mothers and wives. According to Seat, despite the “varying levels of ethnocentrism displayed by missionary faculty and administrators” of these schools, the institutions “came to function as one of the few spaces where women in Japan could find intellectual challenges and a humanistic view of women.”³⁹ By adapting to changes within the political situation in Japan, missionary schools attracted students even after women began attending public schools.

³⁸ Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, xxii.

³⁹ Karen Seat, *Providence Has Freed Our Hands: Women’s Missions and the American Encounter with Japan* (Syracuse University Press, 2008), 16-17.

In looking at women missionaries as cross-cultural agents of Christianity, several historians have argued that they brought ideas of intimacy and relationship-building to the mission field as a method for evangelization. While male missionaries often itinerated and traveled from place to place, married women missionaries stayed in one place and cultivated relationships.⁴⁰ In *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World*, Jennifer Thigpen presents a well-researched study of the relationships between Hawaiian royal women and American missionary wives. Thigpen argues that it was these female relationships which eventually proved pivotal to the mission's ability to make connections with the Hawaiian royal family. Thigpen also argues that the missionary relationships helped establish American influence in Hawai'i'.⁴¹ In this case, relationships and connections brought conversions, but those conversions also opened the door for American imperial expansion into Hawai'i.

In looking at cross-cultural encounters, I build on the conversation by showing that American women missionaries' to Korea's "woman's work for women" extended beyond teaching and evangelizing to include modifying the spaces of their homes to facilitate woman to woman interaction. In illuminating the ways in which missionary women made purposeful decisions to create connections with Korean women and use those relationships for evangelism, I add to the work of previous historians who look at ways ideas, such as religion, are conveyed across cultures.

⁴⁰ For examples of missionary wives evangelizing in the home see: Katherine H. Lee Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*, 1st edition (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2013); Jan Hare and Jean Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry: Emma Crosby and the Methodist Mission on the Northwest Coast* (UBC Press, 2007);

⁴¹ Jennifer Thigpen, *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

Rise of Christianity in Korea

In looking specifically at the cross-cultural encounter that introduced western Christianity to Korea, it is important to examine the work of scholars on the rise of Christianity in the country. East Asia is often thought of as China, Japan and Korea. Protestant missionaries first arrived in China in 1807, Japan in 1859 and lastly in Korea in 1885 and while missionaries of Christianity resided longer in China and Japan, the religion did not establish a strong foothold in either country at the time.⁴² On the other hand, Christianity did become established in Korea.⁴³ In *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* Chung Shin Park outlines three prevailing theories concerning the success of Christianity in Korea. One theory argues that the nature of the indigenous religion of Korea, which included ideas of monotheism and heaven and hell, allowed Koreans to easily accept Christianity. A second group of scholarly work looks to the type of social and educational program instituted by missionary groups as the impetus for the positive reception of Christianity in Korea. A third idea looks to the political activism of the early church against Japanese colonization as the reason for widespread conversions.⁴⁴

In light of the large number of early women converts, however, a close scholarly look at the work of American women missionaries with Korean women is warranted. Several scholars

⁴² For a look at the missionary struggle in Japan see: Seat, *Providence Has Freed Our Hands*; Peter C. Phan in *Christianities in Asia*, 1 edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 151 states that by 1949 at the time of end of the Chinese civil war, only 1,000,000 Chinese were Christian. This is a very small percentage of the overall population and comes after over a hundred years of mission work in China.

⁴³ Chung –Shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 40. The graph on page 40 shows and exponential growth in the number of converts. In addition to Park, also see: Sebastian C. H. Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea*; Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Robert E. Buswell Jr and Timothy S. Lee, eds., *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*; David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea*, ed. Kang-Nam Oh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 14-15.

have already written on women missionaries in Korea. Missiology scholar Kathryn Ahn, in *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, painstakingly chronicles many of what she believed were the accomplishments of the American female missionaries, arguing that American women missionaries were “active pioneers and agents of change in Korea.”⁴⁵ Although criticizing Ahn for a lack of academic vigor, Samuel Pang, in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, purported that Ahn insisted that, more than the content of the gospel message, the way it was presented was important – that the women created a ‘space’ for communication.⁴⁶ Along with Pang, I see American women opening a ‘space’ for communication and that communication became an intrinsic part of the way missionaries conveyed the idea of Christianity.

Historian Hyaeweol Choi has done much research on the rise of the modern woman in Korea. As a part of that effort she studied the work of American women missionaries to Korea. In an article entitled “Women’s Work for ‘Heathen Sisters’: American Women Missionaries and Their Educational Work in Korea,” Choi argues that American missionary women, in their early educational work with Korean girls, emphasized traditional womanhood and centered their curriculum on domesticity in order to be acceptable to traditional roles for Korean women. She also argues that the American missionary women’s project was less about “westernizing” Korean women than in cross-cultural sharing.⁴⁷ In this thesis, I suggest cross-culture adaptation of educational curriculum is a narrow example of cross-cultural interaction and would not fully

⁴⁵ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 308.

⁴⁶ Samuel Y Pang. "Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34.2 (2010) *Academic OneFile*, accessed March 28, 2015,

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA224100295&v=2.1&u=viva_vpi&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=bb7511208db0538da08d889565f8ccaa.

⁴⁷ Hyaeweol Choi, “Women’s Work for ‘Heathen Sisters’: American Women Missionaries and Their Educational Work in Korea,” *Acta Koreana* 2 (July 1999): 1–22.

explain the large number of female converts among women not of school age. In expanding on and adding to Hyaeweol Choi's work, I look at cross-cultural sharing beyond educational curriculum by looking at the ways American and Korean women bridged misunderstandings between their vastly different cultures.

In looking at the ways in which American women missionaries made connections with Korean women in the very early years of the mission to Korea, the central role played by the Korean language comes to light. But the language was difficult for the Americans. In a document entitled "Foreign Language Learning: A Comparative Analysis of Relative Difficulty," The National Security Agency concluded Japanese and Korean to be the hardest languages for a native English speaker to learn with Korean being only slightly easier than Japanese.⁴⁸ The Korean language does, however, have a very phonetic alphabet. I argue that because of this alphabet, American women who were not fluent in Korean, taught Korean women to read within their day-to-day encounters centered on evangelism. I also argue that American women's attempts to teach and speak in Korean helped facilitate a cross-cultural encounter. According to Vicente Rafael, investigation into language and its role in cross-cultural interactions is key to unraveling cross-cultural encounters. In *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*, he argues that whether or not missionaries actively pursued native language acquisition directly affected their ability to facilitate cross-cultural connections.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ National Security Agency, "Foreign Language Learning: A Comparative Analysis of Relative Difficulty," https://www.nsa.gov/public_info/_files/cryptologic_spectrum/foreign_language.pdf.

⁴⁹ Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1993).

In another piece, Choi points to this importance of language in the cross-cultural encounter between American women and Korean women. In “Women’s Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea,” Choi argues Confucian ideas of woman’s place left many Korean women uneducated and that American women missionaries and Korean intellectuals were the two groups who contributed most significantly to the spread of female literacy.⁵⁰ In adding to Choi’s work on American women’s contribution to female literacy rates in Korea, I look at the quotidian ways American women missionaries taught Korean women to read even though Korean was very different from English and they did obtain fluency in the language.

In looking at ideas of commensurability, the creation of gendered spaces in missionary homes and the development of a “middle ground” which promoted cross-cultural interaction, I add to this literature on American missionaries, the rise of Christianity in Korea and the work of American women missionaries in Korea by demonstrating ways in which American women interacted with Korean women beyond educational curriculum and telling the “concrete story” of how they bridged and mitigated differences. Ultimately, I show ways that American women missionaries to Korea actively strove to be cross-cultural bridge builders.

I will begin, however, in the next chapter by outlining some cultural context, Korean and American, as well as a little historical background for the missionaries involved.

⁵⁰ Hyaeweol Choi, “Women’s Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 30, 2000): 88.

Chapter 1

Historical Context

When the American women missionaries in this study decided to leave their homeland and join the mission field in Korea, they left a culture in America that was very different from the culture they encountered in Korea. Their religious values, their understanding of women's place in society and their desire to evangelize were grounded in a Euro-Centric, Judeo-Christian history, steeped in nineteenth century American ideas of racial superiority and cultural imperialism. In contrast, Korean women's Neo-Confucian values and social structure as well as spiritualism grew out of over two thousand years of Confucian and Neo-Confucian influence as well as Shamanistic inspiration.

Neo-Confucianism heavily structured Korean society dictating quotidian expectations for relationship hierarchies and proscriptive rules for women's behavior. Shamanism, considered the native religion of Korea, predates Confucianism and heavily influenced Korean spiritual thought.⁵¹ While Buddhism has also influenced Korean culture for nearly two millennia, neo-Confucianism and Shamanism appeared to have been much more influential on the development of Korean Christianity. These cultural differences set the stage for the cross-cultural encounter between American and Korean women.

Religious and Cultural Influences in Korea

Cultural ideas implanted by the Joseon dynasty dominated Korean society throughout the time period of this study. Six hundred years before the first missionary arrived in Korea, Joseon

⁵¹ Jung Young Lee, *Korean Shamanistic Rituals*, (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 21.

dynasty kings established the importance of Neo-Confucian thought in the country and through the years of Joseon rule, Neo-Confucianism remained the most important cultural paradigm in Korean society. And while Shamanism decreased in importance relative to Neo-Confucianism it remained a strong influence in Korea over the course of the Joseon dynasty.

Shamanism predated Confucianism and though an ancient religious form, it continued to shape the religious and spiritual ideas of Koreans in the late nineteenth century. In Korean Shamanism, adherents believed in the supernatural, in evil spirits and the pervasiveness of those spirits as causal agents.⁵² Early missionaries wrote about the Shamanistic beliefs they encountered when they arrived. American G. H. Jones wrote that due to Shamanistic religious ideas Koreans “had a tendency to spiritualize all natural things, they had a sense of dependence on an existence superior to themselves, and they had established an intercommunicative dimension between humans and spiritual entities.”⁵³ In other words Shamanistic Koreans believed in the supernatural existence of “spiritual entities” they could communicate with.

Shamanism in Korea also rested on the belief that spirits, mostly evil, resided in diseases, all sorts of animate and inanimate objects and were the primary causal agents of trouble and negative occurrences. Fellow missionary Homer Hulbert, in situating the importance of Shamanism in the lives of Koreans wrote, “the underlying religion of the Korean, the foundation upon which all else is mere superstructure, is his original spirit-worship.”⁵⁴ These beliefs,

⁵² Sung Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-1915*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 143-187.

⁵³ G. H. Jones, “The Spirit Worship of the Koreans,” *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2 (1901): 37, quoted in Sung Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-1915*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 29.

⁵⁴ Homer Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea*, (London: Heinemann, 1906), 403, quoted in, Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 30.

although different from Christian beliefs, were similar in the idea of spirits as causal agents and in the conviction of being able to communicate with spiritual entities. Christians believed they could pray and talk to God as well as believed that a causal agent of evil was the devil.

The other dominant ideological influence in Korea at the turn of the twentieth century was Neo-Confucianism. Through much of Korean history, cultural ideas from China influenced Korea. Confucianism grew out of the teachings of Chinese philosopher and scholar Confucius. Scholars believe Confucius was born around 551 BCE but much early information on Confucius is derived from texts created around during the Warring States Period in China, 403-221 BCE.⁵⁵ The teachings centered on benevolence, integrity, sincerity, proper rites, justice and filial piety.⁵⁶ These ideas dictated correct social relationships, morality in government and ritualistic practices.

Neo-Confucianism arose over a thousand years later in China and much of Korean Neo-Confucianism arose from the teachings of twelfth century Song dynasty Chinese scholar Zhu Xi. As early Korean scholars incorporated Neo-Confucianism into the cultural fabric of Korea in the late fourteenth century, they did so with little or no contact with contemporary Chinese Ming scholars interpreting Zhu Xi. “Instead,” according to twentieth century Korean Confucian scholar Michael C. Kalton, “a distinctive pattern of referring almost wholly to Chu Hi’s (Zhu Xi), the Ch’eng brothers and other authoritative Song dynasty sources was set in place.”⁵⁷ In other words, scholars developing Neo-Confucianism in Korea consulted the original writings of Zhu Xi and not their own Chinese Neo-Confucian contemporaries.

⁵⁵ Jeff Richey, “Confucius (551-479 BCE), *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/confuciu/>.

⁵⁶ These ideas come from Confucius “Five Constants” and “Four Virtues.”

⁵⁷ Michael C. Kalton, et. al, *The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Korean Neo-Confucian Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), xix.

Zhu Xi's teachings became the preeminent texts for Korean Neo-Confucianism and laid a foundation for the importance that ritual held in Korean society during the Joseon dynasty. Much of Zhu Xi's teaching centered on social order and proper personal conduct and many of his ideas, including his ideas on ritual, became codified at the beginning of the Joseon Dynasty. Korean studies professor Martina Deuchler in explaining the *Code of Administration of the Choson Dynasty* which was based in teachings of Zhu Xi and written in 1394, said that the code "recognized the significance of elementary social actions (for example, wedding and mourning) in the well-being and stability of the state" and that the code "stressed the importance of ritual" in society.⁵⁸

Confucian rituals were an intricate part of the lives of Koreans. In a preface to Zhu Xi's book *Family Rituals*, Zhu wrote:

Ritual "has fundamental elements and elaborations." From the perspective of how ritual is carried out at home, the fundamental elements are to preserve roles and responsibilities and give substantial form to love and respect; the elaborations are the ceremonies and specifications for capping, weddings, funerals, and ancestral rites. The fundamental elements are the daily courtesies of householders, the things they must not fail to perform for even a single day.⁵⁹

Performance of ritual, according to Zhu Xi was something someone should not "fail to perform for even a single day." Ritual performativity was a "must" in Korean society. Historian Bruce Cumings, in commenting on the shift to emphasizing Neo-Confucianism taken by early Joseon leaders, stated "Much of what we now reckon as "Korean culture" or "Korean tradition" was the result of this major social reorganization accomplished by self-conscious ideologues, who got

⁵⁸ Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 120-121.

⁵⁹ Zhu Xi, Preface to the *Family Rituals*, found in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, compiled by Wm Theodore DeBary and Barry and Irene Bloom, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 745. The quote marks are an allusion to writings by Confucian scholar Li Ki, in *Record of Rites*.

going in the fifteenth century.”⁶⁰ Neo-Confucianism gained such control over society that Joseon Korea developed into the most Confucian state in East Asia.⁶¹ When missionaries arrived in Korea, Neo-Confucian rituals, expectations and thinking dominated Korean society and culture.

Korea also borrowed its earliest script from China. Beginning in the third century BCE, Korea used Chinese characters for its written language not developing a Korean alphabet until the early fifteenth century.⁶² Although Koreans and Chinese could not understand each other’s spoken language, they communicated using Chinese characters. This practice of using Chinese characters for the Korean written language continued among the literati into the twentieth century, despite the development of a Korean alphabet.

Around the early 15th century, Joseon Dynasty King Sejong along with a group of scholars invented a highly phonetic alphabet for the Korean language. They purposefully set out to create an easily read alphabet to make the Korean language more accessible to those less educated and to women. They created the letter shapes to mimic the shape of the mouth when sounds were made. For instance, the vowel ㅏ sounds like “ah” in English and the tall stick shape of the letter was indicative of an open mouth shape and the letter ㅋ makes a “k” type sound and the shape of the letter indicated the tongue would hit the roof of the mouth during pronunciation. This highly scientific and purposeful endeavor created a written language that contained few “exceptions” to the rules. Once a native speaker understood the alphabet, reading

⁶⁰ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, (New York: W. W. Norton and co., 2005), 54-55.

⁶¹ Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 48.

⁶² Insup Taylor and M. Martin Taylor, *Writing and Literacy in Chinese, Korean and Japanese*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins North America, 1995), 297.

became relatively easy compared with languages such as Chinese where the character for each word must be learned.⁶³

The Korean cultural and religious landscape of the late nineteenth century reflected native Korean influences as well as ideas borrowed from China. Shamanism represented thousands of years of belief in the spiritual, in unseen entities that shaped life experience. Korean Neo-Confucianism represented a direct adaptation of Chinese Sung Dynasty scholar's ideas of Neo-Confucianism, which included strong ideas on proper social order and the importance of ritual.

Neo-Confucianism Society and Korean Women at the End of the Joseon Dynasty

The adoption of Neo-Confucianism and its development and strengthening as a societal paradigm during the years of the Joseon Dynasty, structured public and domestic expectations for correct conduct in the country. Neo-Confucian relationship hierarchies dictated proper demeanor and performance in the home and public sphere. Neo-Confucian expectations for gendered behavior guided much of the day-to-day activities of both men and women.

In Korean Neo-Confucianism, the basic principles concerning women's behavior came from the teachings found in the Confucian classic *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*. This book outlined Three Obediences and Four Virtues for women. The Three Obediences were to be obedient to her father as a daughter, to her husband as a wife and to her sons in widowhood. The Four Virtues were morality, proper speech, modest/manner appearance and diligent work.⁶⁴ By

⁶³ See discussion of the Korean language at: Amanda Snellinger, "Korean Language", *Asia Society*, <http://asiasociety.org/korean-language>.

⁶⁴ Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 112 and Rodney Leon Taylor, Howard Yuen Fung Choy, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism: N-Z*, (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), 496.

the end of the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, these idealistic expectations were performed through public seclusion, strict adherence to hierarchical relationships and arranged marriage.

Seclusion

Late Joseon Korean proscriptive rules for women stipulated that women remain secluded from public view. Most Korean women stayed home, behind walls, unseen and only traveled outside the home at night occasionally. Only women of the very lowest classes would come out during the day on a regular basis. Korean women usually entered seclusion around puberty and the strictness of the rule varied geographically, being more stringent in the south than the north.⁶⁵



Coverings for Women – Picture. William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS. Fair Use.

Although expected to stay within the walls of the home, Korean women could legitimately go out in public, if they were invisible and hidden from view.⁶⁶ Women traveled in covered palanquins and also wore a number of different coverings to be able to appear in public. Depending on a woman's rank in society, those coverings could be clothing that covered all but a woman's face and eyes or a very large bamboo type hat that acted almost like a portable tent.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Jin-Hee Chun; Et Al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 18–19. Mattie Ingold Tate Journal. Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa., hereafter designated as PHS. Nellie Rankin letters. Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS..

⁶⁶ In the Confucian text *Analecks for Women*, the author Song Ruozhao admonished women, “Don’t peer over the outer wall or go beyond the outer courtyard. If you have to go outside, cover your face; if you peep outside, conceal yourself as much as possible.” From *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 827-831.

⁶⁷ M. W. Noble, ed., *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea* (Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985).

Women in the lowest ranks of society wore a green silk cloth or just an apron over their head. In a memoir, Drusilla Yi, a Korean Christian convert, tells of a time when she “made do” in covering herself. “I went wearing my old clothes and carrying a paper lantern. I wore an apron over my head, being too poor to wear the green silk cloak, the kind used for the seclusion of women.”⁶⁸

While societal expectations delimited women’s proper behavior, women did push those bounds, especially when circumstances warranted or curiosity motivated their actions. So, while perhaps cumbersome and difficult, women did go out of their houses upon occasion. An example of a novel happening in Seoul that brought women out of their homes can be found in the journal of American missionary William Butler Harrison. Harrison wrote in an 1896 entry about a baseball game between missionary men and men from the U.S. Marine contingent stationed in Seoul. Although the United States did not keep an Ambassador in Korea, the country did support an American Legation headed by a Foreign Minister with a small military presence. In the journal entry for the Saturday baseball game Harrison declared that it “was a great sight to the Koreans. Quite a number of ladies were out.”⁶⁹ While Korean social expectations for women included seclusion, women were never entirely restricted from public spaces.

Family Life Expectations

Strict adherence to hierarchical binaries dominated familial relationships in Korea and five of those were the most important in social and family life. In the book *Mencius*, 4th century

⁶⁸ M.W. Noble, ed. “Biography of Mrs. Drusilla Kyeng Sook Yi, as told by her to Mrs. W. A. Noble”, *Victorious Lives*, 22. While I am not sure why these coverings were green, green was a color worn by all classes of Korean women.

⁶⁹ William Butler Harrison Journal, April 26, 1896, box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS. This may be one of the first references to baseball in Korean history. Today baseball is a very popular sport in South Korea. A website for the Asian Baseball Committee puts the date as 1905, this reference predates that.

BC Confucian philosopher, Mencius, defined the five Confucian relationships, as "...affection between father and son, righteousness between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends."⁷⁰ For women in Korea in the late 1800s, inferiority of women to men and of wives to husbands defined hierarchical relationships. Women were also expected to show great deference to elders and in-laws.

In another custom surrounding familial relationships, Korean men and women did not marry for love and companionship; they married for practical purposes and procreation of male offspring. Korean women often married very young, as early as 13, in arranged marriages. A Korean woman did not actually see or meet her new husband until after the wedding ceremony and expectations for her behavior included talking very little for at least the first year of marriage as well as serving her new mother-in-law by following her every instruction.⁷¹

Once married, a woman's first and foremost job was to produce a son. Korean historian Bruce Cumings quoted a Korean periodical published in the early twentieth century explaining that a Korean man:

...wants to be married, not for selfish reasons, nor because a little sugar coated heart longs to rest in his love and be looked after. Not a bit of it: he wants a son, a son of his very own. He wants him wildly, unreasonably; anything for a son.⁷²

⁷⁰ Taylor and Choy, "Wu Lun", *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism:N-Z*, 695.

⁷¹ C. Insun Yoon, "Civilizing Mission for Women: American Methodist Missionary Women and Social Change in Korea, 1885-1940", (PhD dissertation, Drew University, 2008), 30-34.

⁷² James Scarth Gale, *History of the Korean People*, (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1972), 109-110, quoted in Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 50.

For some women final acceptance into the family depended on producing a male heir. Women also rarely had names but after having a male son would finally earn the name of the male child's mother, for instance, "Woo-joo Oma" or "Woo-joo's mom."⁷³

Women possessed little recourse if they found themselves in abusive marriages. Only men could legally divorce and men could divorce their wives for disobedience to any of these seven different rules for women.⁷⁴

- a) Be obedient to your husband's family, especially to the elders.
- b) Bear your husband sons. (Daughters were not considered as posterity.)
- c) Do not commit obscene acts.
- d) Do not be jealous of your husband's concubines.
- e) Do not catch malignant diseases (epilepsy, venereal disease, etc.)
- t) Do not chatter or gossip.
- g) Do not steal.⁷⁵

By the late 1800s, women did not have grounds for divorce and were expected not to remarry after the deaths of their husbands.

Educational Opportunities for Korean Women

The Confucian belief in the inferiority of women to men limited educational opportunities for Korean women. While the particular percentage is unknown, it is widely accepted by historians that the literacy rate for Korean women during the late Joseon was very low.⁷⁶ According to an 1896 article in *The Korean Repository* written by a missionary, no

⁷³ William Elliot Griffis, *Corea, The Hermit Nation* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1882), 244-245, quoted in C. Insun Yoon, "Civilizing Mission for Women," 32.

⁷⁴ Haesook Kim, "Changes in Gender Composition and the Future of Gender Balance in the Legal Professions in Korea," in *East Asia's Renewed Respect for the Rule of Law in the 21st Century*, ed. Setsuo Miyazawa et. al. (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2015), 174-175.

⁷⁵ Yoon, "Civilizing Mission for Women," 31.

⁷⁶ Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women*, 66.

schools for girls existed and primers and textbooks for boys taught the inferiority of women. And in the textbooks a common adage taught boys included the following admonition, “A man honors himself by governing his wife, and a woman honors herself by subordinating herself to her husband.”⁷⁷ Often men commented women could not be educated; they were incapable of learning.⁷⁸

Social Classes of Korean Women

For women, class determined the extent to which they abided by the Confucian expectations for women. The class system was highly structured and western observers of late Jeoson society often described it in terms of the more familiar caste system encountered in India. Korean societal structure however was not a true caste system. At the top of the social structure the *yangban* class consisted of the social elite, those with prominent ancestors. The *yangban* generally enjoyed wealth procured from landownership and slave labor.⁷⁹ Eugene Park also described a middle class known as the *Chungin* or literally “Middle People.” This class of commoners consisted of skilled government workers, low-ranking military men and illegitimate sons of the *yangban*.⁸⁰ Below the *chungin* were commoners and then the lowest class of slaves and butchers.⁸¹ Women in the highest classes experienced the greatest seclusion and highest expectations for proper Confucian behavior. And while Confucian expectations proved to be

⁷⁷ Geo Herber Jones, “The Status of Woman in Korea, *The Korean Repository* 3, (1896): 224-225.

⁷⁸ Yoon, *Civilizing Mission for Women*, 30-34.

⁷⁹ Michael Seth, *A History of Korea from Antiquity to the Present*, (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 165.

⁸⁰ Eugene Y. Park, “Status and “Defunct” Offices in Early Modern Korea: The Case of Five Guards Generals (Owijang), 1864-1910”, *Questia: Trusted Online Research*, <https://www.questia.com/article/1G1-178085535/status-and-defunct-offices-in-early-modern-korea>. Accessed March 9, 2016.

⁸¹ Park, “Status and “Defunct” Offices in Early Modern Korea.”

most restrictive for upper-class *yangban* women, missionary Ellen Strong reported that the rules for exclusion extended pretty far down the rank of society.⁸² Confucian expectations for women pervaded almost every social class with the exception of dancing girls, government employed entertainers, shaman priestess's and slaves.⁸³

Societal expectations for Korean women under late Joseon Confucian strictures greatly limited their rights and marginalized their position in society, but it did not leave them completely powerless. Although a Korean woman found herself secluded, unable to own property, and the nameless servant in someone else's home after marriage, historian Bruce Cumings explains that as the inside person she could rule the inner sanctum. And when she got older, restrictions on her activities somewhat diminished.⁸⁴ In the waning years of twentieth century Joseon, Korean intellectuals called for the education of Korean women as the first educators of children in the home.⁸⁵ This new attitude by Korean men concerning the education of women opened the possibility of American women missionaries to build bridges with Korean women based on literacy, a possibility American women did indeed take.⁸⁶

American Women's Determination to Enter the World of Korean Women

American missionary women came to Korea as part of a wave of worldwide Christian evangelization that began in earnest around 1880.⁸⁷ At the same moment, several changes took

⁸² Ellen Strong, "Woman's Work in Korea," *Woman's Work for Woman*, (August 1893), 213-214.

⁸³ *The Korea Review*, Homer Hulbert, ed., (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House, January, 1902), 6-8.

⁸⁴ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 61.

⁸⁵ Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires 1895-1919*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 40.

⁸⁶ Hyaewol Choi, "Women's Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea," 88.

⁸⁷ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 1.

place in Korea that made it possible for American missionaries to travel there. Most notably were the ambitions of Japan to bring Korea into their sphere of influence. Using gunboat diplomacy, learned from the United States, Japan forcibly opened Korea for trade in 1876. Very soon thereafter, Koreans signed an unequal trade agreement with the United States in 1882, the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation, setting up a relationship of economic exploitation by Americans. Americans also established a diplomatic presence in Seoul through the American Legation.

As the Joseon Dynasty began to wane under pressure from Japan and the West, American missionaries began to arrive on her shores. The first missionary to Korea came ostensibly as a doctor to the American Legation stationed in Seoul, although the Northern Presbyterian Mission Board paid his salary.⁸⁸ When entering countries like Korea, the United States engaged in a form of cultural imperialism that was unlike Japanese colonialism, which did not formally begin until 1910. American cultural imperialism aimed to change cultural values to those of Protestant America. American missionary women played an important role in this effort. They were presumably the only ones who could reach Korean women. The gender and religious values they brought with them, however differed markedly from the Neo-Confucian social landscape they entered.

Late Nineteenth Century America

In the late nineteenth century, scientific ideas on racial hierarchy fueled cultural imperialism - the elevation of American cultural ideals over those found in other parts of the world in a project seen as benevolent and civilizing. This hierarchy elevated the superiority of

⁸⁸ Chung-shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 17. The first Protestant missionary to arrive, Horace N. Allen, stepped foot in Korea on September 20, 1884. Although he was a missionary, the American Legation needed a doctor and agreed to introduce him to the Korean court as the physician for the legation. However, in reality he was not. The Presbyterian mission paid his salary.

Euro-Americans and Euro-American values. After the Civil War, the white north and the white south coalesced in a type of racial unity aided by a “scientific” legitimacy for racism discovered in social Darwinism and manifested in nineteenth century ethnography. According to historian Jackson Lears, “Dreams of rebirth” after the war “involved the renewal of white power.”⁸⁹

The ethnographic displays at the 1904 Saint Louis World’s fair give insight into the ideas of American and European cultural superiority and racism found in turn of the twentieth century America. On display at the world’s fair were “primitive” groups from around the world, whose evolution had not yet attained that of the highest race, “Americo-European” man.⁹⁰ In describing the motivations for such a display, Professor W.J. McGhee of the Smithsonian institution and president of the American Anthropological society stated:

The primary motive of the ethnographic displays is to show the world a little known side of human life; yet it is the aim to do this in such a manner that all who come may learn something of that upward course of human development beginning with the Dark Ages of tooth and claw and stone and tools, and culminating in the modern enlightenment illustrated in the Exhibit Palaces and the International Congresses.⁹¹

Humans from around the world were on display in essence to make the case that white Europeans and Americans were the most evolved, most modern and most enlightened of all races on the earth.

⁸⁹ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 2.

⁹⁰ James W. Buel, ed., *Louisiana and the fair. An exposition of the world, its people and their achievements*, volume 5 (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1904).
<https://archive.org/stream/louisianafairexp05bueliala#page/n9/mode/2up>

⁹¹ James W. Buel, ed., *Louisiana and the fair*, xi-xii.



Frontispiece of Louisiana the Fair, *An exposition of the world, its people and their achievements, volume 5* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1904). Public Domain.

The frontispiece of a volume entitled “Types and Development of man” published in 1904 to accompany the display graphically portrayed this racism.⁹² “Bushman”, the Japanese “Ainu” man, who were on display at the exposition, and the “negro” lined up on the bottom after prehistoric man and of course at the top was the white European-American man. In the center a woman holding a light symbolized the “civilizing” light of Americans to the “dark” world. In the book, inside the front cover, an explanation of the artwork was given. “The photogaveure herewith” the explanation read, “is from an excellent specifically prepared drawing which very accurately illustrates, as nearly as the science of ethnology is able to do, the characteristic types

⁹² Frontispiece. James W. Buel, ed., *Louisiana and the fair*.

of mankind arranged in progressive order of development from primitive or prehistoric man to the highest example of modern civilization.”⁹³ Predominate ideas on race and civilization at the end of the nineteenth century centered on the superiority of the white American. Most middle class Americans held these ideas, including missionaries who took them to the mission field.

Despite the influx of immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, the United States remained a Protestant nation and Protestant religious ideas seasoned the stew that became American cultural imperialism. Religion historian Winthrop Hudson said of the time, “the ideals, the convictions, the language, the customs, the institutions of society were so shot through with Christian presuppositions that the culture itself nurtured and nourished the Christian faith.”⁹⁴ American culture included the preeminence of Protestant Christianity and these Protestant values and convictions included ideas of the superiority of the white race.

As Protestant ministers and pastors taught beliefs commensurate with the Christian religion, they also taught that American Christians held a responsibility to lesser-enlightened ones in the world, in other words to embark on a civilizing mission. Pastors often couched this responsibility in terms of helping others. Some though, used much stronger language. In 1893, Congregationalist pastor Josiah Strong stated “that this race [meaning white Anglo-Saxon Protestants] is destined to dispossess many weaker ones, assimilate others, and mould (sic) the remainder until in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind.”⁹⁵

Dispossess and assimilate and mold are very imperialistic words of domination. Beyond a

⁹³ James W. Buel, ed., *Louisiana and the fair*, inside front cover.

⁹⁴ Winthrop Hudson, *The Great Tradition of American Churches*, (New York: Harper, 1953), 108, quoted in Carolyn A. Haynes, *Divine Destiny: Gender and Race in Nineteenth-Century Protestantism*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), xvii.

⁹⁵ Josiah Strong, *The New Era: or The Coming Kingdom*, (New York, 1893), 79-80, quoted in Haynes, *Divine Destiny*: xii.

message of a type of paternalistic help, American Protestant pastors preached messages from the pulpit of the superiority of their race over the race of those on the mission field.

These ideas of racial superiority found expression in late nineteenth century influential Protestant organizations, such as the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. According to observers and participants, seemingly the SVM rose quickly in the 1880s as a supernatural, spiritual move of God, but in actually the group was a well-organized, deliberately planned group. In its highly emotional meetings conducted near college campuses, it signed up more missionary prospects than ever actually went to the mission field. They recruited both men and women, but the organization itself did not send out missionaries. Its mission was to recruit missionaries for already existing mission boards. The SVM targeted young college students with their slogan of “Evangelization of the World in this Generation.”⁹⁶ This evangelization to the world included preaching Protestant religious ideas and values, as well as proselytizing American cultural imperialism through their civilizing mission.

At least in part due to the SVM, the number of Protestant foreign missionaries mushroomed at the end of the nineteenth century. Every major denomination in America instituted foreign mission boards, many completely staffed and controlled by women.⁹⁷ And by 1915, the foreign mission movement involved more women in America than the Temperance Movement. It was the single largest women’s movement in America at the time.⁹⁸

These mission boards often orchestrated decisions that affected missionaries in foreign countries. Mission board personnel knew little about and had never visited the countries they

⁹⁶ Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World*, 50 - 63.

⁹⁷ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 1,8.

⁹⁸ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 8.

oversaw. Lack of familiarity did not matter. Their ideas of a Christian “civilizing mission” to the world justified their participation in sending missionaries.⁹⁹ Also, for both male and female mission boards, the superiority of the American Protestant religion and culture trumped knowing anything about the culture of the country where they sent missionaries.¹⁰⁰ Mission boards therefore felt qualified to set policy for missionaries to follow in the field. Missionaries in Korea followed the policies set by mission boards.

In sum, in late nineteenth century America strong ties existed between ideas of racial superiority, cultural superiority, religious superiority and missions. For the missionaries, the world needed to be civilized according to white Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and beliefs and American missionaries were ready to do the civilizing. While much of this work included proselytizing Christian tenets, missionaries included ideas of American cultural imperialism. And as these missionaries entered Korea, the cultural paradigms and religious beliefs of both Korean and American women were complicated in a mix of ideas on evil spirits, gods, women’s literacy, cleanliness (moral and physical) and appropriate actions in worship.

Differing Religious Beliefs of American and Korean Women

While Protestant and Korean religious ideas shared some similarities, they greatly differed in the details. For example, while Shamanism and Protestantism shared common beliefs in the existent of spiritual entities people cannot see, Korean Shamanistic beliefs incorporated multiple gods, the highest of which was the sky god, *Hanneulnim*.¹⁰¹ In this belief in multiple

⁹⁹ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Hill, *The World Their Household*, 5, 41-42.

¹⁰¹ Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 53-55.

gods, Shamanism differed from the Protestant belief in one God.¹⁰² While ideas of a highest god, *Hanneulnim*, were somewhat similar to the supreme one God in Christianity, differences were seen in the practice of the two religions. For instance, Shamans pray to multiple gods on the behalf of those who are sick or suffering or in difficult circumstances, Protestant Christians pray to one God only.

The use of a Shaman as a go-between in the middle of believers and gods differed from the Protestant idea of praying directly to the one God. Shamans in Korean Shamanism were often called on to pray for and perform rituals for the sick or dying, Koreans did not pray directly themselves.¹⁰³ American Protestant Christians, asked pastors for prayer, but most often they would pray directly to their God. They did not see the need for a pastor as a go-between. They would also see questions about the future as fortune telling and as such, not a part of Protestant Christianity.¹⁰⁴

Other points of conflict included relations between men and women. The Korean Confucian practice of men taking concubines also directly clashed with missionary values. Protestant Americans believed strongly that a man should only have one wife, an admonition they believed came from scriptures in the Bible such as Exodus 20:17, which said that a person should not covet, or want a neighbor's wife. Another scripture in 1st Timothy advocates that

¹⁰² David Ferguson, *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth Century Theology*, (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 66.

¹⁰³ Lee-Ellen Strawn, "Korean Bible Women's Success: Using the Anbang Network and the Religious Authority of the Mudang" *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol. 6 no. 1 (December, 2012), 130.

¹⁰⁴ Ferguson, *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth Century Theology*, 308.

leaders in the church should be “sober-minded and the husband of one wife.”¹⁰⁵ No such strong cultural admonition for only one wife existed in late nineteenth century Korea.¹⁰⁶

American missionary women had much to say about their perceptions of women’s treatment in Korea, including concubinage. For instance, one missionary considered Korean women’s lives as “hard” and “unbeautiful” and another stated that their problems made her “sick at heart.”¹⁰⁷ In many ways, missionary women did not discriminate against Korean women who were concubines. They slept in their homes and taught them principles of Christianity. But when it came to church membership, the status as a concubine became problematic.¹⁰⁸

These are just a few examples of places of possible religious clash between American women missionaries and Korean women. Religion played a large role in American women missionaries’ cultural paradigm and their ideas of the superiority of that paradigm brought them in direct conflict with cultural values of Korean women. Another area that brought them in conflict with Korean women was their differing proscriptive gender roles.

Protestant Proscriptive Gender Roles for American Women

Just as Confucian ideas shaped gender ideals in Korea, religious ideas shaped proscriptive gender values for women in America. While American Protestant women did not experience expectations for seclusion, expectations for their place in society and the home did exist. A lot of these gender expectations for women emerged out of Protestant Christian ideas of

¹⁰⁵ 1st Timothy 3:2

¹⁰⁶ Rules for life in a household that included concubines were set out by Confucius. According to a book written close to the time of this study, “Concubinage was then and theretofore, as now, also an institution in China and is recognized by Confucius and rules laid down also for its regulation.” Miles Meander Dawson, *The Ethics of Confucius*, (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1915), 141.

¹⁰⁷ Mrs. H. Miller, “A Christian Concubine,” *The Korean Mission Field* 1 (1905): 170 and Mrs. A.M. Sharrocks, “Work Among Korean Women”, *The Korean Mission Field*, 1 (1905): 33-35.

¹⁰⁸ Mrs. H. Miller, “A Christian Concubine,” *The Korean Mission Field* 1 (1905);170.

the proper spheres for women. Proper spheres or places for women come straight from Protestant ideas of the appropriate role of women in the family and in the public sphere.¹⁰⁹

Proscriptive gender roles for nineteenth century American women focused on their role in the home as mothers, caregivers and educators. Much nineteenth century American male Protestant thought on the proper place for women subordinated women to men.¹¹⁰ According to these male theologians, this subordination came out of Bible scriptures such as Ephesians 4:22-23. According to this scripture, wives should submit to husbands as the head of the household. American Protestant pastors, according to observations by an English traveller to America, especially favored this scripture.¹¹¹ In addition to this idea, another biblical concept that was important to male proscriptive ideas for women's behavior were scriptures that talked of mothers teaching children.¹¹² In incorporating these Biblical ideas into the male dominated world of the late nineteenth century, women did not receive educations for their own personal intellectual growth, but to perfect their roles as housekeepers, wives and mothers. Proper vocations for women became activities such as sewing, weaving, housekeeping, laundering and tutoring.¹¹³

While these expectations for domesticity existed in America, by the late nineteenth century, in conjunction with their role as educators of children, professional homemakers and purveyors of Protestant ideals, almost all middle class girls obtained some kind of education and

¹⁰⁹ Karin E. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth Century American Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17 & 60.

¹¹⁰ Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 17 & 60.

¹¹¹ Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, note 14 p. 223.

¹¹² Proverbs 1:8-9. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 127.

¹¹³ Haynes, *Divine Destiny*, 88.

more and more middle-class women attended college. For example by the turn of the twentieth century, women's medical schools graduated new classes each year.¹¹⁴ Other women graduates found social science as a way to enter into larger roles outside of the home. They used degrees in this field as a tool for social reform thus as an extension of promoting Protestant principles. Women also graduated from female seminaries, institutions devised not to produce female clergy but to produce women who would help Christianize the nation as teachers and support the nation as self-sufficient mothers and wives.¹¹⁵ Many of the missionary women who came to Korea either graduated from medical school or a female seminary.

In their role as Protestant crusaders, some of the American women missionaries to Korea found opportunities for professional careers which would have been more difficult to find in America. Southern Presbyterian missionary Nellie Rankin was one such woman. In describing her work in Korea, Nellie told her brother, "I was never more happy in the prospect for work than now and if I thought I would have to give up Korea by going to America, I would never set foot on American soil again...I love the work."¹¹⁶ Nellie Rankin and hundreds of other female missionaries found space for professional careers on the mission field.

American women missionaries, though proscriptionally relegated to their proper place in the Protestant religious world, found a space within missions to push the boundaries, just as Korean women pushed their boundaries in social expectations. In pushing those boundaries, they

¹¹⁴ Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 117-119. "History of Women Physicians Timeline", The Legacy Center: Archives and Special Collections, Drexel University College of Medicine, accessed March 13, 2016. <http://archives.drexelmed.edu/timeline.php>.

¹¹⁵ Kristen Welsh and Abraham Ruelas, *The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 69.

¹¹⁶ Letter. Nellie Rankin to "My Dear Will", August 2, 1909, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

took their cultural imperialism around the world. And in doing so, they carried with them the prominent racial and imperialistic notions of late nineteenth century America as well as Protestant Christian beliefs. In the eyes of missionaries arriving on the shores of Korea, America was modern; Korea was not. America was developed; Korea was uncivilized. America was Christian; Korea was heathen.

American women missionaries to Korea faced vast differences in cultural outlook with the Korean women they came to evangelize. And while before they left, they had great ambitions for changing Korean women, they did not spend much time learning about Korean women's culture or values. They spent most of their spare time raising money.

American Missionaries to Korea – Motivations and Preparations

American women missionaries' motivations to enter the Korean mission field varied but most arrived with idealistic expectations of converting Korean women to Christianity. They also brought with them the idea that their Christian religion and culture was superior to that of the Koreans. For example, Mattie Ingold Tate wrote of the gratitude in her heart "that God had not allotted me such a life [as the Koreans had] and that he had brought me here to tell of His love and power to bless and save to these people and I pray that I may be faithful to the great trust."¹¹⁷ Tate's motivation focused on evangelism centered on the transmission of a new idea, a Western idea, of Christianity. It also centered on the Koreans as Others.¹¹⁸ Ingold Tate saw these Others

¹¹⁷ Mattie Ingold Tate Personal Journal, July 18, 1897. Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹¹⁸ Post-colonial theory and ideas of Edward Said illuminated the ways in which imperialist Europeans and Americans looked at people in other parts of the world as culturally inferior. Edward Said writes in his work *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq*, about a conceptual framework situated around "a notion of Us-versus-Them" of an idea that "our civilization is known and accepted, theirs is different and strange." In effect, what is not "us" is "other" and what is "other" is unusual and inferior. Missionary women who worked in Korea exhibited these ideas of cultural superiority. While these ideas are important for this study, they are not the focus. Edward Said, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 24.

as less blessed and as living a life she would not like to live and in need of her help to change them. Her stated intentions and motivations fixated on changing Korean women's minds away from traditional Korean beliefs and to a new belief.

Besides changing beliefs, the motivations of Methodist missionary Millie Albertson point to a desire to civilize Korean women. Albertson stated in a 1905 article, "If we can but teach our women," in referencing Korean women, "the sacredness of home life; make them intelligent wives, mothers, sisters, neighbors, the work of winning Korea to Christ cannot fail."¹¹⁹ This statement by Albertson directly reflected motivations stemming from a type of cultural domestic imperialism. American domesticity trumped Korean domesticity. Instead of looking at Korean domesticity as simply different, she saw it as inferior. These remarks also directly referred to an undertaking to civilize and modernize Korean women. This motivation for work articulated by Albertson alluded to the racial, cultural and moral superiority typical of nineteenth century American thought.

American missionaries to Korea did not receive training before they left. Despite the size, scope and organization of the mission's movement in America, the early Southern Presbyterians missionaries who came to Korea did not receive much, if any, cultural or linguistic preparation. Early Korean missionary Anabel Nisbet explained the experience of the first Southern Presbyterians to go to Korea as missionaries.¹²⁰

According to Nisbet, Horace Allen, the mission-salaried doctor to the American Legation, returned to America from Korea for a missionary recruiting trip some time in 1891. During this trip, he visited a number of Presbyterian seminaries, including McCormick in

¹¹⁹Millie Albertson, "Work for Women," *The Korea Mission Field* 9, no. 4 (1914): 111.

¹²⁰ Anabel Nisbet, *Day in and Day out in Korea*, (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1920), 18-19.

Chicago and Union in Richmond, a Southern Presbyterian seminary. After Allen's visit, three men from these seminaries became interested in entering mission work in Korea, L.B. Tate, William Junkin and W.D. Reynolds. They applied to the Executive Committee for missions of the Southern Presbyterian denomination, but the Southern Presbyterians turned down their request and asked them to choose another field of service. Four women also desired to go to Korea, two women, May Leyburn and Patsy Bolling, engaged to Junkin and Reynolds respectively and two single missionary women, Mattie Tate, L.B. Tate's sister and Linnie Davis.¹²¹

The group of seven men and women did not, however, choose a different field of service. "Deeply impressed with the fact that God was calling them personally to Korea," the group instead prayed that Korea would open up as a possible mission destination.¹²² Two months later, around late 1891, the group received a message from the Southern Presbyterians that they would sponsor the group to open a mission in Korea. The Foreign Mission's Committee told the band to prepare to sail in August of 1892.

At this point, "prepare" mostly meant raise money. In doing this, members of the group prepared articles to run in denominational literature in order to "create a strong sentiment in favor of opening work in Korea" in hopes of engendering support for their groundbreaking mission.¹²³ Although the group was under the Southern Presbyterians, the largest contribution came from a Northern Presbyterian. According to Nisbet, Mr. John Underwood of Brooklyn

¹²¹ Nisbet, *Day in and Day out in Korea*, 18.

¹²² Nisbet, *Day in and Day out in Korea*, 18.

¹²³ Nisbet, , *Day in and Day out in Korea*, 19.

New York contributed \$2000.00, which was the contribution that “added the most.”¹²⁴ John Underwood, the founder of Underwood Typewriter Company, was the brother of Korean missionary Horace Underwood.

While Nisbet mentions raising money, she makes no mention of reviewing Korean culture or studying the Korean language before they left for Korea. She does, however allude to their lack of preparation in these areas by stating, “In those early days of helpless ignorance of language and custom, many a funny blunder was made...”¹²⁵ This description points to the early group’s lack of familiarity with Korea.

This ignorance of Korean culture can also be found in writings of other women who served in Korea. Many American woman missionaries described Korean weddings in journals they kept or letters they wrote home. And most of those descriptions included complete shock at the Korean wedding ceremony. They expected a ceremony similar to ones in the United States and when they encountered very different rituals, their reactions not only assessed Korean weddings as different but as unholy or not attractive.¹²⁶ Their astonishment ranged from the fact that marriages were arranged and the bride and groom did not know each other before the ceremony to detailed descriptions of the events of the wedding, including drawn pictures. Mattie Ingold Tate’s opinions were fairly typical when she declared, “There was nothing serious or solemn or beautiful about it and it seemed like a farce to call it marriage, tho it is by their law.”¹²⁷

¹²⁴ This story about the early beginnings of the Southern Presbyterian mission can be found in Anabel Nisbet’s book *Day in and Day out in Korea*, 17-19.

¹²⁵ Nisbet, *Day in and Day out in Korea*, 20.

¹²⁶ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, April 14, 1904. Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929. RG 1010, PHS.

¹²⁷ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, April 14, 1904, PHS. , Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

Her detailed description and declarations point to an unfamiliarity of a basic rite of passage in Korean culture.

In another passage in her medical journal, Mattie Ingold Tate showed her ignorance of Korean Shamanistic practices. In the entry, she described passing a house where brush hung piled around the fence. Apparently she found out why later and made the note that it was done “to make the eyes of the thief drop out.”¹²⁸ In light of the large role Shamanism played in Korean society, her ignorance of ritualistic practices in the religion pointed to her unfamiliarity with Korean culture, but her note on what the practice meant, also pointed to her desire to learn.

In an interesting story that again pointed to Tate’s lack of familiarity with Korean culture, the doctor described a time when Korean women laughed at her ignorance when she didn’t know that you were supposed to touch your chin and then your face to wake up a foot that had “gone to sleep.”¹²⁹ Korean women seemed to find the American’s ignorance of their customs amusing, at least according to Ingold Tate. As a medical doctor, her mention of the custom more than likely pointed to her astonishment at Korean women’s lack of knowledge concerning basic blood flow.

This lack of familiarity of Korean customs goes hand-in-hand with the lack of preparation and training missionaries received for work in Korea. Their assessments and value judgments of some of these cultural customs also pointed to ideas of the superiority of American customs.

American women missionaries to Korea left the United States ill-prepared but confident in their ability as Americans to help the less-fortunate, less-Christian Korean women. They saw

¹²⁸ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, November 10, 1903, PHS. , Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹²⁹ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, Decembere 13, 1899. Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

their behavior as benign in offering an opportunity for Korean women to accept Christianity, a righteous, imperialistic benevolence that had its roots in nineteenth century American ideas of racial, cultural and religious superiority. The American women departed with little knowledge of Korea, and with motivations couched in terms of bringing the “sacredness of home life” to Korean women.¹³⁰

Examples of the type of imperialism missionaries brought to the mission field can be seen in analyzing some of the photographs the missionaries took. Historian Laura Wexler in her book *Tender Violence* on imperialistic photography, exposed ways in which a category of late nineteenth century photographs she terms as “domestic images” showed racial attitudes.¹³¹ In the context of foreign missions, photographs American women took of the people they encountered abroad illuminated their unfamiliarity with other cultures as well as their attitudes of superiority in the encounters. According to Wexler, behind the seemingly benign pictures lay a discourse couched in domesticity, which justified expansionist policies as an inherently benevolent and civilizing project. Photographers made an explicit attempt to portray the “others” in the picture in the best light possible, as happy in their situations, due to the help or paternalistic care of the white man or woman.¹³²

¹³⁰ Millie Albertson, “Work for Women,” *The Korea Mission Field* 9, no. 4 (1914): 111.

¹³¹ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 21-23.

¹³² Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 54.

Photographs taken by American missionaries to Korea can be analyzed in this light including this Mission picture of a Korean woman in western dress. The title to the photograph was “Mrs. Hugh Cynn accompanied M. Edmunds to US, April 1908 (은순리).”¹³³ In this photograph, the photographer marginalized the Korean woman’s actual name, pronounced Eun Sun Ri in English, to parentheses. The missionary’s designation of the Korean woman as Mrs. Hugh Cynn destroyed the woman’s Korean identity, as in Korean culture women never took the name of their husbands. The Korean woman’s western dress and the western-style chair and table used for the pose also prioritize American culture over Korean culture. In essence, this photograph portrayed a “violence” done to Korean culture.



Picture. "Mrs. Hugh Cynn," William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1911, RG 1140, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa. Fair Use.

American women missionaries to Korea possessed motivations that centered on changing the religion and cultural practices (like marriage norms) of Korean women. They often also possessed motivations to instill in Korean women the same kind of domestic ideals they possessed. When the American women missionaries arrived in Korea, they brought with them these motivations embedded with ideas of cultural and racial superiority and framed by an almost total ignorance of Korean culture. But they also brought with them a willingness to adapt and a

¹³³ Picture. “Mrs. Hugh Cynn accompanied M. Edmunds to US, April 1908 (은순리),” box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

motivation to connect with Korean women. These characteristics would also be important factors in their cross-cultural encounter with Korean women.

Biographies of Missionaries

While many of the missionaries to Korea had similar middle-class, Protestant, educated backgrounds, they also were individual people. They came from different towns in the eastern and southern United States and possessed differing levels of education. In these biographies, I introduce a little background for the missionaries most often mentioned in this study. While there were four main American Protestant denominations in Korea, Northern and Southern Presbyterian and Northern and Southern Methodist Episcopal, I concentrate on missionaries from the Northern Methodist-Episcopal and the Southern Presbyterian. The biographies are organized by denomination.

Northern Methodist-Episcopal Missionaries

The Methodist Episcopal missionaries that appear most often in this paper are Mattie Wilcox Noble and Nellie Pierce. Mattie Wilcox Noble was one of the most well-known Korean women missionaries. For the entirety of her time in Korea, Noble kept a journal in which she wrote down her observations of Korean culture as well as accounts of her family life and work. Noble was born and raised near Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania and was the eleventh of thirteen children. She attended local public school and went on to attend Wyoming Seminary in nearby Kingston Pennsylvania where she met her husband, Arthur Noble. She left school without graduating to marry and sail to Korea. She remained in Korea for forty-two years and accomplished many firsts including organizing the first Methodist Women's Bible Institute as

well as beginning numerous girl's schools around Pyeong Yang. In the process she gave birth to seven children, two of which died in infancy in Korea, and two of which were twins.¹³⁴

Nellie Pierce came to the Korean mission field as a single woman missionary in 1898 or 1899. Like many missionaries, she spent much of her first year in language study, but also in doing odd jobs around the mission and teaching and interacting with Korean women through an interpreter. In the ensuing four years, Pierce worked in evangelistic work in Seoul. She spent much time in teaching women, including Bible women, as well as in country evangelistic work. Her reports to the mission board in these years were detailed. They are especially enlightening because she did not always paint a rosy picture and frequently pointed out problems she saw. Sometime in 1904, she married fellow missionary Hugh Miller. After this, her reports are less detailed and more nonspecific and generic.

Southern Presbyterian Missionaries

Southern Presbyterian women missionaries Mattie Ingold Tate, Nellie Rankin, Annie Preston and Linnie Davis Harrison appear most often in this paper. Mattie Ingold graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Baltimore as a medical doctor and arrived as a single missionary to Korea in 1897. Dr. Ingold kept two journals of her early work in Korea, one personal and one medical. As a Southern Presbyterian missionary she was stationed in the southwest section of the country with fellow missionary Lewis Tate. The two, Tate and Ingold, married eight years after the doctor arrived in Korea and almost immediately after she returned from her first furlough. They had one stillborn child in 1910 and remained on the mission field

¹³⁴ Biographical information on Mattie Noble: Helen Y. Schubert and L.Dale Patterson, "Guide to the Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble: Biographical Note", *The General Commission on Archives and History The United Methodist Church*, June 6, 2011, <http://catalog.gcah.org/publicdata/gcah2406.htm>.

until 1925. Besides working in a dispensary and itinerating, Tate also seemed to obtain a good grasp on the Korean language as her catechism for children, written in Korean, was widely read and published.¹³⁵

Nellie Rankin arrived as a single missionary to Korea in 1907. She often wrote of her ministry activities, of Korean culture and of her day-to-day life in letters home to family and friends and especially to her brother Will. In her correspondence she talked of her love for mission work, as well as her love for the freedom she enjoyed in roaming the countryside as an itinerate preacher. Besides itineration, Rankin ran a girl's school. Rankin also frequently wrote about her experiences in learning the Korean language and her pride in being one of the few to finish the prescribed language courses before the end of three years. Her term in Korea proved to be relatively short and came to sudden end when appendicitis took her life in 1911. Ironically, doctors could have possibly saved her life but they chose a more conservative approach to her case in fear of infection after the operation. Her beloved brother married a few years after her death and named his first child in her honor.¹³⁶

Annie Preston arrived in Korea in 1903 with her husband, John Fairman Preston. Preston was also a contemporary with Nellie Rankin at Agnes Scott College and her hometown was Salisbury, North Carolina. While on the mission field, Annie gave birth seven times, her first child died in infancy. Annie along with her husband kept up a steady stream of correspondence

¹³⁵ This biographical information was gleaned from her personal writings except for the information on her graduation from medical college which can be found at: Milton Lewis, "The Graduates of the Woman's Medical College of Baltimore and Their Work", *Maryland Medical Journal: A Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, Vol L no 10, (1907): 384. Her journals are in: Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹³⁶ This information was gleaned from her personal letters found in: Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS. Information on the names of her brother's children was found through ancestry.com.

with their families back in the United States and in these letters, we learn that Annie was a prolific teacher and once stated that she would not be happy just doing domestic work, but had to have her hands in the work of the mission. Her husband often itinerated leaving her in charge of the station. At one point, she traveled back to Korea from America after a furlough on her own. In this voyage she managed to travel half-way around the world with a child, a baby and a dog in tow. She remained on the mission field for thirty-seven years along with her family and husband.¹³⁷

Linnie Davis Harrison was the first Southern Presbyterian missionary to arrive in Korea in 1892. She embarked on the voyage on her own but met Methodist missionary Mattie Wilcox Noble in route and they travelled together to Korea. She taught women and children Bible lessons as well as Korean language literacy. She married fellow missionary William Butler Harrison in 1898. She died of typhus in 1903. William Butler Harrison's son by a second wife stated in a family history that at the time of Linnie Davis's death "the "love lights" went out in father and I don't think they ever really came back on again."¹³⁸ After remarrying, Harrison stayed on the mission field until 1928.¹³⁹

One other note should be added here about these American women missionaries. They were busy. From accounts in their journals and letters, they performed a myriad of domestic and mission tasks each day, which often slowed their engagement with the Korean culture around

¹³⁷ This information is primarily gleaned from the letters of Annie and John Fairman Preston found in: John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS. Also information was obtained from the biographical note attached to these papers.

¹³⁸ Charles William Harrison, "Family History" document, found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹³⁹ Most of this biographical information was gleaned from papers found in William Butler Harrison Papers, PHS and Mattie Wilcox Noble's journal. Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

them. While life in Korea could be professionally rewarding for these women, they struggled with the contentious pull between home and work.

All of these missionary women worked closely with Korean Bible women to help spread their ideas. Korean Bible women were native Korean women who taught other Korean women under the supervision of a woman missionary. They taught in local churches, but mostly they itinerated and taught in villages across Korea. They often visited and evangelized in the homes of Korean women. While it seemed that most of these women came from the lower classes in Korea, not all did. Some actually came from the highest *Yangban* classes.¹⁴⁰ And while this story is about the evangelization efforts of American women missionaries, the records of these Americans pointed to the significant work done by Korean women in the rise of Christianity in Korea.¹⁴¹ At this point, historians primarily know about their work through the American women missionaries' writings. And these writings point to the significant role they played in building cultural bridges.

Missionaries like Mattie Noble, Nellie Rankin and Annie Preston were often the very first Americans to interact with Korean women. Their novelty actually made them a curiosity when they first entered a new area and Korean women, who normally stayed inside, came out to see them.¹⁴² That novelty however pointed to real differences as well. American women

¹⁴⁰ In Mattie Wilcox Nobles edited memoirs of Korean women, the story of a *Yangban* woman, identified as "Mrs. Samtok Chun" who became a Bible woman. *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea*, ed. Mattie Noble.

¹⁴¹ Almost every mission report by an American woman and many letters and journal entries talk about Korean Bible women and their activities. Also see Bokyoung Park, "The Contribution of Korean Christian Women to the Church and its Mission: Implications for an Evangelical Missiology," (PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological University, 1999), 79-85.

¹⁴² Among many reference to large crowds of curious Koreans visiting missionary women see: L.B. Tate, "The Opening of Chunju Station", folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

missionaries' entered Korea with western cultural ideas and paradigms that differed greatly with the eastern cultural ideas and paradigms of Korean women. These differences soon became apparent to the American missionaries. This awareness of difference precipitated the need for the American women to construct cultural bridges that would span the dissimilarities and allow American women to build relationships with Korean women. In the next chapter, I discuss one such bridge, the bridge of commensurability.

Chapter Two

Acts of Commensurability

I will begin the study of the language right away so as to begin work as soon as possible.¹⁴³

Mattie Ingold Tate, Southern Presbyterian Missionary to Korea

Missionaries worked to bridge the cultural divide through acts of commensurability, such as learning the Korean language. One such missionary was Mattie Ingold Tate who did indeed begin Korean language study “right away” after arriving in Korea in 1897 in order to do better work as a doctor.¹⁴⁴ Her journal entries show great diligence in her efforts to learn the language and that she did not begin steady work as a physician for a year, at least in part to concentrate on her study of the language.¹⁴⁵ Many missionaries, not just Tate, spent most of their first year in language study. The Korean language proved difficult to learn for the American missionaries stationed in Korea. Despite the difficulty, however, missionaries learned the Korean language well enough to establish lines of communication and a “middle ground.”

In looking at cross-cultural encounters, actions of individuals are paramount. Historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam questions the idea that cultures are largely impermeable spheres that are “inaccessible to those who look in from the outside.”¹⁴⁶ Subrahmanyam instead purports that

¹⁴³ Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, September 16, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁴⁴ Tate came to the mission field as Mattie Ingold and later became Mattie Ingold Tate when she married fellow missionary Lewis B. Tate.

¹⁴⁵ Martha Tate Journal, November 11, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS. Mattie stated she studied morning and afternoon. In the November 3, 1898 entry Mattie wrote that she opened the dispensary on the first anniversary of her arrival at the Chunju mission station.

¹⁴⁶ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 155.

people build bridges between cultures by performing acts commensurate with cross-cultural understanding. They intentionally work to understand a disparate and culturally different group. Subrahmanyam purports that encounters between cultures are made; they don't "simply happen."¹⁴⁷ People create them. Interaction between cultures is dynamic and that what usually happens in cross-cultural encounters is "approximation, improvisation, and eventually a shift in the relative positions of all concerned."¹⁴⁸ Importantly, in looking at encounters, Subrahmanyam looks at how individual people who are little actors on the historical stage and who would not normally appear in the histories of the world, are agents in the project of creating a culture of commensurability across boundaries.

Subrahmanyam sets his ideas in contrast with other theorists such as historian and philosopher Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn's structuralist ideas of incommensurability focus on framing cultures as homogenous wholes largely incapable of compatibility with other cultures. Global historian, Jorge Flores, in speaking on prevailing incommensurability theories of global history says, "To 'essentialize' the divide between 'us' and 'them', between West and the rest, is to deny the importance of commensurability and to simplify the connections between different cultures and societies."¹⁴⁹

Mattie Ingold Tate and other "little actors" in the history of the mission in Korea demonstrated this theory of commensurability in their day-to-day activities. They came to the mission field with an agenda to convert Korean women to Christianity and through a number of

¹⁴⁷ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*: 212.

¹⁴⁸ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Jorge Flores, "The Cultural History of Empire: An interview with Professor Antonello Romano (EUI) and Professor Jorge Flores (EUI) by Moritz Von Brescius, *Zeitenblicke Online Journal fur die Geschichtswissenschaften*, <http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2013/1/Romano-Flores/dippArticle.pdf>.

“little acts” of commensurability they built cultural bridges in order to evangelize. Through participating in aspects of Korean culture, by learning the Korean language and by, in turn, teaching Korean women Korean language literacy, American women missionaries built connections with Korean women. As a consequence of these purposeful connections, American women missionaries developed relationships with Korean women as well. These relationships helped facilitate the transmission of religious ideas and became a constructive dynamic in cross-cultural encounters between Korean women and American women.

Perceptions of “Strangeness”

When American women missionaries arrived in Korea, Korean culture differed so greatly from American culture that it seemed to them like an impermeable sphere. Their writings showed a bewilderment of the culture, a frustration with the customs and an overall perception that could be characterized as a type of “strangeness.” They were often particularly startled by the role of women in Korean society. Norms concerning the “proper sphere” for Korean women, differences in marriage practices, male child preference, cultural attitudes of violence towards women and literacy rates for women often shocked American missionaries.

Most missionaries wrote about their initial reactions to and experiences of the country in their letters or journals and those first impressions almost universally talked of differences in culture. In her first journal entry after arriving in Korea, Mattie Wilcox Noble recorded the “strangeness” of different customs. Noble expressed her astonishment at the way heavy luggage was handled, on the backs of Korean porters, the odd feeling of riding in what she called “basket chairs,” declaring it “a novel experience,” and her experience of being pulled over the city wall of Seoul by ropes as the gates to the city closed before their arrival.¹⁵⁰ From the moment they

¹⁵⁰ Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, Oct. 21, 1892, Number 1: Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble, Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

began to experience a culture very different from the one they left in America, they quickly learned that they would need to navigate those differences to interact with Korean women.

Only a few months after arriving in Korea on 1892, Mattie Noble penned an example of one of the most often mentioned cultural differences found in missionary writing, the Confucian expectation for the seclusion of women. This entry exemplified the missionary's perceptions of gender differences separating the two cultures. Noble declared that during a special holiday "even the women" played games outside their homes.¹⁵¹ Periodicals about Korean missions also often wrote about this gender difference. In an article in the periodical *The Korean Repository* the author wrote on his perceptions of the limitations faced by Korean women.

Her inferiority is a barrier to her entrance upon public life and the best way to exclude her from it has been deemed the measure of confining her to a proper sphere —"woman's sphere"—and surrounding it by such impossible safe-guards that outsiders have no entrance to it, neither has she an exit.¹⁵²

The author went on to claim that a Korean woman's "face and form are never seen."¹⁵³ While this perceived observation was a generic broad generalization of Korean women's behavior, it does show the "strangeness" with which Americans perceived the cultural difference. Passages such as this one, although penned by a male American, illustrated the predominant ideas of both male and female Americans concerning the different proscriptive expectations for women as well as the frustrations Americans experienced in navigating those expectations.

Mattie Ingold Tate wrote about the difficulties she faced in negotiating seclusion issues for women. She felt this expectation for women hindered her medical practice. Dr. Tate kept a

¹⁵¹ Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, March 4, 1893, Number 1: Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble, Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

¹⁵² Geo Herber Jones, "The Status of Woman in Korea, *The Korean Repository*, 3 (1896): 224-225.

¹⁵³ Geo. Herber Jones, "The Status of Woman in Korea", *The Korean Repository*, 3, (1896): 225.

medical journal of her first years in the field and in a journal entry on Jan 22, 1900 she described her efforts to encourage a woman to leave her home and come to the dispensary where she could treat the woman's injured hand.¹⁵⁴ After Dr. Tate worked hard to convince the woman to come and managed to make arrangements for her to make the trip, the woman's "son came in and finding out what was up, ordered the coolies away and said she should not come up."¹⁵⁵ In the doctor's eyes, the son prevented her from treating the woman due to Korean cultural expectations that women stay home and secluded. To not allow the mother to continue treatment was strange to the American doctor.

Dissimilarities in marriage practices was another cultural difference American women missionaries commented on in their writings. American women desired marriages based on love and saw Korean women's arranged marriages to men they did not know as different and lacking. Missionary journals and letters often reveal quite candid declarations of love for their spouses or betrothed. William Butler Harrison, described as a rather taciturn and non-effusive man by his son, wrote passionately of his proposal to his first wife Linnie Davis.¹⁵⁶ The entry not only showed his thoughts, but illuminated Linnie Davis's expectation to marry for love.

¹⁵⁴ Milton Lewis, "The Graduates of the Woman's Medical College of Baltimore and Their Work", *Maryland Medical Journal: A Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, Vol L no 10, (1907): 384.

¹⁵⁵ Martha Tate Journal, Jan. 22, 1900, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁵⁶ Charles William Harrison, "Family History" document, found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

For once I played the man. I made the hardest speech of my life and, thank God, captivated my audience. Miss Davis (now Linnie Dear) said, as I was about to go without an answer, “I do love you”. There are no sweeter words than these.¹⁵⁷

American women believed in marriage for love, even if convenient and on the mission field. (Missionaries often married one another after beginning work in a foreign land.) They also believed marriage was to be companionable. Consequently, they often saw the arranged marriage of Korean men and women at early ages, without knowing one another, as highly undesirable.¹⁵⁸ And after marriage Americans believed

that Korean women spent their time “combating the abounding sorrows and difficulties of life.”¹⁵⁹ One missionary described the role of the wife as “a household slave” and in reference to the lack of companionship in Korean marriage stated, “There is no family life, no family meal together, nothing we think makes life beautiful.”¹⁶⁰ Americans believed in a marriage that included love and companionship. They perceived these attributes as not being present in Korean marriage.



Ceramic portrait of Linnie Davis, box 1, William Butler Harrison Papers, 1895-1931, RG 1140 PHS. Fair Use.

¹⁵⁷ William Butler Harrison, Journal Beginning November 24th 1895 Ending December 21st 1897, November 2, 1895, box 2 William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁵⁸ Martha Tate Medical Journal, August 14, 1904, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁵⁹ Geo, Herber Jones, The Status of Woman in Korea, *The Korean Repository*, 3 (1896): 226. There is a Korean word “han” which does not translate directly but alludes to the difficult destiny or fate Korean women have in life. Much has been written about the struggles of Korean women.

¹⁶⁰ Letter. John Fairman Preston to “My Precious Mother”, May 13, 1906, folder 7, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

Along with differences in marriage practices, American missionaries also observed the Korean preference for male babies. Missionary Annie Preston wrote

A woman told me this morning that we had received a great blessing because we had a boy baby- I want them to know that I consider my girls blessings too!
(emphasis author)¹⁶¹

In another letter, Annie's husband, John Fairman Preston told of a time when Korean women consoled fellow missionary, Georgina Owens, because she delivered a third baby girl.¹⁶²

American women found the overwhelming preference for male children disturbing.

Missionaries' contempt for cultural practices of violence against women, including a practice known as "widow stealing" also appeared in letters and reports. Women accused of infidelity were mutilated and missionaries talked candidly and with horror about the practice of cutting off the nose and fingers of these women. Missionary Mattie Noble bluntly pointed out the hypocrisy between men and women in Korean society concerning adultery. "There is," she stated, "scarcely a true man in Korea and who cuts off his nose and fingers?"¹⁶³ Though it was common practice in Korea to cut off the nose and fingers of a woman suspected of adultery, in this rhetorical question Noble pointed out that the same expectation did not exist for Korean men. Husbands in Korea society often were not faithful partners to their wives.

American missionary women also wrote about their shock at a practice known as "widow stealing." Southern Presbyterian missionary Nellie Rankin was amazed by the custom in which men kidnapped widows shortly after the death of their husbands in order to force them into

¹⁶¹Letter, Annie Preston to My Dear Mother, September 20, 1909, folder 10, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁶²Letter, Fairman Preston to My Dear Parents, November 12, 1905, folder 6, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁶³Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, October 10, 1893, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

marriage or concubinage. In a letter home, she related a detailed account of a Korean woman's desperate actions to avert being "stolen".¹⁶⁴ In the story, she not only wrote of her shock at the practice but also recounted the way in which Christians came to help the woman, eventually arranging a better situation for her. By relating the story in this manner, Nellie revealed not only her surprise at the custom, but also her perceptions of the status of women in western Christian culture. Rankin in her analysis of the widow stealing ignored acts of violence against women in American culture because they were not a part of her past experience with gender relationships.¹⁶⁵

Gender differences concerning education added to American missionaries' perceptions of the strangeness of Korean culture. Most American women missionaries could not only read and write but held college diplomas and saw the lack of education for Korean women as extraordinary. American women believed strongly in the ability of women to learn, but many in Korea did not hold the same opinion. In one newspaper article from the time period, a Korean man laughed at efforts to teach women to read believing that women were no more educable than cattle.¹⁶⁶ Many men in Korean society held the opinion that women did not possess the capacity to understand reading, writing or their husband's business dealings. Missionary Nellie Pierce lamented the difference she saw in education:

I soon found that only about six of the twenty could read. One Sunday morning I asked how many wanted to learn to read. Poor girls! Not knowing whether their

¹⁶⁴ Letter. Nellie Rankin to "My dear Kid", March 2, 1909, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁶⁵ Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth Century America*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007). Examples give evidence of violence in America against black women, Native American women and wives.

¹⁶⁶ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 170.

mothers-in-law or fathers-in-law or husbands would permit them there was not a very hearty response to my invitation...¹⁶⁷

The lack of education and educational opportunities for Korean women appalled American women missionaries. They perceived it as regrettable as well as backwards and uncivilized.

Ideas of Racial and Western Superiority

Much of the “strangeness” perceived by American women missionaries’ to Korea arose from their own particular ideas of American cultural superiority. These ideas played a role in their marginalization of Korean culture and thus their perceptions of Korean women. All of these factors together helped to create a cultural divide. Missionaries to Korea, especially in their earliest years in the field, speak of the superiority of their race and of American culture. Most missionaries’ first impressions of Koreans proved to be similar to those held by Mattie Ingold Tate. Tate believed Koreans to be a “wild-looking people...a hopeless pitiful looking lot of humanity.”¹⁶⁸ These perceptions helped to increase an already significant cultural schism.

Perhaps most telling in evaluating American perceptions of Koreans was their continuous designation of Koreans as “others,” as Mattie Ingold Tate did in the above example. Also American women missionaries often designate people according to nationality – Korean women, as opposed to *women*, Korean workers instead of fellow workers. While this designation of Koreans as “others” changed for a few missionaries the longer they stayed in Korea, notably

¹⁶⁷Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 15.

¹⁶⁸MarthaTate Journal, September 16, 1891, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

Mattie Ingold Tate, what she and other missionaries never overcame was seeing Koreans as “others” they came to minister *to*.¹⁶⁹

One example of American cultural superiority involved American domestic management, Americans insisted Korean workers in their home master American ways of keeping house. As missionaries began to settle in Korea and establish homes, most looked to hire Korean servants to do much of the day-to-day tasks of running a home in order allow time for the missionaries to do the work of evangelization. Most missionaries talked about servants in the first years with various adjectives such as “untrustworthy”, “stupid” and “lazy.”¹⁷⁰ One missionary wrote that in the early years it proved difficult to find servants as the “young women were prevented by custom and prejudice from going outside their homes; the old women are too stupid to learn; and the men were too proud to take orders from women and too lazy to carry them out.”¹⁷¹ Instead of employing Korean ways of doing things, missionaries considered them inferior and insisted on doing things the American way. In the process, they designated Koreans as “others” with judgmental adjectives and the cultural divide between Koreans and Americans widened.

In another way of designating Koreans as different from Americans, missionaries saw Koreans unclean and in need of soap. Remarks in letters and journals that in essence described Koreans as “dirty natives” also marked Koreans as backward, not as advanced as Americans and designated them as “others.” Description of dirt on people and in homes laced their descriptions of Koreans and Korean homes. In describing sight-seers, Annie Preston considered some “very

¹⁶⁹ Martha Tate Journal, September 8, 1898, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁷⁰ For examples see: William Butler Harrison, Journal Beginning November 24th 1895 Ending December 21st 1897, June 5, 1895. Letter. Annie Preston to “My dear Father and Mother”, April 24, 1908, folder 9, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁷¹ W.B. Harrison, “Opening of Kunsan Station”, folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

clean and pleasant and others very dirty and prying.” Here Annie connected “dirty” with the negative character trait, “prying.” In the same letter, Annie extolled the cleanliness of a *yangban* home in comparison with other Korean homes, by stating that “their cleanliness appealed to me even if their customs did not” - alluding to the very strict seclusion of women found in this upper-class.¹⁷² Here Annie developed a racial hierarchy of “dirty” Koreans at the bottom, followed by “clean” Koreans and then the superior American missionary who was neither dirty nor bound by less-than-enlightened ideas about the seclusion of women.

Also in designating Koreans discursively as “others,” many missionaries often described Koreans as “heathens” in literature created for distribution in America. A prominent journal of mission work during this time was entitled *The Heathen Woman’s Friend*. The word “heathen” not only carried the connotation of “other” but of a “wholly other.” In the world of Christianity a “heathen” would be an “Asian other” as well as an unbelieving “other.”¹⁷³

When American women missionaries arrived in Korea they perceived the culture of the country as “strange” and different as well as inferior. Despite these perceptions of “strangeness” and “Otherness,” and because of their belief in the importance of their call to convert Korean women to Christianity, American women participated in acts of cultural commensurability in efforts to build connections with Korean women for purpose of evangelization.

Acts of Commensurability

Despite disparities in culture and ideas of racial and cultural superiority, American women managed to bridge the divide between themselves and Korean women. Ideas of

¹⁷² Letter, Annie Preston to My Dear Mother, May 21, 1904, folder 4, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁷³ For an example of these attitudes see: “Mission Schools: Shall Heathen be Taught?,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* III, (1876) : 35.

commensurability provide a window into explaining how they constructed cross-cultural connections and drew Korean women toward Christianity. To reach Korean women, American women missionaries participated in specific actions commensurate with bridging differences. Their belief in Christianity as the only correct religion, and the only way to heaven, highly motivated them as evangelizers. Their duty was to take “light” to a dark and heathen world.¹⁷⁴ Before she arrived in Korea, Mattie Ingold Tate prayed, “May the light of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ soon shine brightly throughout the “Sunrise Kingdom””¹⁷⁵ Motivations such as these prompted the American women missionaries to seek out ways to connect with Korean women.

By sharing in some of the Korean cultural expectations for women, by visiting in Korean women’s homes and villages, and by teaching literacy to Korean women, missionaries created a basis for a relationship shaped by cultural superiority but grounded in gender. American women worked specifically with Korean women and communal experiences based in gender helped to build relationships. These collective experiences established a “nearness” with Korean women along lines of shared gender identity and in shared experience. As sociologist Georg Simmel suggests, the “nearness” produced by strangers with shared experience and identity, help to bridge a cultural gap and facilitate relationships.¹⁷⁶

American women worked hard to produce shared experiences. They realized the importance of such interactions. One missionary stated that after making personal calls in the

¹⁷⁴ Rosetta Sherwood, “Kwang Hya Nyo Won”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 18.

¹⁷⁵ Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, September 9 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁷⁶ Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Nabu Press, 2011), 402-408.Mr

homes of Korean women, “Later, when we meet, we feel we have something in common.”¹⁷⁷

Actions of commensurability, such as visiting, led to shared experience which in turn led to the beginning of a “nearness” or a common ground. Missionaries described this “nearness” as “friendship.” For example, missionary Nellie Rankin often talked in her letters about her “Korean friends.” At one point she took her holiday time to travel to visit Korean “friends” in the countryside.¹⁷⁸ In furthering her description of her relationships, Rankin declared that she visited a “friend” and “had a good time exchanging gossip.”¹⁷⁹ And while Rankin often wrote of her inability to establish a good relationship with fellow American single missionary Mattie Tate, she expressed that her Korean “friend,” “Mrs. Yi is the joy of my life.”¹⁸⁰ Personal writings such as Nellie Rankin’s point to her perceived belief that relationships existed between her and Korean women. The development of these relationships suggests the bridging of a cultural divide.

Commensurable acts by individuals, such as visiting, help to bridge a cultural divide and produce a “nearness” with Korean women. The incentive to convert Koreans provided an impetus for trying to bridge the gap and American missionary women’s purposeful acts of cultural commensurability helped bridge the differences between themselves and Confucian Korean women.

¹⁷⁷ Mrs. A.M. Sharrocks, “Work Among Korean Women”, *The Korean Mission Field* 1, (1905): 34.

¹⁷⁸ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Father, January 1, 1909, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁷⁹ Nellie Rankin, “A Hundred Mile Trip in Korea”, *The Missionary for October 1910*, found in Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, PHS.

¹⁸⁰ Letter, Nellie Rankin to “Birthday Brother”, October 6, 1910, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

Travel as a Commensurable Act

One of the ways American women exhibited “commensurable” behaviors was to concede to Korean cultural expectations for women concerning travel. Women in Neo-Confucian Korea did not move about openly, especially during the day. While little evidence exists that American women wore coverings beyond hats popular in America at the time, there is evidence that American women observed some expectations concerning travel for women, even though they found them to be different, unusual and uncomfortable. In performing these commensurable acts, American women rode in palanquins, stayed in the “*anbang*” or women’s areas in inns and homes and consciously made efforts to decide if their travel arrangements would be offensive to Koreans.

Southern Presbyterian missionary Mattie Tate’s experience is a good example of the type of concessions women missionaries made in order to meet cultural travel expectations for women in Korea. On a trip from Seoul to Chunju in 1893, every chance Mattie Tate had to get out of the chair and walk, she did. The “chair” was a covered palanquin used for travel by women in Korea so men could not see them. For the American Mattie Tate, however, travel in the chair was cramped and uncomfortable and every time she climbed out “her limbs would be so stiff that she could not use them for a while.”¹⁸¹ Mattie Tate constantly kept a “look out” for other travelers, and when no other sojourners were on the road, Mattie got out of the cramped covered chair and walked. If others were around, however, she stayed in the chair. She desired to

¹⁸¹ L.B. Tate, “The Opening of Chunju Station”, folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

not offend anyone. Also after Mattie arrived in Chunju, she remained in the inner quarters of a house for three months and “did not venture to go out on the streets.”¹⁸²

Often decisions on transportation did not center around the American women’s preference, but on other factors. When Mattie Wilcox Noble needed to visit the home of a Yangban, or upper class woman, she decided she must go in a palanquin, “Since the nobleman was a great Youngban(sic) it would not have been proper, from the Korean standpoint, for me to have walked to his home.” She described the palanquin as “a little box large enough for one person to sit in.” She went on to explain that there are no chairs or seats in them and she must sit “Korean” style. When she arrived she stated that the coolies set the chair down, “the curtain was raised and (I) was glad to step out in the open air.”¹⁸³ Noble did not want to offend the Koreans so she conformed to a Confucian cultural expectation for women, even though she clearly would rather have walked.

One of American missionary women’s most often used tools of evangelism was itineration or trips to the country to visit villages. Beyond transportation issues, the missionary women who traveled extensively in the countryside encountered other culturally different and unusual circumstances. During these journeys, that often spanned three or more weeks at a time, American women participated in acts of commensurability by adapting to life in Korean homes and to Korean schedules. As stated earlier, Korean women were expected to sleep and stay in the “inner quarters” of the home. Children also stayed in the “inner quarters” with their mothers, although sons usually went to sleep with their fathers and grandfathers around the age of seven.

¹⁸² L.B. Tate, “The Opening of Chunju Station,” folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁸³ Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, March 17, 1893, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

Mattie Tate itinerated often, sleeping in Korean homes at times with children. On one trip she spent a number of days staying with a Korean family and while “she had a blanket...sleep did not come easily as the children kept crawling under the blanket.”¹⁸⁴ Mattie Tate adapted to life in Korean homes including sleeping in the same space as the children, even though she lost sleep and stayed in unfamiliar places.

Beyond sharing space with Korean families, American women missionaries often tolerated discomfort in order to itinerate. For example, many women who traveled talked of being the target of fleas. Nellie Rankin wrote of fleas more than once, one time stating “There were a good many fleas at the last place and they did damage to my anatomy, but I got no other livestock!”¹⁸⁵ Another Methodist missionary whose trip produced very few results because she could not make connections with the women, lamented, “Almost the only visitors I did have were “small game” and in great variety.”¹⁸⁶ In writing about fleas and bugs, the women usually did it in fairly comical ways but they also wrote that they were glad to return home and leave the fleas behind until the next trip – trips they did take despite the flea population.

Korean homes also differed greatly from the homes Americans built or remodeled and women who itinerated wrote of these differences. Nellie Rankin described sharing a mud-floored room with numerous bags of grain and supplies, and in that room barely being able to stand without hitting her head on the straw, sooty ceiling, bending to get through the four foot door and

¹⁸⁴ Single page report dated 1895 found in the folder entitled “Korea Mission Histories, Correspondence and Biographical Sketches”, folder 16, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

¹⁸⁵ Letter, Nellie Rankin to My Dear Will, November 5, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁸⁶ Ethel Estev, “Evangelistic Work, Pyeng Yang and North Korea District”, *Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 42.

sleeping with a chicken coop outside her door and the pig sty six feet away.¹⁸⁷ Nellie Rankin's description of a Korean home with adjectives such as "mud" floored and "sooty" and descriptions of sleeping near a chicken coop and a pigsty point to a perception of her Korean host's accommodations as backward and uncivilized. While Rankin's description illuminated her perceived differences in modernity and cleanliness between American and Korean culture, her description also showed that she stayed and did not return home or seek accommodations somewhere else. This story points to a willingness by American women to stay in homes they perceived as less modern and less comfortable in order to evangelize.

While American women missionaries complained about dirt and fleas, marginalizing Korean women's culture in the process, their acts were acts of commensurability. They slept in the inner rooms with the children and the rooms with dirty ceilings. They rode in palanquins and remained secluded in homes for long periods of time.

Eating as a Commensurable Act

Beyond participating in cultural expectations for women in travel, participation in eating Korean food served as a cultural bridge. One of the largest cultural dissimilarities to overcome is food differences and according to research done on cultural difference and eating, showing appreciation for a culture's cuisine helps in building cultural bridges.¹⁸⁸ Food was important to the Americans. American women missionaries and their husbands went to great lengths to procure and cook American style food. They shipped food from America in cans, they planted elaborate gardens with seed they brought or shipped in, they planted fruit trees, raised pigs and

¹⁸⁷ Nellie Rankin, "A Hundred Mile Trip in Korea", *The Missionary for October 1910*, found in Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, PHS.

¹⁸⁸ Gregorio Billikopf, "Cultural Differences? Or, Are we really that different?", *Agricultural Labor Management Articles*, online journal, (Berkeley: University of California), 2009.

stored ice in the winter and made ice cream with it in later months before it all melted. But when asked by Koreans to eat Korean food, they did. They desired not to offend and reduce their chances of winning a convert. So they ate Korean food, with chopsticks, and many, much to their surprise, came to like it.

Southern Presbyterian missionary Nellie Rankin is a good example of a missionary who participated in acts of commensurability surrounding Korean food. In a letter to her brother, she talked about her evolution from non-Korean food eater to an everyday eater of “Kimchi.”

A woman at Pong san had urged me to come home that way and stop for dinner so I did. There was one thing accomplished by this trip if nothing else I learned to eat Korean food. The main dish is rice and “Kimchi” a kind of sauerkraut (their cabbage is not like ours). It is made of cabbage, red pepper, more red pepper, salt etc – formerly I couldn’t touch it but suddenly the taste came to me just like the taste for olives did and I have eaten it every day since except today.¹⁸⁹

Obviously this is not the first time Rankin tried “Kimchi”. She was very familiar with the spicy cabbage dish. And when she accepted the invitation for dinner, she still believed that she did not like it, but agreed to go anyway. She participated in a deliberate act of commensurability by eating at the house of the Korean woman in Pongsan. Later Nellie wrote that “I can now pick up even very small morsels with my chop sticks, they have lost their air of novelty.”¹⁹⁰ While Nellie continued to plant gardens and import food, she also learned to eat “Korean” style.

Home Visits

Visiting the homes of Korean women was another way American women worked to connect with and evangelize Korean women. In the very first years of the mission in Korea,

¹⁸⁹ Letter, Nellie Rankin to My Dear Will, November 5, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁹⁰ Nellie Rankin, “A Hundred Mile Trip in Korea”. *The Missionary for October 1910*, found in Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, PHS.

American women missionaries had to devise ways in which to make contact with Korean women, who rarely left their homes. So, American women made house calls to overcome the “seclusion” rule for Korean women and at some point in their mission career, almost all American women missionaries engaged in this activity.

Records, letters and journals reveal that they visited the homes of the *yangban* (upper class), as well as the homes of the lower class. *Yangban* visits entailed more preparation as to travel or time of day or perhaps needed an invitation, whereas visits to lower class homes proved to be easier to make. Mattie Ingold Tate regularly visited in the neighborhoods of Chunju and wrote down notes about each house such as “too busy to talk”, “husband not allow attend church” and “Had a good talk and seems sincere.” Her records show that she visited many homes.¹⁹¹ Mattie Noble described in detail the preparations and amount of time it took to visit a *yangban* house. These measures were important, Noble asserted, because “A Korean of the upper-class must always remain home.”¹⁹² American women missionaries visited all classes of Korean women in their homes.

American women missionaries also learned and used the correct behavior when visiting homes. They learned to whisper so men could not hear them, as men were not supposed to hear their voices and speaking about Christianity might anger a husband.¹⁹³ They learned to eat whatever food they were given when they visited the home, because not accepting food would be

¹⁹¹ Medical Journal of Martha Tate, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

¹⁹² Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, March 17, 1893, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

¹⁹³ Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, April 3, 1893 and March 19, 1893, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

seen as a great offense. For many Korean women, food was a cherished commodity.¹⁹⁴ They also learned the best times to visit.¹⁹⁵ If they visited at certain times of the year, women would be too busy to talk with them. Some American women missionaries reported that home visits produced more results than any other mission effort.¹⁹⁶

In visiting homes, the missionaries desired to make connections with and build relationships with Korean women in order to facilitate evangelization, a goal they sometimes realized and some times did not as the reception they received varied from total disinterest to the eventual formation of friendships and conversion. One missionary reported that after a few initial visits to a Korean home to visit the women there, “The man of the house did not object to the ladies [missionary women] coming to his home, so from that time began a friendship which has lasted through years.” In this interaction, begun by visitation, missionary women created connections, which led to relationships that led to conversions.¹⁹⁷

Objects of Korean Women’s Curiosity

Beyond differences in living conditions, beyond fears and perceived differences in modernity found in homes, American women talked most often about their discomfort in being the object of Korean curiosity – in being the “strange” to Koreans. While traveling, American women visited remote villages in the Korean countryside where foreigners were seldom or never seen. The American women became the town attraction. “I am teaching three times a day,”

¹⁹⁴ Journal of Mrs. W. A. Noble Yrs. 1892 June 30th to 1896, March 17, 1893, , United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

¹⁹⁵ Ethel Estev, “Evangelistic Work,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 42. Missionaries learned that at certain times of the year, especially summers, women were too busy to visit.

¹⁹⁶ Mrs. A.M. Sharrocks, “Work Among Korean Women”, *The Korea Mission Field* 1, (1905): 34.

¹⁹⁷ Mrs. Rosella H. Cram, “The Old Servant”, *The Korea Mission Field* 2, (1905): 24.

Nellie Rankin told her mother about one visit to a rural village, “and doing a sideshow act in between. I am the first foreign woman to have ever visited here so am quite a show.”¹⁹⁸ Nellie Pierce talked about arriving late in a village, hoping to rest, but then “the sightseers come” and so she must “again tell the story.”¹⁹⁹ While willing to be the object of curiosity, American women wrote about the experience most often in negative terms – terms that allude to feelings of being confined and enclosed. In the same letter to her mother mentioned above, Rankin admitted that the people “flocking to see the foreigner” could be wearisome. “It is a little trying at times,” she wrote, “to be on exhibit for they stare at me as tho I was a wild animal. I know how the animals at a zoo feel.”²⁰⁰ Although exasperating and annoying, American women missionaries continued to itinerate, visit homes and turned Korean curiosity into opportunities for evangelism and for making initial contacts with Korean women.²⁰¹

Commensurability and Language Acquisition

The single most important commensurable act on the part of American women missionaries proved to be the acquisition or even partial acquisition of the Korean language.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Letter, Nellie Rankin to Mother, April 21, 1908. Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

¹⁹⁹ Nellie Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School, Evangelistic Work Mead Memorial Church and South Korea District,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 21.

²⁰⁰ Letter, Nellie Rankin to Mother, April 21, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁰¹ Other scholars of Korea during this time period talk about the curiosity Korean women expressed towards the Americans and their possessions. See Katherine H. Lee Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009) and Hyaewool Choi, “The Missionary Home as a Pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth Century Korea”, in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2014).

²⁰² A survey on the literature concerning cross-cultural encounters points to some kind of similar language, or ability to communicate, as paramount in attempting productive cross-cultural encounters.

Korean language procurement by American women missionaries not only opened the door for communication with Korean women, but it also opened up literacy opportunities for Korean women. Women missionaries, who were usually only partially fluent in the Korean language, taught Korean women how to read the Korean language. American women missionaries' desire to learn the Korean language, communicate Christian principles in Korean and study Christian ideas with Korean women led to much interaction between the two groups of women which ultimately led to relationship building as well as transmission of religious ideas.

Annie and John Fairman Preston arrived at Mokpo Korea, their first station of duty on November 8, 1903 and began the study of the Korean language two days later. Less than one day in, Preston declared that they both “like(d) language study” and that Annie took to it “like a duck to water.”²⁰³ Their experience stating that language study began within a week of arrival and that they possessed a sense of optimism for success were like sentiments expressed in a number of letters and journal entries surveyed for this study.

Mission board rules for all denominations required Korean language study as well as Korean language proficiency exams. The course of study began upon arrival in Korea, ran for three years and incorporated three annual exams. The exams tested the reading, writing and speaking ability of the missionaries. It theoretically ran for three years, and some missionaries did it in three years, but many did not. “Annual” exams for many proved to be a very flexible concept.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Letter. John Fairman Preston to Mother and Father, November 10, 1903, folder 4, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁰⁴ Nellie Rankin described the exam process in her letters home. For example see: Letter. Nellie Rankin to My dear Aunt Nelly, October 1, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

Missionaries voiced in their letters and journals their motivations for learning the language. For some, it was the desire to pass the Board examinations. In a letter to her father, Rankin declared:

As I have one more examination ahead it behooves me to peg away or next summer I will have to feel the disgrace of failing to hear my name called when the list of those who have passed are read at annual meeting. This year a number failed on their orals.²⁰⁵

Nellie did indeed pass the language exam at the next annual meeting and ran to ring the bell of the church in celebration, much to the bemusement of the Koreans in the village.²⁰⁶

While passing the exam seemed to motivate Rankin, she also wrote often of the benefit of being able to communicate in Korean. Mattie Ingold Tate also confided to her journal desires to understand the Korean people and her dedication to “study real hard” in order to do so.²⁰⁷ In her first report, missionary Florence Sherman noted that “not being able to speak or understand the language” hampered her ability to help the mission. She desired to “comfort” Korean women who came to the mission but the only way she could express her sympathy was “by look, act, or by calling upon an interpreter.” She went on to write, “I look forward longingly, and almost impatiently to the time when I shall be able to dispense with an interpreter, and tell them some of the things I am unable to now.”²⁰⁸ Sherman, Rankin and Tate all exhibited a desire to communicate with Korean women. They were on a mission to connect and convert Korean women and they needed the Korean language to do it.

²⁰⁵ Letter, Nellie Rankin to Father, October 20, 1908. Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁰⁶ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Will, August 2, 1909. Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁰⁷ Martha Tate Journal, December 21, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

²⁰⁸ Florence Sherman, “Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 18-19.

Teaching Korean women to read and write the Korean language was also a motivation. Learning the language became especially important to the American women due to the almost non-existent literacy for Korean women. They desired not only to be role models for education, but they also desired to teach Korean women to read their own language.²⁰⁹

Although motivated, learning the Korean language was hard. Missionaries' letters talk of having to "dig away at the language", that it is quite "awkward", "irksome", that "the words won't stick," and Nellie Rankin, the relatively successful Southern Presbyterian language student, said the study of the language will "make your hair curl."²¹⁰ Korean word order, idioms and modifiers differed greatly from English. An example of word order difference can be seen in the speech of Annie Preston's daughter who spent much time with a Korean Amah or "nanny." In her speech, she demonstrated the Korean language word order using English words. When asking her father to hold her hand, the child said; "Me hand you holds it."²¹¹ This shows the Korean order of object then verb. English order is verb then object. In another example from the speech of the same child, the propensity to use "to do" verbs for many actions and the placement of verbs at the end of sentences appeared. In telling her mother that her father was awake the child declared, "Fadder wake up did it." This type of word order and word usage along with very different types of modifiers, made learning Korean fluently extremely difficult for the English speaking American missionaries.

²⁰⁹ See: Hyaewol Choi, "The Missionary Home as a Pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth Century Korea", in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2014) and Hyaewol Choi, "Women's Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2000).

²¹⁰ Letter, Nellie Rankin to Father, October 20, 1908. Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS. Also see letters in box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²¹¹ Letter, Annie Preston to "My Dear Mother", May 5, 1910, folder 11, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

Beyond attempting to learn, missionary women prayed and invoked the use of scripture to learn the language. Myrtle Elliott Cable declared that she looked forward to the day when her “tongue” would be “loosed” so she could teach. Through a direct reference to a Biblical miracle in Luke, she invoked a desire for help from God.²¹² Florence Sherman prayed for success and declared Korean women also prayed for her. The women, according to Sherman, “pray(ed) so many times for me, that I (might) quickly learn their language.”²¹³ Her perception was that Korean women wanted her to know their language.

Despite this difficulty or because of it, American women missionaries studied – morning and afternoon.²¹⁴ Many, like the Prestons, began their studies on an optimistic note only to realize that proficiency “proved harder” than they supposed.²¹⁵ A report sent to America by Methodist women missionaries in Korea stated that Nellie Pierce “gave nearly the whole of her first year to study the language.”²¹⁶ And Annie Preston declared in a letter, “Korean is wreaking havoc with my English,” much as it had with her daughter’s.²¹⁷ As Nellie Rankin came away from her language exams, she declared that she was “mentally and physically in a state of

²¹² Luke 1:64.

²¹³ Sherman, “Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 19.

²¹⁴ Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, December November 11, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

²¹⁵ Letter. John Fairman Preston to Father, February 17, 1904, folder 5, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²¹⁶ *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Boston: Miss P.J. Walden, publisher. 89-90.

²¹⁷ Letter. Annie Preston to Father and Mother, February 19, 1905, folder 6, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS

collapse” because she “used all (her) brain juice” while taking the exam.²¹⁸ Korean was hard. Despite that difficulty, missionary women persevered even as they raised children and did other mission work. Most American women missionaries achieved some amount of ability in the Korean language and even “some” ability in the language opened the door for them to teach literacy to Korean women.

Willingness to Teach Korean Language Literacy

Running through journals, letters, reports and just about any type of correspondence from American women missionaries is a stream of communication about literacy, and the lack thereof, for Korean women. The missionaries saw it as a roadblock to evangelism, because the women could not read the Bible, but they also saw it in terms of an unfair difference with men who enjoyed much higher rates of literacy. While American women may have participated in some aspects of Korean culture for women, they did not hesitate to challenge the cultural norm of female “ignorance.” They taught Korean women to read.

Methodist missionary Millie Albertson did not say that Korean women should learn to read in order to read scripture, but instead she said they should learn to read to retrieve something that was lost. Albertson summed up American women’s attitudes fairly well when she wrote, “the Korean alphabet is so simple that the woman of average intelligence may learn to read very quickly, therefore, she can, to a certain extent, retrieve her lost opportunities.” Albertson believed the lack of primary education for women greatly affected their lives. “Korean men,” she wrote, “have been students for centuries but it was not considered worthwhile for

²¹⁸ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Will, July 1, 1909, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

women to learn even to read.” Women “have been denied the privilege of study in childhood.”

²¹⁹ In this way Albertson saw lack of education for women as a “lost” opportunity.

Millie Albertson alluded to something else that proved to be of particular importance to the work of American women in Korea – the Korean alphabet devised by King Sejong to make reading Korean easy. Due to the nature of the Korean alphabet, American women missionaries were able to teach Korean women to read the Korean language without being particularly fluent in the language themselves. By teaching native speakers the alphabet and knowing at least some words and sentences, the missionaries taught Korean women literacy.

Missionary women began teaching women to read in the earliest days of the American mission, in 1886.²²⁰ Historian Hyaeweol Choi contends that American women missionaries and Korean intellectuals were the two groups that contributed most significantly to the spread of literacy among Korean women.²²¹ American women physicians wrote about teaching patients in their hospitals to read.²²² Missionary women taught women at night, in the morning, in the afternoon. They literally taught at all times during the day. Since there were no clocks, Linnie Davis finally resorted to raising flags to indicate when the women could come.²²³ Another missionary wrote in her 1899 report that she taught *Yangban* women at night, as the women

²¹⁹ Millie Albertson, “Work for Women,” *The Korea Mission Field* 9, no. 4 (1914): 111.

²²⁰ Mary Scranton, “Woman’s Work in Korea,” *The Korean Repository* 3, no.1 (January 1896): 4.

²²¹ Hyaeweol Choi, “Women’s Literacy and New Womanhood in Late Choson Korea,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2000) : 88.

²²² Lillian Harris, MD, “Baldwin Dispensary,” *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 30.

²²³ William Burnice Greene, “History of Kunsan Station, 1896-1930”, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

could not go out in public during the day.²²⁴ Often the youngest women came with their small children in tow.²²⁵ Another missionary took one night a week just for teaching all “who wished to learn to read and write.”²²⁶ American women conducted classes on reading and writing at all times of the day and in many different places.

American women missionaries also encouraged all women from the youngest to the oldest to learn to read. One older woman needed much encouragement. Methodist Lula Miller wrote about her in her 1903 report:

Through the winter a number of women have been coming to me for the study of the native character. Their progress from week to week was marked. One middle aged woman kept saying, “I have no sense. I can not learn to read.” Yet she was making satisfactory progress when the class closed this spring.²²⁷

The trope this Korean woman expressed of women “having no sense” was a common idea taught to the women, as well as to boys in school.²²⁸ The efforts of the American women began to debunk that idea – at least for the middle-aged woman who learned that she could indeed read.

Once Korean women realized they could learn from the foreign teachers, they began to ask the Americans to teach them, sometimes forcefully. Nellie Rankin wrote to her Aunt of the Korean women’s zeal for learning. “The women,” Nellie wrote, “are so ignorant and so anxious

²²⁴ Cram, “The Old Servant,” *The Korea Mission Field* 2, (1905): 24.

²²⁵ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 16.

²²⁶ “Report of the Fusan Station, 1898-1899”, *General Reports of Stations of Korea Presbyterian Mission For The Year 1898-1899*, (Seoul: Presbyterian Church in the USA Korea Mission, 1899), 36.

²²⁷ Lula A. Miller, “Evangelistic Work and Day Schools Chemulpo and West Korea District”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 36.

²²⁸ Geo Heber Jones, “The Status of Woman in Korea, *The Korean Repository* 3, (1896): 224.

to learn that I will be almost forced to teach “Eunmoon” or the native Korean characters.”²²⁹

Almost without exception, women missionary’s letters, reports and journals revealed American women teaching Korean women to read.

This literary bridge allowed American women to engage in the Korean language with Korean women but it also allowed Korean women access to the American model of female literacy.²³⁰ After Annie Preston had lived in Mokpo for a few years, the whole educational culture for women in the village changed. After she moved to nearby Kwangju, a woman from Mokpo visited. The woman reported to Annie her displeasure with the women in Kwangju. The woman, Annie wrote, “was much disgusted with the women here because they are not all learning to read.” Annie went on to write that she was much gratified to learn of the education “craze” in Mokpo.²³¹ The women of Mokpo experienced an educational transformation they desired all women of Korea to embrace. Indeed, many missionaries talk about the zeal for learning that ignited in the population of Korean women as they became more and more literate. In order to learn, women would rise early and weed their fields in order to begin class by nine in the morning with an itinerating teacher.²³² At one point, Annie Preston taught seven classes a

²²⁹ Letter. Nellie Rankin to My Dear Aunt Nelly, October 1, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²³⁰ Oh Jang Hui, “The Korean Language and the Influence American Women Missionaries had on Korean Women 1884 – 1910”, Presbyterian Theological Graduate School of Historical Theology, 2013. (Translation Mine) 어 정 희, *조선말 미국여성선교사가 한국여계에 끼친 영향 – 1884-1910 년을 존후하여*, 한국: 장교회신학대 대학원 역사신학 전공, 2013.

²³¹ Letter. Annie Preston to My Dear Mother, October 25, 1906, folder 7, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²³² “Country Classes,” *General Report Syen Chun Station, 1901-1902*, (Seoul: Press of Methodist Publishing House, 1902), 17.

week for women.²³³ Insightful and articulate Methodist missionary Nellie Pierce wrote succinctly of the passion Korean women possessed for learning. In her 1901 report, Pierce declared, “It is delightful to see the zeal with which they come, a zeal that does not seem to abate in the least but increases as they learn.”²³⁴

The enthusiasm Korean women exhibited for literacy and the American women missionaries equal enthusiasm for teaching literacy again created a “nearness” based on shared experience and shared gender identification. Male missionaries could not teach literacy to Korean women due to seclusion ideals. In the end, women taught women how to read and in the process, the educational culture for Korean women changed and Korean women became familiar with Christianity.

Korean women also helped American women improve their spoken Korean. Mattie Ingold Tate wrote in her journal about putting aside her book learning and deciding to talk to women in order to learn the language.²³⁵ The Methodist missionary who taught the *Yangban* at night eventually began to visit and converse with the Korean women on a social basis – each helping the other.²³⁶ Mary Hillman wrote about studying with a Korean Bible woman while on itinerating trips. “On these trips,” Hillman explained, “when not teaching and traveling she (Helen, the Bible woman) is reading the Bible with us, explaining unknown words and phrases

²³³ Letter. John Fairman Preston to Mother and Father, March 20, 1909, folder 10, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²³⁴ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 16.

²³⁵ Martha Tate Journal, November 11, 1897, , Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

²³⁶ Cram, “The Old Sevant,” *The Korea Mission Field* 2, (1905): 24.

or eagerly inquiring the meaning of some obscure passage.”²³⁷ This text describes a language two-way street, Korean women learning to read and write their language and American women gaining fluency in the spoken language from Korean women. It also signals the creation of new relationships and understanding of Christianity as they read the Bible together. Commensurable acts surrounding language helped make inroads into seemingly impermeable cultural spheres. And ultimately, the missionary women felt, it helped to bridge a cultural divide.

Conclusion

American women missionaries took advantage of a rare confluence of commensurable acts on their part, the existence of a unique alphabet and Korean women’s desire for literacy to help bridge a cultural divide. American women worked to bridge the cultural divide through participating in aspects of Korean culture. They traveled in palanquins, stayed in inner rooms, ate Korean food and learned Korean manners. They also worked to acquire some degree of fluency in a very difficult language and used a unique alphabet to teach literacy in that language to Korean women eager to learn. In performing commensurable acts centered in Korean culture and Korean language literacy, American women participated in and shared in cultural expectations for females with Korean women. In the process, relationships developed and American women believed they developed a “nearness” to Korean women, which would ultimately help them transmit new religious ideas to Korean women. Along with acts of commensurability, “Nearness” was also spatially promoted. American missionaries’ adapted the space of their western-styled and remodeled homes to Confucian ideals to facilitate and make possible interactions between American and Korean women.

²³⁷ Lula A. Miller, “Evangelistic Work and Day Schools Chemulpo and West Korea District”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 32.

Chapter Three

The Space of American Women Missionary's Homes in Korea

The Christian women drift constantly into our home for counsel and instruction. Many days much of the time one or more are sitting on the floor pouring over some Christian book of instruction, waiting for their turn with the catechism or for a word of cheer and encouragement.²³⁸

Mattie Noble (Mrs. W. Arthur Noble)

I was an ignorant woman, and did not know how to read our simple Korean syllabary. Thank God I became able to study my beloved Bible through the printed page. I can never forget the one who came to me and became my dearest teacher and friend, Mrs. W. Arthur Noble. She came as a missionary to Korea in 1892, and arrived in Pyeng Yang in 1896. Mr. Suk Kyung Oh led me to know of our Lord, but Mrs. Noble led me to the Cross where I was born again, taught me to read and to study the Scriptures. She led me in learning the plan of salvation, line upon line. She is truly my mother in the faith.²³⁹

Sadie Kim

When Mattie Noble taught Sadie Kim how to read, much of this work took place in Noble's home. Her home, she wrote, was a space that brought her "in touch and sympathy with the women as no other work" did.²⁴⁰ As such it was a private space with a very public, evangelizing purpose. These public/private spaces also facilitated encounters of literacy training and cultural exchange. Realizing the importance of proper spaces for women in Korean society,

²³⁸ Mattie Wilcox Noble, *Evangelistic Work and Day Schools, Pyeng Yang Circuit*, Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 9.
<http://images.library.yale.edu/divinitycontent/dayrep/Methodist%20Episcopal%20Church.%20Korea%20Woman's%20Conference%201898-1899%20v1.pdf>.

²³⁹ Sadie Kim, "The Story of My Life", in *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea*, ed. Mattie Noble, (Seoul: Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985), 32.

²⁴⁰ Mattie Wilcox Noble, "Report of Evangelistic work, Bible Institutes, and Thre Day Schools, Pyeng Yang," Annual Meeting of the Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in KOrea in 1906, pp. 60-65 in Hyaeweol Choi's article *The Missionary Home as a Pulpit*, 33.

missionaries modified existing homes or deliberately built homes that segregated space between males and females to make interaction with Korean women possible.

This chapter will show that the intentional decision by female missionaries to open up, as well as modify, the space of their homes, provided a place for mutual interaction between themselves and Korean women in a society steeped in neo-Confucian ideas of proper spaces for women. Sociologist Jurgen Habermas has argued that private spaces, such as the home, could serve as public space for the dissemination of ideas. In late nineteenth century Confucian Korea the evangelical work done by American women missionaries in the modified spaces of their homes is another example of the public function of private space. Women walked into their living room, interacted with, taught and evangelized Korean women

Neo-Confucian Ideas of Space

As Neo-Confucianism became official ideology at the beginning of the Joseon dynasty in 1392, women's 'place' in society became more and more marginalized.²⁴¹ Their place in society became increasingly centered on the neo-Confucian idea of "inside" and "outside." In applying these principles to the spaces of the home, woman's proper place became inside the home and man's proper place became outside the home.²⁴² Neo-Confucian ideas of woman's place developed out of Chinese Song dynasty scholar Zhu Xi's 12th century interpretations of original Confucian texts.²⁴³ In her work on Chinese domesticity, historian Helen Schneider explains that

²⁴¹ Grace Hye-Won Park Lim, "The Status and Roles of Korean Missionary Wives in Cross-Cultural Mission" PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological University, 2000, 14. For a discussion on the start of the Joseon dynasty see: Jinwung Kim, *History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2012), 69-72.

²⁴² Jin-Hee Chun; Et Al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 18-19.

²⁴³ Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period through the Nineteenth Century*, First Edition, Thus edition (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 116.

Zhu Xi's ideas situated women as the primary managers in the home.²⁴⁴ According to Schneider, "A wife who managed [domestic space] well and without complications enabled her husband to attend fully to public "outside" affairs."²⁴⁵ Therefore, woman's place was inside the home and private, and man's place was outside the home and public.

Ideas of "inside" and "outside," "public" and "private" for women also appear discursively in the Korean language. The Korean traditional word for wife, 아내, *anae*, means "inside person". 안방, *anbang*, means "inner room" and the 안채, *anchae*, means "women's quarters."²⁴⁶ These words clearly point out the connection between gender and space.

The authors of the architectural book *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* contend that by the mid Joseon Period, discrimination against women moved into ideas of space in the home. Separate spaces for women, away from men, became a primary concern in the design and layout of homes, a feat most often accomplished by building walls.²⁴⁷

By the late nineteenth century, a wall surrounded most traditional Korean homes so passers-by could not see the women and most *yangban* or upper-class women lived behind a separate wall in the home's compound. Besides living behind walls, women lived as far away as possible from the entrance to the home, residing in rearmost rooms of the house. This was true in configurations of upper-class homes as well as commoner's homes.

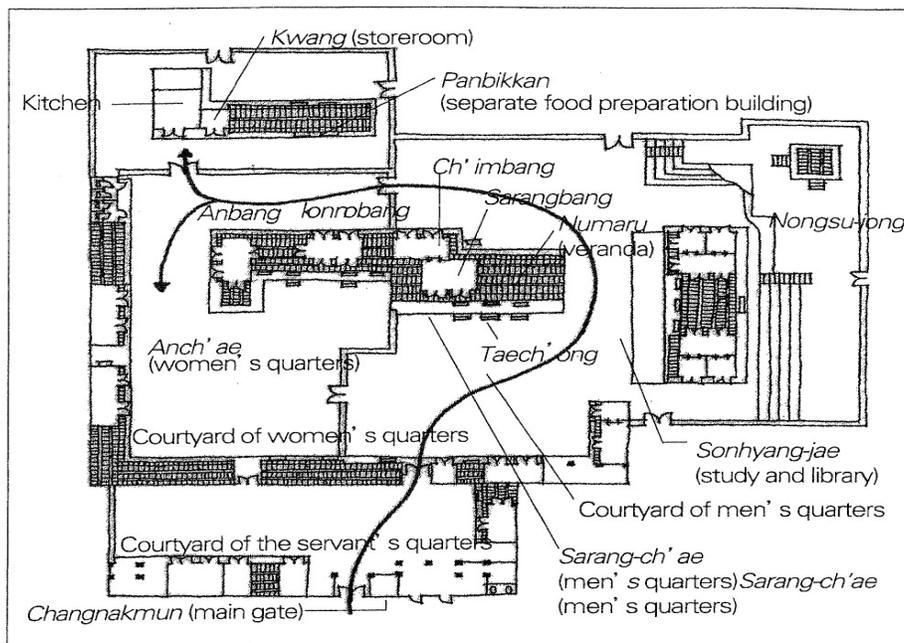
²⁴⁴ Helen Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: University of Washington Press, 2012), 8.

²⁴⁵ Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House*, 7.

²⁴⁶ Kwang Soon Lee, "Korean Women's Understanding of Mission the Role of Women in the Korean Presbyterian Church," PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological University, 65; Chun et.al, *Hanoak*, 15–29.

²⁴⁷ Chun et al, *Hanoak*, 19

In the following diagram, the authors of *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* not only show the floor plan for a *yangban*, or “elite” class estate, they outline the distance of the women’s *anbang* (inner room) and kitchen from the entrance to the home. When a visitor entered the home, after traveling through the servant’s area, they entered the gate to the “public” part of the home. In the diagram below, the wall to the left indicated the area separated as “private” and for women. The kitchen and *anbang* (the areas where women spent the most time) were at the back of the home complex.²⁴⁸ Women spent most of their lives behind walls such as these that separated and isolated them.



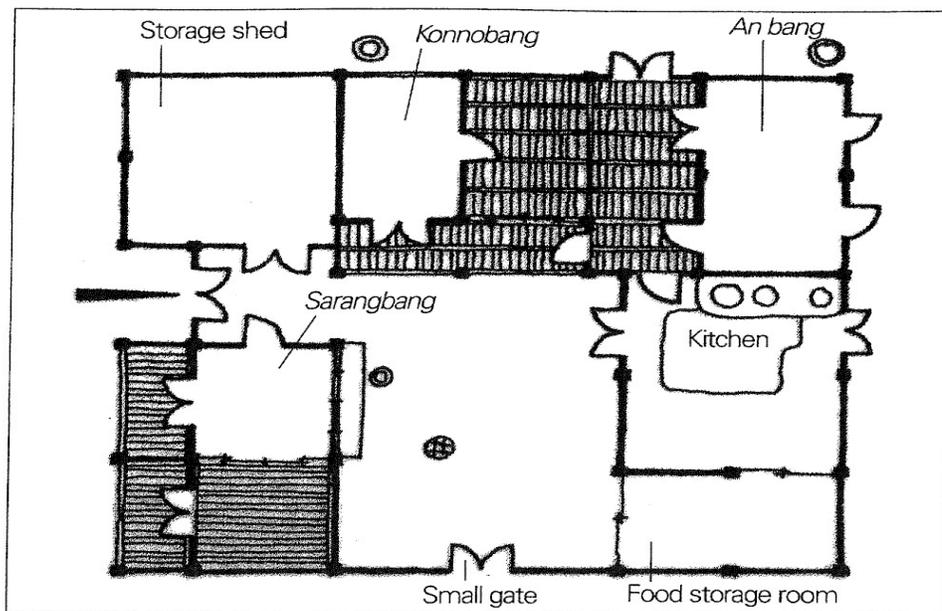
Layout of a yangban Estate. The path leads from the gate through the men's space to the *anchae* (women's quarters), or women's area. Jin-Hee Chun; Et Al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 55.

Girls learned their place in Korean society early in life as they spent their entire childhood in the women’s areas while being instructed in domestic duties and female

²⁴⁸ Chun et al, *Hanoak*, 55.

decorum.²⁴⁹ Male children when they finished nursing, moved from the women’s quarters in the back and slept and studied in the men’s areas in the front, under the guidance and tutelage of their fathers and grandfathers. Girls often married early, some at 13; after marriage, a Korean girl moved to her husband’s home where she worked for her mother-in-law.²⁵⁰ Although she lived and worked in her husband’s home, and despite the fact that she was married, she did not obtain status within the family until she gave birth to a son.²⁵¹

Confucian ideas on space were not limited to the upper class. Below is a diagram from a modest *chungin* home and the delineation of spaces within the home.



A modest *chungin* home. Jin-Hee Chun; Et Al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 63.

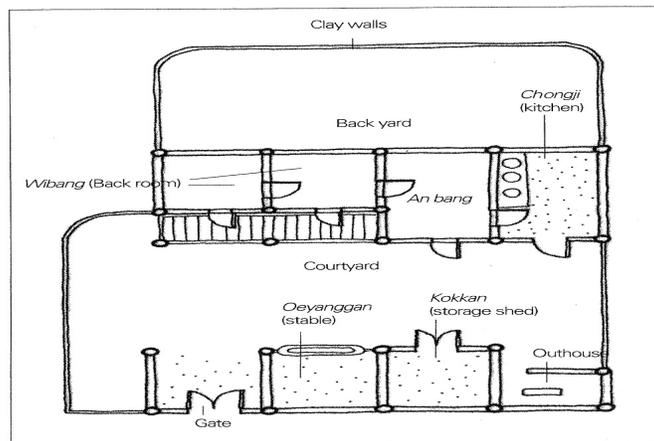
²⁴⁹ Janelli and Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society*, 35–40; Chun et al, *Hanoak*, 55.

²⁵⁰ Janelli and Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society*, 55.

²⁵¹ Lim, “The Status and Roles of Korean Missionary Wives in Cross-Cultural Mission ,” 15.

This home was typical of a *chungin*, or middle class home, as it contained a *sarangbang*, or men's study only found in middle and upper class homes. Middle class members of Korean society, often government workers and sons of concubines, obtained educations and only the educated needed a study or derived an income from jobs that needed an education. As in this diagram, the men's study existed close to the gate and the *anbang* continued to be in the back. In this configuration, the *anbang* was located away from the entrance gates and directly connected with the kitchen, the domestic, private space of the home.

Even the homes of the lower classes in Korea delineated space for an *anbang* as seen in the diagram below. Although very simple in design, an *anbang* remained delineated and women would be expected to stay there when men other than family members visited the home.



Home of commoner – the *anbang* is still present. Jin-Hee Chun; Et Al, *Hanoak: Traditional Korean Homes* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp., 1999), 63.

Although somewhat dependent on class, the expectation for many Korean women of the Joseon dynasty consisted of living in these walled off spaces in the home. And although men did have a private space in the home in the *sarangbang*, or study, women had no public space equivalent to mens'.

In a 1903 editorial in the Korean journal *Sinhak wilbo* Korean evangelist, Mun Kyongho decried the traditional role of women in Korea and the inside-outside rule. Mun described

women as “treated like material objects,” and “confined to the inner chambers, prevented from going anywhere,” even on picnics or scenic places.²⁵² Later in 1933, Korean writer Induk Park again confirmed Mun’s view in her poignant description of growing up in a traditional Korean home.

Having grown up in the country I know somewhat the life of a farmer’s wife. She exists within the four walls of poverty, ignorance, disease and superstition. Above these is the roof of oppression by her husband. She toils under these circumstances all through her life from birth to death. It seems that it is her destiny, for there is no way of getting out of it. Many of our grandmothers went through such a life, and many women of today are going through practically the same routine.²⁵³

Park wanted readers of *The Korea Mission Field* to understand that ideas that ruled her grandmother’s generation of women continued to shape the lives of women in 1933.

Although few writings by Korean women in the early nineteenth century have been discovered, in the few known sources, Korean women wrote about their segregated world. In a book of memoirs compiled by and filtered through the cultural and religious lens of American missionary Mattie Noble, Samtuk Chun, the wife of a Royal Councillor in the Korean government, wrote of her life inside her home.

According to custom, I always remained at home. I couldn’t go outside of our house and its open court or yard which was surrounded by buildings and by high walls unless I were to go carried by chair bearers, with servants walking before and behind to protect me and to clear the way. Our family customs were especially strict...It was utterly impossible for me to go outside our home.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Mun Kyongho, “*Naeoe hanun p’ungsok*” “The Custom of the Inside-Outside Rule,” in *New Women in Colonial Korea: A Sourcebook*, ed. Hyaewol Choi, 1 edition (London: Routledge, 2013), 21. Also, in Katherine Ahn’s *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 170 – “When a Korean man heard of the missionaries opening schools for girls, he commented that the next thing he expected from the missionaries would be ‘schools for Korean cattle.’”

²⁵³ Induk Park in Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea*, 162.

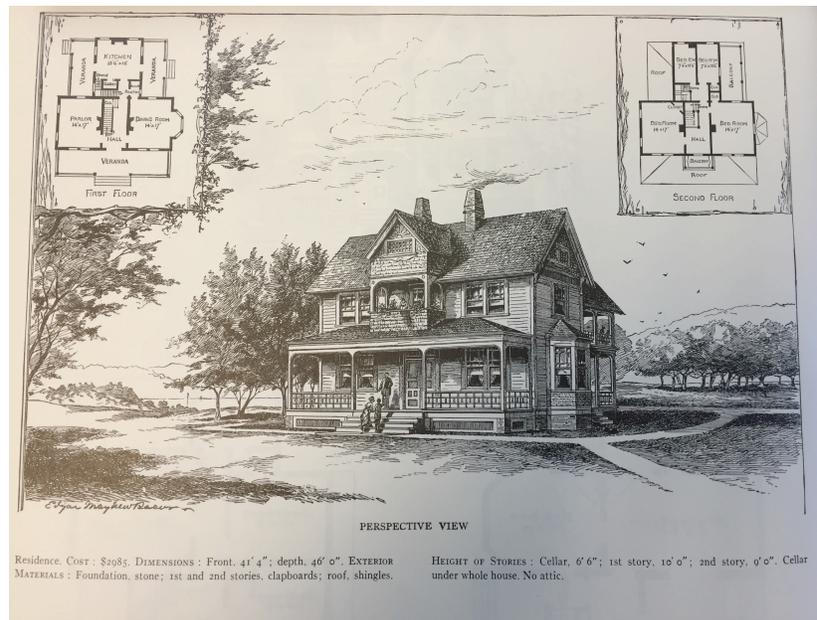
²⁵⁴ “Samtuk Chun” biography in Mattie Noble, ed. *Victorious Lives of Early Christians*, (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1927), 31-32.

Chun was a member of the upper class or *yangban* and *yangban* stringently followed Confucian proscriptive ideas of spatial limitations for women. Her discursive picture of the spaces she lived in summed up well the segregation of space in a traditional Korean home.

Korean scholars such as Hyaeweol Choi and Katherine Ahn write of the difficulties Korean women faced due to space restrictions. The letters, journals and reports of American missionaries point to the space of the missionaries' homes as one Korean women could occupy under Confucian constrictions.²⁵⁵ Spaces in the home, as opposed to more official public spaces, such as churches, proved to be more acceptable in Korean Confucian society, a circumstance that American women missionaries recognized and used in their evangelization efforts.

Middle Class Homes in America

Space expectations in Protestant middle-class America differed greatly from those in Korea, therefore, the types of houses built in America held little resemblance to the homes built in Korea. In American homes, spaces were less segregated, walls rarely surrounded homes



"Design No. 204," Shoppell's *Modern Homes in Turn of the Century Houses, Cottages and Villas: Floor Plans and Line Illustrations of 118 Homes from Shoppell's Catalogs*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1983), 2. Public Domain

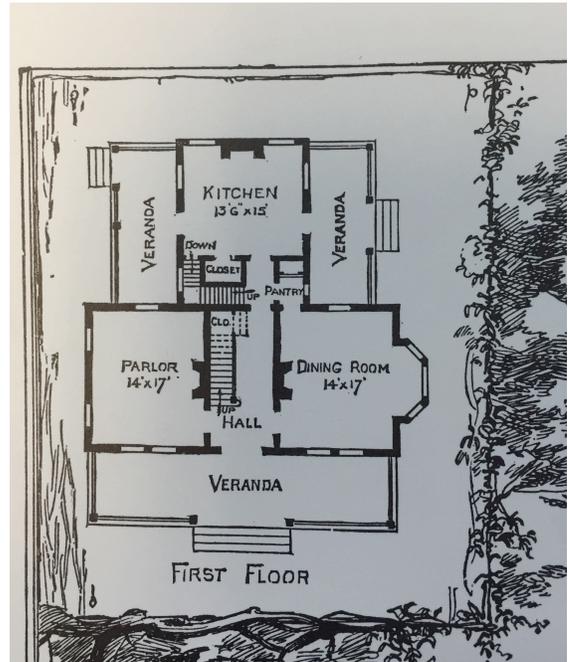
²⁵⁵ See: Hyaeweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways: Seoul-California Series in Korean Studies, Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) and Katherine H. Lee Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom: Pioneer American Women Missionaries in Korea*, 1st edition (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2013).

and architects planned communal as well as personal space. Late nineteenth century middle class American single-family homes often possessed two floors, and space on the first floor facilitated family activities.²⁵⁶ Missionary letters and journals talk often about family meals together in a dining room.²⁵⁷

This particular house plan comes from a portfolio with the title *Building Designs* by R.W. Shoppell dating from the 1880s. It was one of the homes with a lower cost and somewhat matched a description given of a home built by missionary John Preston in Korea. In a letter to his mother and father about the home he built in Kwangju, Preston described some aspects of his new home.

The distinctive features of our house are: large front porch, with colonial pillars, and “old Virginia” doorway opening into reception hall, real American stairway, large open fire-place in Dining room and grate in Sitting room...²⁵⁸

This detailed layout of the first floor of the house plan above differed little from Preston’s description. It shows the prominent position of a Dining Room as well as a “Parlor,” or in Preston’s words, a “sitting room.” It also shows a staircase, fireplaces and porch all of which were important to Preston.



"Design No. 204," Shoppell's Modern Homes in Turn of the Century Houses, Cottages and Villas: Floor Plans and Line Illustrations of 118 Homes from Shoppell's Catalogs, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1983), 2. Public Domain.

²⁵⁶ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 172.

²⁵⁷ When eating comes up in letters and journals it is almost always done as a communal activity in families.

²⁵⁸ Letter. John Fairman Preston to Father and Mother, July 2, 1906. PHS

A book by architect Frank Lloyd Wright entitled *House Beautiful* and first printed in 1896 detailed an almost spiritual relationship between Americans and their homes. In the book, Wright and his colleague William Herman Winslow end the first chapter entitled “The Building of the House” with the following sentiment, “The house in which we live is a building of God, a house not made with hands.”²⁵⁹ The whole book pointed to the importance between Christianity and the “feeling” or atmosphere of the American home.

Wright and Winslow’s book also illuminated the importance of furnishings and decorations in making the house a home and not just bare walls. And the last chapter in the book, entitled “The Dear Togetherness” elucidated late nineteenth century ideas on the role the home played in family togetherness. The atmosphere of the home, according to Wright and Winslow, is like a “Constant love-song without words, whose meaning is, ‘We are glad that we are alive together.’”²⁶⁰ American missionaries to Korea also declared the importance of home as a place for family togetherness.²⁶¹

Along with seeing the home as a holy place and a place for family togetherness, late nineteenth century American women also saw the home as a reflection of themselves. According to historian Kristin Hoganson, “In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, middle-class Americans commonly regarded household interiors as expressions of the women who inhabited

²⁵⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright and William Herman Winslow, *The House Beautiful*, (Chicago: Auvergne Press, 1896), republished Pomegranite Press, (Petaluma: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2006).

²⁶⁰ Wright and Winslow, *House Beautiful*.

²⁶¹ Letter. John Fairman Preston to “My Precious Mother”, May 13, 1906, folder 7, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS. Preston juxtaposes his belief in the importance of communal family life against the lack of family he perceives to exist in Korean homes.

them.”²⁶² Every house in Korea that Annie Preston occupied she remodeled in some way or another, even if it was to just change the wallpaper.²⁶³

Late nineteenth century American middle class women’s expectation for home space and the ways in which the family shared space differed from Korean women’s expectation for space and day-to-day life in the home. And as American women missionaries entered the mission field in Korea they desired to replicate their homes in America.

American Missionary Women’s Desire for Renovated or Western Style Homes

As American missionaries arrived in Korea, they often stayed in Korean-styled homes for only short periods of time before building or remodeling. Several motivations appeared in their records for desiring to renovate or build western styled homes. Most missionaries saw Korean houses as inadequate, unhealthy and uncomfortable. Missionaries also expressed their desire to live as a nuclear family and preferred to not share their homes with other missionaries, a circumstance that often arose in the very early years of mission work in Korea. Therefore, to remedy the need to share, they built.

American sensibilities and ideas of superior western modernity drove missionary judgments of Korean housing as unhealthy and unhygienic. Missionary Lilius Underwood described Korean cities as’ “festering pools and ditches overflowing with filth, steaming a very witches brew of evils upon the sickened air, with odors unspeakable and undreamed of in

²⁶² Kristin Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 13.

²⁶³ Letter. Annie Preston to My Dear Mother, June 23, 1909, folder 10, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

civilized lands.”²⁶⁴ Due to perceptions such as this one of the uncivilized nature of Korean cities, the actual site of or situation of Korean homes often came under scathing review by missionaries. The location of many Korean homes on lower, flatter land was often deemed as unhealthy. Mattie Ingold Tate, in describing the development of the mission station in Chunju, wrote that the station’s homes were being built “above” (emphasis Tate’s) the Korean homes and that the homes being built “command fine views and are in very desirable locations both for beauty and health.”²⁶⁵ These two desirable conditions, high on a hill and above the Korean homes, equaled a healthy location in the mind of the American missionary. In another mission station, the missionaries located what they considered to be a “healthy” site but would not purchase it until the doctor came to “guarantee the healthfulness of the situation.” This decision to not take action until approved by the professional doctor, points to the great importance missionaries placed on a house site location.²⁶⁶

In looking at the location of houses on the highest places within a Korean community, the racial implications and overtones of the missionaries’ position of building above the Koreans cannot be ignored. Just as nineteenth century Americans believed in a “hierarchy of man,” it seems they also believed in a hierarchy of man’s house. This hierarchy included building on the highest ground and building or remodeling in a “modern” way.

²⁶⁴ Lilius Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Topknobs*, (Boston: American Tract Society, 1904), 98.

²⁶⁵ Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, November 11, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

²⁶⁶ “General Report of Taiku Station, 1898-1899,” *General Report Stations of Korea Presbyterian Mission For The Year 1898-1899*, (Seoul: Presbyterian Church in the USA Korea Mission, 1899), 41.



Missionary homes located at the top of a hill at Kunsan Korea mission station. Photo. box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Fair Use.

The design and shortcomings of Korean homes also came into question. American missionary Lillias Horton Underwood, described some benefits of her early Korean-styled home, such as the addition of a tiled roof, but mostly pointed to its inadequacies. For example, she described the monsoon season's effect on her home. In her narrative, she described the streams of water "flowing cheerfully down [her] nice wallpaper, avoiding the buckets [she] set for it." She also lamented the rain's effect on the clay used in constructing traditional Korean roofs. After it rained for a time, she declared, "down comes a lump of mud here, and another there." Her rugs needed moving; it was damp and "to say the least, unpleasant."²⁶⁷ In another perceived flaw, the flue in Korean homes ran under the house, a design which, according to Anabel Nisbet,

²⁶⁷ Lillias H. (Lillias Horton) Underwood, *Underwood of Korea; Being an Intimate Record of the Life and Work of the Rev. H.G. Underwood, D.D., LL. D., for Thirty One Years a Missionary of the Presbyterian Board in Korea* (New York, London [etc.] Fleming H. Revell Co, 1918), 66, <http://archive.org/details/underwoodofkorea00unde>.

left a missionary in a “fiery trial as he sat uncomfortably perspiring in the room.”²⁶⁸ Early pioneer missionary Mary Scranton wrote of her joy when work on her western-styled home began. “The shouts of the workmen as they prepared the ground,” she wrote, “tramping and stamping to the beat of the drum, was far sweeter music than such sounds ordinarily are.”²⁶⁹ In an overall assessment of Korean houses, missionary Lilius Underwood stated, “It is needless to say that everything in connection with these houses is fearfully unsanitary...”²⁷⁰ Missionaries deemed un-renovated Korean housing unhealthy and viewed taking care of their health as a paramount responsibility.²⁷¹

Besides a desire for a healthy, well-functioning home, other factors played into missionaries’ yearnings to build and remodel houses, namely the wish for their own individual space not shared with other missionaries. Mission houses were often shared and overcrowded. In letters and journals, American missionaries reserved their most scathing words for fellow missionaries – not Koreans. Missionaries often lived with each other in small spaces for long periods of time. Sometimes these arrangements worked well; sometimes, however, they did not. In a letter penned by John Fairman Preston he described the great frustration and effort he and Annie put forth in caring for missionaries in their home. In the letter he wrote that two of them had “given so much trouble that Annie and I pretty nearly decided several times to drop the whole business and retire.”²⁷² A few months later, they moved and lived in a different situation.

²⁶⁸ Anabel Nisbet, *Day In and Day Out in Korea*, (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1919), 35.

²⁶⁹ Mary Scranton, "Woman's Work in Korea", *The Korean Repository* 3, (1896), 4.

²⁷⁰ Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, 5.

²⁷¹ See Lilius Underwood’s discussion of “Mr. McKenzie” in Underwood, *Fifteen years*, 123-127.

²⁷² Letter. John Fairman Preston to My Dear Father and Mother, September 20, 1908, folder 9, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

Preston described this new living arrangement as suiting “Annie perfectly at this time, as she is tired and wishes a little surcease from housekeeping cares.”²⁷³ Nellie Rankin often spoke of her frustrations living with fellow missionary, Mattie Tate. She perceived Tate as overbearing and bossy and wrote with great excitement when she finally obtained her own house. In a letter to a friend she declared her rooms as “very pretty and “real cozy.”²⁷⁴

Along with the desire to build enough housing to avoid sharing, missionary husbands also saw building and remodeling to a western-style as a necessity for keeping their wives, as well as single women missionaries, on the mission field. John Fairman Preston wrote about his hard work in seeing Annie finally “settled” in a newly built, western-style home.²⁷⁵ William Harrison wrote about a fellow missionary building a house so his bride could come from America.²⁷⁶ American missionary men built and remodeled houses. They saw it as a requirement on the mission field for health, for comfort and for wives to stay with them in the field.

Remodeling and Building

One of the first solutions missionaries devised to “fix” housing problems was to remodel existing houses to better accommodate American sensibilities for domestic space. For example, an initial solution to Mary Scranton’s desire for windows was take three photographic plates and use them as windowpanes to be able to see “at least with one eye at a time the light of heaven

²⁷³ Letter. John Fairman Preston to Mother, May 23, 1909, folder 10, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁷⁴ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Georgia, May 17, 1910, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁷⁵ Letter. John Fairman Preston to My Precious Mother, May 13, 1906, folder 7, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁷⁶ William Butler Harrison, Journal May 6, 1896, box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

again.”²⁷⁷ Missionaries also wrote of putting down new oilpaper on floors, glass in doors as windows and trying to cover mud walls with wallpaper.²⁷⁸ They also, with much effort, put in heating systems they found more familiar and considered healthier, such as fireplaces.²⁷⁹ These first attempts at “fixing” perceived housing problems sufficed for a season, but most missionaries soon began perusing house plans and began the building process.²⁸⁰

American male missionaries built houses and historians have found that for many it was the single most difficult thing they did during their whole time on the mission field.²⁸¹ Women, as well as men missionaries often wrote about the challenging undertaking of building western-style homes in Korea. Descriptions such as “gigantic task” and “strenuous effort” run through the writings on building homes.²⁸² Every part of the building process seemed to be problematic. Missionaries overpaid for sites so as not to offend the local Koreans. Also, government officials, both Korean and Japanese, confiscated homes already built.²⁸³ Building materials also proved tough to find. Southern Presbyterian missionary William Reynolds bought a grove of pine trees

²⁷⁷ Mary Scranton, "Woman's Work in Korea", *The Korean Repository* 3, (1896): 3.

²⁷⁸ William Butler Harrison, Journal Beginning November 24th 1895 Ending December 21st 1897, July 7, 1897, box 2 William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁷⁹ Underwood, *Underwood of Korea*, 66.

²⁸⁰ William Butler Harrison, Journal Beginning November 24th 1895 Ending December 21st 1897, March 19, 1897, box 2 William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS. Every journal and every set of letters I read from the missionaries I studied talked about remodeling or building houses.

²⁸¹ See: Georgina W. Owen, *Opening of Kwangju Station*, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS. Also see: W. B. Harrison, *Opening of Kunsan Station*, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁸² See William Burnice Greene, “History of Kunsan Station, 1896-1930”, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS. Also see: Georgina W. Owen, “Opening of Kwangju”, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁸³ William Burnice Greene, “History of Kunsan Station, 1896-1930,” folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

in order to secure timber for home building.²⁸⁴ William Harrison in his journal talked about the grove being 15 li from the house site (about 4 ½ miles) and that getting the timber from the grove to the building site proved to be very difficult.²⁸⁵ Sometimes government officials also seized timber.²⁸⁶ And one missionary cut trees in the forest miles from the house site then floated them down the river into town.²⁸⁷

Beyond building materials such as logs, missionaries also wanted to obtain materials that were not even available in Korea, materials such as pipes, glass, bathtubs and nails. These items illustrate another example of American missionaries perceived need for things western/modern.²⁸⁸ Every edition of *The Korean Repository* included advertisements from companies specializing in obtaining goods from America.²⁸⁹ And missionaries placed many orders.²⁹⁰ And after ordering them, they waited. They waited as goods from America either crossed the Pacific Ocean or the Atlantic Ocean (and through the Suez Canal) to the Yellow Sea. They waited as those same goods rode on the backs of donkeys, or men, to their homes in the interior. Four months was quick and signaled good weather. Sometimes, in bad weather or

²⁸⁴ John Fairman Preston, "Recollections of Early Beginnings", folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

²⁸⁵ William Butler Harrison Journal, March, 30, 1896 and April 5, 1896, box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁸⁶ Ethel Estey, "Evangelistic Work, Pyeng Yang and North Korea District," *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 46.

²⁸⁷ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 131.

²⁸⁸ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 131.

²⁸⁹ F. Ohlinger ed., *The Korean Repository* 3, (1896).

²⁹⁰ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 140.

mitigating circumstances, it took a year. Sometimes, their orders never arrived and instead sat on the bottom of the sea in some remote part of the world.

After going through the arduous labor of building these homes, missionaries often faced considerable criticism due to the size and relative wealth of their homes compared with Koreans. Missionary Annie Baird wrote that, “Perhaps no feature of missionary life has excited so much senseless, ignorant, not to say malicious criticism as our houses.”²⁹¹ One such criticism concerning the location of missionary homes appeared in a journal in the United States written by an author who had recently traveled throughout Asia. He intimated that if mission boards knew the way in which missionaries lived, the Boards would quickly discontinue their support. Baird countered the accusation in a sarcastic retort:

And the one dark fact that he saw fit to divulge was that everywhere he went through the Orient he found that the missionaries had selected the “highest and healthiest sites” for their homes! What we want to consider is not such criticisms as are too inane to be worth troubled thought...²⁹²

Baird believed missionaries should be “comfortable and healthfully housed” but without “unnecessary spaciousness and ornamentation.”²⁹³ Despite the criticisms and despite the difficulty, American missionaries continued to build western-style homes.²⁹⁴

Women missionaries soon realized their homes’ potential in building bridges to Korean women. While the missionaries could have decided to keep their homes private, most did not –

²⁹¹ Annie Laurie Adams Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1913), 25, <http://archive.org/details/insideviewsofmis00bair>.

²⁹² Baird, *Inside Views*, 26.

²⁹³ Baird, *Inside Views*, 26 & 28.

²⁹⁴ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 130.

they welcomed Korean women into the space of their homes, a space that proved to be acceptable for Confucian women living under proscriptive ideas for separate female space.

The Missionary Home as a Cross-Cultural Space

Annie Preston, in recounting her early years on the mission field, explained to younger missionaries that she did not need to go into the villages to encourage Koreans to come to her home as the “whole countryside came to us.”²⁹⁵ While proscriptive behavior called for women to stay home, they did come out on occasion, especially during holidays and at times when they were very curious. Many American missionary women, including Annie Preston, Nellie Rankin, Mattie Noble and Mattie Ingold Tate, wrote about Korean women visiting their homes. Most of these first visits to American homes came in conjunction with something missionaries termed “sight-seeing” visits from Korean women.²⁹⁶ Western-styled homes became the object of many Korean women’s curiosity. Ordinary items found in the American’s home such as chairs, tables, rugs, sewing machines, lamps, typewriters and clocks became curiosities to Korean women – many Korean women had never seen such items.²⁹⁷ Also, most Korean women had never seen a foreigner.²⁹⁸ So, to Korean women, American women, their homes, and the objects in their home became interesting curiosities. And while curiosity motivated many first visits to western styled homes, for additional visits to occur, American women would need to make sure the spaces the women came to conformed to Confucian expectations for women’s seclusion.

²⁹⁵ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 192.

²⁹⁶ Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, November 11, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS. Letter, Annie Preston to My Dear Mother, May 21, 1904, folder 4, box 4, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS. Letter. Nellie Rankin to Father, October 20, 1908, box 2, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

²⁹⁷ Hyaeweol Choi, “The Missionary Home as a Pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth-Century Korea, 32 & 36.

²⁹⁸ Ahn, *Awakening the Hermit Kingdom*, 193.

To meet Confucian strictures on separation of sexes, missionaries in the field modified spaces to accommodate the women and invite them to do more than sight-see. For example, soon after arriving, Southern Presbyterian missionaries adapted to the Confucian spatial expectations for women by creating a space just for women at the Kunsan station. The mission here bought a “tiled roof Government building” situated above the village on a hill and remodeled it for the home of female missionary Linnie Davis and created a “six kan room for meetings for women” in the dwelling. (A kan is an imprecise traditional Korean measurement which equates to the distance between two supporting poles in a traditional Korean home.) The men meet in the study of male missionary William Junkin.²⁹⁹

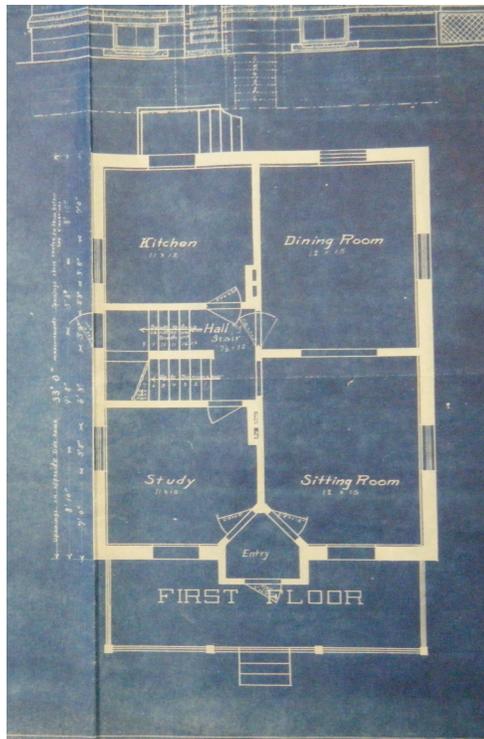
Southern Presbyterians at the Chunju station also adapted their dwellings to address Confucian expectations of space for women. Lewis Tate and his sister Mattie were the first missionaries to the city of Chunju, south of Seoul. Upon arriving, the two siblings secured separate houses to accommodate a segregation of the sexes. Since, Mattie’s house consisted of just one room, Lewis enclosed the porch using “Cash Store boxes” to create a bedroom for his sister and left the existing room as a place his sister met with the women. The men met in Lewis’s home.³⁰⁰ Later the two siblings created another space in which they could hold joint services. The dwelling had two rooms and they kept a door open between them so the women and men could both hear the speaker, but not see each other.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ W.B. Harrison, “Opening of Kunsan Station”, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

³⁰⁰ L.B. Tate, “The Opening of Chunju Station”, folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

³⁰¹ John Fairman Preston, “Recollections of Early Beginnings”, folder 26, Box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

While remodeling was a first step, Americans often decided to build new homes. And when they built new homes some designed western-style house plans to accommodate Confucian ideals as well as American aesthetics and expectations for domestic space. This can be seen in building plans from the Methodist mission in Korea.³⁰² In these plans the front door opened to a small foyer with two doors, one to the left and one to the right. The one to the left led to the study, the equivalence of the Korean men's area or *sarangbang*. The door to the right led to traditional women's areas, the sitting room and dining room. Rooms were also segregated by a number of doors. These plans illustrate ways missionaries purposefully included design elements to incorporate spaces for Korean women to visit and remain within Confucian constrictions for women, inside and segregated.



Songdo Korea Mission Hom Plans. Missionary Residence: Songdo, Korea (Undated) World Division Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. (Also see note 306.) Used with permission.

Southern Presbyterians designed Nellie Rankin's home as a truly joint space for herself and for a girls' school. Her living room served as "a dining room, sitting room, study and general office combined."³⁰³ Her rooms resided on the same floor and directly behind the chapel built

³⁰² Missionary Residence: Songdo, Korea (Undated) World Division Records, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. Architect James Arthur Thompson drew this set of blueprints and a 1913 alumni record for the University of Illinois states that he is the architect for the Methodist Episcopal South mission in Korea and lives in Songdo, Korea.

³⁰³ Letter. Nellie Rankin to "Happy Birthday Brother", October 6, 1910, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

for female worship. She told her brother in a 1910 letter that her main room was “the prettiest room I have seen out here.”³⁰⁴ She hoped later to send him pictures but decided a drawing was all she could do at the time. In the drawing she included the location of and description of her furniture. While Rankin and missionaries in her station decided to design her space as a truly joint space, other missionary women made only small changes to accommodate the space of their homes for Korean women. These women, mostly married, opened up the space of their living rooms to Korean women, having men stand behind screens if they came into the space to teach.³⁰⁵

Within these spaces, which fell within proper Confucian cultural norms for women, much cross-cultural interaction took place. Nellie Rankin opened up her home often for cross-cultural sharing, and not always based on teaching reading or singing. Sometimes, Nellie Rankin’s home also became a place of social interaction. In one letter, Rankin wrote of holding a dinner party to pay back all the women who had “entertained me when I was out in the country teaching.” Her menu consisted entirely of Korean food of which she stated she was “exceedingly fond” indicating her cross-cultural adaptation to Korean food as well as her perceived societal responsibility to return the kindness of the Korean women.³⁰⁶ Rankin also spent many nights conversing with young girls who came to her home to “gossip.” “They love to come to my room and gas,” Rankin wrote, “and as I learn a good deal from their talks about Korean view-points I

³⁰⁴ Letter. Nellie Rankin to “Happy Birthday Brother”, October 6, 1910, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

³⁰⁵ Bishop Earl Cranston, “Tidings From Mission Fields: Notes from Korea,” *The Gospel in All Lands*, (December 1898): 564.

³⁰⁶ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Ruth, February 7, 1911, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

let them.”³⁰⁷ Here rather than Rankin instructing Korean girls in literacy, American or Christian values, the girls gossiped and she learned Korean culture, all in the space of her home which allowed for this female interaction.

Mattie Ingold Tate along with many American women taught reading and other subjects in her home while at the same time practicing her Korean language skills with the Korean women who came. In 1897, Ingold Tate, tired of studying the language with a tutor, thought it would be best to just talk with Korean women and learn from them. Shortly after, she began a singing class in her home for Korean women.³⁰⁸ This undoubtedly gave Ingold Tate the opportunity to not only teach singing but also practice Korean. Through the winter of 1899 -1900 Ingold Tate expanded her singing class to include a reading class, a change she instituted “for the encouragement of a few of them who are trying to learn,” probably including herself within her interactions with the Korean women.³⁰⁹

The holiday season also provided opportunities for such exchange. In 1897 during the Christmas season, Ingold Tate invited elderly women in the community for a party in which she shared American food and played the organ for her guests. While this “party” certainly showed the differences in lifestyle and demonstrated the greater wealth of the Americans, it also opened up opportunity for cross-cultural exchange.³¹⁰ Koreans returned the favor by visiting Ingold Tate

³⁰⁷ Letter. Nellie Rankin to “My Dear Will,” April 13, no year given, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

³⁰⁸ Martha Ingold Tate Journal, November 11, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

³⁰⁹ Martha Ingold Tate Journal, December 2, 1899, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

³¹⁰ Martha Ingold Tate Journal, December 25, 1897, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

at New Years to give her a New Year's performance.³¹¹ This in essence, became a cross-cultural sharing of holidays the Koreans and Americans saw as important in their lives.

Beyond the exchange of cultural ideas and the teaching of literacy, however, missionaries' main goal was always evangelism – the transmission of principles of Christianity within their homes. Southern Presbyterian missionary Linnie Davis's home was expressly remodeled and designed to become a space of evangelism for Korean women. And Linnie Davis did evangelize. In Linnie Davis's home she taught reading but she also taught the Bible.³¹² Methodist missionary Rosella Cram taught the *yangban* women who frequently visited her house at night to read using Christian texts.³¹³ And although Annie Preston taught geography and arithmetic, she mostly taught Christianity.³¹⁴ And as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, Mattie Noble taught Sadie Kim how to read but she also taught her how to be “born again.” Sadie Kim and Korean women like her, Joseon dynasty Confucian woman, steeped in the Confucian ideas of “proper spaces” for women found acceptable spaces in the homes of Mattie Noble, Annie Preston, Mattie Ingold Tate, Nellie Rankin, Linnie Davis and others, for interaction with American women missionaries and the Americans used it for interactions, literacy, and more direct evangelizing.

The Space of the Home and the Intersection of the Public and the Private

³¹¹ Martha Ingold Tate Journal, January 23, 1898, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

³¹² William Burnice Greene, “History of Kunsan Station, 1896-1930”, folder 25, box 3, John Fairman Preston Papers, RG 441, PHS.

³¹³ Mrs. Rosella H. Cram, “The Old Servant”, *The Korea Mission Field 2* (1905): 24. Lula A. Miller, “Evangelistic Work and Day Schools Chemulpo and West Korea District”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 36

³¹⁴ The letters of Annie and John Fairman Preston point to Annie teaching often and of her desire to continue in mission work despite the birth of children and heavy household responsibilities.

In the first years of missionary work in Korea, American missionaries, in a desire to replicate the memory of their homes in America, remodeled Korean homes in western fashion and most often eventually built western-style homes. These homes, at first, became curiosities to Korean women. After this initial contact, however, many of these homes developed into acceptable spaces, modified to meet Confucian norms, where Korean women gathered and interacted with American women. In terms of evangelism, literacy and cross-cultural cultural exchanges, these spaces functioned as public spaces within the realm of the private.³¹⁵ Through American women's decisions to remodel and build western style homes for themselves and in intentionally designing them for the separation of sexes, they produced a space in which education, evangelization and cross-cultural sharing could take place. And while literacy and cultural exchanges occurred, evangelism took center stage and as we will see in our next chapter, American women's attempts at evangelism in a language many of them never mastered, set the stage for misunderstandings as well as understandings of western principles of Christianity.

³¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991).

Chapter Four

Misunderstandings, Syncretism and a “Middle Ground”

The other day when I heard one of them [Korean Bible women] in the simple reading of a passage make three mistakes failing to bring out the meaning, my heart sank...³¹⁶

What should they do? They did what to them was the next best thing...taking their offerings they placed them at the foot of the flag pole and there prayed to the God “whom they ignorantly worshiped.”³¹⁷

Nellie Pierce, 1903

Missionary Nellie Pierce’s reports to the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea often contained perceptive insights missing from missionary accounts that painted fruitful pictures of mission success. In her 1903 report, Pierce saw communication problems, misunderstandings and partial understandings of Western Christianity among the Korean Bible women she trained – the very women most likely to best understand Christianity. In the same report, she called offerings brought by Koreans a type of ignorant worship, and thus Pierce showed her own non-understanding of the place ritual played in Korean culture. In the strongly Neo-Confucian country of Korea the performance of rituals was a mainstay of life.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Nellie Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School, Evangelistic Work Mead Memorial Church and South Korea District,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 22.

³¹⁷ Nellie Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 20.

³¹⁸ See discussion of Korean Confucianism in Chapter 1.

Such misunderstandings and non-understandings shaped the cross-cultural interaction centered on religion that occurred between American women missionaries and Korean women. Despite American women's efforts to teach Christianity in the Korean language, some missionary women believed Korean women never seemed to fully grasp the ideas they tried to convey. And while the commensurable act of learning the Korean language helped to bridge a cultural divide, it also led to miscommunication and misunderstandings. Missionary lack of understanding of Korean religion and rites, ideas of a superiority of American Christian culture and the ever present notions of ministering 'to' a 'heathen' race, prevented American women's understanding of the highly developed and mature Confucian and Shamanistic culture present in Korea. American women missionaries saw Koreans as "heathen," uncivilized" and in need of their "help."³¹⁹ Missionaries' ideas of American superiority and ignorance of Korean religious culture coupled with their imperfect attempts to speak in Korean framed communication between American and Korean women and inevitably led to different understandings of a presumably shared religious ideology.

In this chapter, I focus on cultural misunderstandings and language communication and miscommunication. I argue that as American women spoke, wrote, read, and taught Christianity in the Korean language, their efforts were not always understood as the missionary women intended. These (mis)understandings grew out of personal interaction between the two groups of women as the Americans used a language they found difficult to master and relied heavily on evangelism methods they did not closely oversee. I also argue that American women's

³¹⁹ Incorporated throughout much of mission literature, especially that produced for mission journals or public consumption, Koreans are referred to corporately as "heathen." Once they become believers, this designation is often dropped. Incumbent with heathen is the idea that Koreans are uncivilized and it is very well established in missionary literature of the "civilizing" and "saving" mission of missionaries. See Chapter one and Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

ignorance of the intricate place of Confucian and Shamanistic ritual and practice in Korean culture also led to misunderstandings by American women missionaries of how Korean women integrated Christianity into their worldview.

These (mis)understandings, however, did not preclude cultural bridge building; they in fact supported it as misunderstanding eventually led to new mutual understandings. My argument builds from that of historian Richard White who in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 – 1825* showed that creative misunderstandings between different cultural groups can eventually lead to mutually understandable practices. Along those lines, I argue that productive discourse, which includes the creation of understandings as well as misunderstandings which lead to new understandings, helps to bridge a cultural divide. In the accounts White discusses, cultural divides were bridged when mutual misunderstandings lead to new creative understandings between parties, creating in essence a new hybrid culture.³²⁰ Both sides in differing cultures believed they shared the same understanding as to a concept, such as religion. They proceeded to interact as if they both understand each other; however, complete understanding did not happen. Misunderstandings persisted. Unaware of these misunderstandings, and assuming instead a shared understanding existed, mutually commensurate interaction occurred. Over time, as misunderstandings endured, a new cross-culture emerges which changed the relative position of all involved.

I argue that a model similar to White's can be applied to the missionary experience in Korea. In Korean Christianity, Korean women did not understand Christianity in the same way American women did, but many American women believed that Korean women understand Christianity in the same way as it they shared it. They often did not "see," that Korean women

³²⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650-1815*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

were developing their own interpretations of Western Christianity due to their lack of cultural awareness and patronizing attitudes. It is in these partial understandings and American women missionaries' assumption of shared understanding that doctrinal conflicts were ameliorated and a "middle ground" emerged. In this "middle ground" Korean women adapted everyday Confucian and Shamanistic ideas and rituals to Christianity helping to produce a syncretic Korean Christianity. This "middle ground" worked as a bridge only in the very early years of the cross-cultural encounter.

Scholars such as David Chung in his book *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea* established the syncretic nature of Christianity. In his work, Chung explored the syncretic nature of Korean Christianity in terms of Korean indigenous religions' compatibility with Christianity. Chung argues that because of this compatibility or inter-relatedness, Christianity was able to take root in Korea.³²¹ Sung Deuk Oak also explored syncretism in his book, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-1915*. According to Oak, early Korean Protestant Christianity "was a particular Korean-created hybrid of indigenous Korean religious cultures, Chinese Protestantism and Anglo-American Protestantism" facilitated by decisions made by male missionaries and the work of many native Korean male evangelizers³²² But syncretism wasn't just gendered male in Korea. Syncretic ideas developed among women as they interacted within the segregated and modified spaces adapted just for female interaction. In looking at the syncretic nature of Korean

³²¹ David Chung, *Syncretism: The Religious Context of Christian Beginnings in Korea*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2002).

³²² Sung Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-1915*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 305.

Christianity, I lay a foundation for arguing that communication between missionaries and Korean women played an instrumental role in creating Korean Christianity.

Understandings

Korean women and missionary women did share understanding as to Christian concepts on some level. Korean women and American women seem to share similar understandings of a number of Christian doctrines including the centrality of Jesus in the religion, the need for a “savior” of sorts, ideas of proper/improper behavior, good and evil so to speak, and the need for forgiveness of sins.

Many American women missionaries referred to Korean women calling Christianity the “Jesus Doctrine.”³²³ In calling Christianity the “Jesus Doctrine,” Korean women exhibited an understanding of the central role of Jesus in the religion. Missionary women reported that when asked about the role of Jesus, Korean women replied often that Jesus was important because Jesus was God’s son.³²⁴ The idea of Jesus as God’s son was a basic tenant of Western Christianity.³²⁵ Nellie Pierce reported that “Almost every week...everyone in the room from dear old Rachel, eighty years of age, down to Lena, who can barely lisp the name of Jesus, has told of His love in her heart.”³²⁶ Korean women understood the religion centered on Jesus. Another idea central to Christianity that Korean women seemed to understand was Jesus as “savior.” Korean

³²³ Many documents talk about the “Jesus Doctrine”. Among others see; Ellen C. Parsons, *Fifteen Years In the Korea Mission*, (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1900), 9. Also: Samtok Chan, “Mrs. Samtok Chan”, in *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea*, ed. Mattie Noble, (Seoul: Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985), 32.

³²⁴ Lilius Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Topknots*, (Boston: American Tract Society, 1904), 189-195.

³²⁵ Many American Protestant denominations adhere to a statement of faith known as the “Apostles Creed.” In the Apostles Creed, Jesus is stated as being the son of God.

³²⁶ Nellie Pierce, “Report IV – Bible Woman’s Training School, Evangelistic Work, Mead Memorial Church and South District,” *Fourth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1902), 8.

Bible woman, Dorcas Kim Kang wrote, “The day of my baptism was the happiest day of my life. Of course I rejoiced most that I was acknowledging the Lord [speaking of Jesus] as my Saviour...”³²⁷ Both Korean and American women seemed to have very similar understandings of Jesus as a “savior.”

Running in conjunction with “savior” was the idea of being saved from or forgiven of sins. Missionary Lulu Frey reported that a Korean woman, after reading the Bible, understood she had sinned and had found peace in the “One who had lifted her burden” by forgiving her sins.³²⁸ Presbyterian missionary Lilius Underwood wrote that a Korean woman when asked whether or not she believed her sins were forgiven answered, “entirely forgiven.”³²⁹ Evidence in the records of missionary women pointed to an understanding of a ‘saving from sin,’ especially when sin was defined in terms they could understand such as “murder.”³³⁰ American women missionaries believed that Korean women possessed good understanding of some core principles of Western Christianity.

Space for Misunderstanding

While American missionaries communicated ideas such as the central role of Jesus in Christianity as “savior” and forgiver of sins, American women missionaries also communicated garbled or muddled concepts of Western Christianity particularly when they tried to translate English concepts into Korean. French philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote on the impossibility of

³²⁷ Dorcas Kim Kang, “Mrs. Dorcas Kim Kang A Recipient of Abounding Grace,” in *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea*, ed. Mattie Noble, (Seoul: Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985), 82.

³²⁸ Lulu Frey, “Evangelistic Work, First Church Seoul,” *Fourth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1902), 11.

³²⁹ Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, 195.

³³⁰ Underwood, *Fifteen Years*, 186.

“translation”. It is impossible, he argued, but we do it anyway.³³¹ And American women missionaries did it anyway.

American women missionaries in the field, who were largely untrained in translation, often wrote lessons in English first then translated them to Korean. Nellie Rankin’s attempts at translations illustrated this practice. Rankin wrote in a letter to her father, “Now I had to get my lessons in English first then I spend 3 hours on each lesson with my teacher putting them into Korean. One difficulty is to find the word that expresses the idea.”³³² Her teacher did not know the principles of Christianity (and most likely he did not know any English, very few instructors in the early years did) and together they struggled to find the “word that expresses the idea,” a difficult task for the best translators. Rankin wrote in the same letter that her Korean language study was progressing and she now could “make myself understood, if not in classic Korean in plain short sentences.”³³³ Nellie Rankin could hardly be considered a skilled translator, but she and other women missionaries in the field translated anyway. Forty years after missionaries first arrived in Korea, a Korean described missionaries’ early grasp of the language as containing “imperfect pronunciations and broken phraseology” and to be “full of foreign intonations.”³³⁴

³³¹ Jacques Derrida wrote “What must be translated of that which is translatable can only be the untranslatable.” In *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 258. Derrida believed everything was untranslatable and *true* translation was impossible under any circumstance, even if the language you were reading was a language you were fluent in. Language is fluid and full of possible difference. In the transference of foreign languages, the difficulties in translation are compounded.

³³² Letter. Nellie Rankin to Father, October 20, 1908 Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS..

³³³ Letter. Nellie Rankin to Father, October 20, 1908, Notebook of transcribed letters found in box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS..

³³⁴ Pyun Young Tai, *My Attitude Toward Ancestor-Worship*, (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1926), 5.

Missionaries attempted to communicate new religious ideas to Koreans using this “broken phraseology.”

Korean and American idioms contributed to problems of communication between American and Korean women. For example, Western Christians often talked of putting God’s words into their hearts to indicate memorizing Bible scriptures. American missionaries first arriving on the field would more than likely have translated Bible memorization as “hiding God’s word in your heart” to produce changes on the “inside.” Korean women also understood this process as an idiom, but a very different idiom. Korean women understood Bible memorization as having “eaten the words” to produce change. Nellie Pierce in her 1901 report explained that she discovered that when Korean women, spoke about Bible scripture memorization they, “testify constantly to the comfort and help the words are to them, because as they say, they “have eaten” them...”³³⁵

In an encounter recorded by missionary doctor Mattie Ingold Tate, a Korean woman became concerned that eating medicine given by the missionary doctor, just like eating the words of missionaries, could possibly change her insides and make her a Christian. Dr. Tate wrote with great perplexity that the woman “was afraid I was going to make her eat some of the medicine. There is a rumor that we give them med. (sic) to change their inside and she thought I was going to dose it out to her!”³³⁶ This points to a miscommunication by the missionaries’ concerning a change on the “inside.” In the Korean idiom that called for “eating” words and in the colloquial language of Korea which terms “taking medicine” as “eating medicine,” the Korean woman

³³⁵ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 15.

³³⁶ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS.

understood that a change on her inside, towards Christianity, would take place due to eating the medicine of the missionary. “Eating,” “insides,” “heart,” and “change” all became confused and muddled in the use of idioms, Korean and American.

Beyond struggling with translation and dealing with Korean idioms, women missionaries’ described frequent troubles in speaking Korean. But in order to evangelize and teach, they had to talk. Missionary women thought much evangelizing took place when they spoke in the Korean language. However, ironically, they also thought that the success they achieved was “notwithstanding the halting speech that hinders the best instruction” or the speech done in a “poor stammering way.”³³⁷ In 1903, when discussing meetings she conducted with women in her home and the questions the women would ask about Christianity, missionary Mary Hillman wrote, “Sometimes, it was difficult to understand their questions and again there was difficulty in making my explanations clear.”³³⁸ She wrote the report to the mission board as she was ending her prescribed language courses. Korean was a difficult language for missionaries to master. Nonetheless, they persevered, struggling to find Korean words that conveyed American Protestant meanings.

American women missionaries’ translated, talked and wrote all in the Korean language about their beliefs in Christianity and translated those beliefs through their own Western lens. Their attempts showed considerable effort to bridge a cultural divide by engaging in the Korean language, but their writings also showed the difficulties they faced and the limits of their

³³⁷ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House, 1901), 15.

³³⁸ Mary Hillman, “Evangelistic Work and Day Schools, Chemulpo and West Korea District”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 35.

knowledge of the language, limits and difficulties that were often overshadowed by their perceptions of overwhelming success. These language limitations, coupled with unfamiliarity with Korean culture, created the space for misunderstandings as Korean women interpreted the messages missionary women tried to convey.

Missionaries' Perceived Partial Understanding of Christianity by Korean Women

Just as Nellie Pierce said in 1903 that her “heart sink” when Korean women did not understand Christianity in the ways she thought they should, in her 1905 report, Pierce wrote, “as yet the real meaning of the “Jesus Doctrine” is very vague to most.”³³⁹ Despite their best attempts to communicate their version of Christianity in the Korean language, a few missionaries, like Pierce, felt Korean women’s understanding of Christianity remained vague.

Pierce’s fellow missionary Lulu Frey also perceived this lack of understanding on the part of Korean women. Although she held weekly prayer meetings with Korean women and felt that many were “living and growing daily in Christ Jesus,” she also noted “Many of the latter [members] are yet very ignorant concerning that which they profess to believe and need much teaching.”³⁴⁰ Missionaries, such as Frey, who did cite problems, often glossed over them believing that just “getting the Word into their [Korean women’s] hearts” was more important, even though “the other for the greater part has been left undone.”³⁴¹ “The other” in this passage meant understanding Christian principles as missionaries’ understood them. Frey and Pierce

³³⁹ Nellie Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School, Evangelistic Work Mead Memorial Church and South Korea District,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 20.

³⁴⁰ Frey, “Evangelistic Work, First Church, Seoul,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 4.

³⁴¹ Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School, Evangelistic Work Mead Memorial Church and South Korea District,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 22.

chose to ignore possible problems with understanding if they thought Korean women were “getting the word” through texts and teachings they translated from English to Korean.

Presbyterian missionaries at the northwest Korea Syen Chun station likewise alluded to the problem of understanding in their 1902 report stating that Korean women often told them, “As for believing I believe...but I am so ignorant. I know so little about my Bible I know not how to read its thoughts with my dark mind.”³⁴² While probably not a true direct quote, it would be understandable that a translated Western religious book would be difficult for Korean women to understand.

Similarly in reporting a lack of Christian understanding among Korean women, early missionary Mary Scranton stated in 1896 after she returned from itinerating, “I found that one village...[had] been ‘sown with tares.’”³⁴³ In biblical parlance, “tares” denoted some kind of misunderstanding of “proper” Christianity. Here Mary Scranton reported her perceived lack of understanding of Christianity on the part of Korean women and, in her perceptions of those differences, declared the misunderstanding to be “tares,” without any investigation into Korean cultural practices that might explain differences. This points to not only language as a source of missionaries’ perceptions of partial understanding on the part of Korean women, but also to American women’s lack of interest in exploring reasons for misunderstandings. Instead they often bemoaned Korean ignorance and called for more teaching.

While Scranton and other women missionaries worked diligently to communicate principles of Christianity, their less than fluent language skills and ignorance of Korean women’s

³⁴² “Needs of Woman’s Work,” *General Report Syen Chun Station, 1901-1902*, (Seoul: Press of Methodist Publishing House, 1902), 19.

³⁴³ Mrs. M. F. Scranton, *Report of the Evangelistic Work Among the Women of Korea, 1895-1896*, United Methodist Center, Madison, New Jersey.

cultural paradigm, left the American women to judge the Korean women's understanding of religious principles to be wrong or vague. Korean women attempted to read and understand a book, the Bible, without the Judeo-Christian cultural background missionary women possessed. And missionary women, with little cultural awareness and understanding of Korean women's Confucian-Shamanistic background and with beliefs about their own cultural superiority, did little to help Korean women make sense of Christianity from a Korean perspective.

“Seed-Sowing” Evangelism and the Nevius System

Compounding the misunderstandings fostered by translation difficulties and ignorance of Korean culture was the evangelistic approach used by the American women missionaries, a method known as “seed-sowing.” “Seed-sowing” centered on teaching basic ideas about Christianity, which became the “seed,” that would grow and eventually produce a “harvest,” or a mature Christian.³⁴⁴ Mary Scranton's reference to “tares” and “sowing” was not a random use of metaphors. Missionaries often wrote about “sowing seeds.” Missionary writings showed that they possessed great faith in the efficacy of this evangelistic technique.

Central to the “seed-sowing” technique was the idea that the amount of time spent in teaching need not be long. Itinerating missionaries often talked of staying for very short visits in villages, telling the “story” and then leaving with “many regrets” because they could not stay longer. However, as they left they prayed that the “Lord may bless the seed sown” and believed that God's blessing would “bring forth fruit to the glory of His name.”³⁴⁵ Nellie Pierce reported that she had visited fifty-two villages in the span of a year trying to “sow the seed as I have gone

³⁴⁴ Matthew 13.

³⁴⁵ See: Martha B. Ingold Tate Journal, March 23, 1898 and October 23, 1898, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS. Also, Mary Knowles, “Wayside Sowing”, *The Korea Mission Field* 1, (1905), 26.

back and forth.”³⁴⁶ This number of visits pointed to spending less than a week in most villages, especially since Pierce divided her time between itinerating work and evangelistic work in Seoul. For American women missionaries, the amount of time spent in itinerant teaching was less important than a belief that “sowing the seed” would bring forth fruit.

American women missionaries also sent out Korean women, known as Bible women, to “sow seeds,” despite the fact that some American women missionaries thought Bible women had only a rudimentary understanding of Christianity. This reliance on Bible women for seed sowing can be seen in Nellie Pierce’s 1901 report. In the report she stated that two Bible women “went from house to house and from village to village, explaining as they read, and from the seed thus sown much is garnered.”³⁴⁷ Though Pierce did not go on these seed-sowing trips, she believed the “seeds” sown by the Bible women were fruitful. In the same paragraph, however, she also wrote of the amount of Bible study the two Korean seed-sowing Bible women received. Pierce explained that since they did not often reside in the city, (Seoul), that “their Bible study [was] rather desultory and they lose much that the others get, but it is better that they get this than none at all.”³⁴⁸ American women missionaries believed some instruction was better than none. They also believed instruction by Bible women, even if the Bible women’s knowledge was not “complete” in the eyes of the missionaries, was better than none. The practice of using Korean

³⁴⁶ Pierce, “Bible Women’s Training School,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 1.

³⁴⁷ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 14.

³⁴⁸ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House).

Bible women as evangelizers enabled a Korean understanding of Christianity to be sown among Korean women by Korean women.

Beyond seed-sowing American missionaries used another evangelical method, the Nevius System, and this mechanism, too, opened the door for the perpetuation of Korean ideas of Christianity. John L. Nevius developed the plan for missionary church planting out of his experience as a pioneer Presbyterian missionary to China. The Nevius System called for active participation by native converts in the work of Christianity and native language acquisition for missionaries. In his work, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, Nevius argued that native churches, from their very inception, should be self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing.³⁴⁹ The four main American Protestant missions in Korea wholeheartedly adopted this plan for planting churches, and in the process, gave up much control over new converts.

American missionaries described the use of the Nevius System on the ground, in small villages across Korea. In an article in *The Korea Mission Field* entitled “How the Gospel is Propagated in Korea,” the author stated:

There are Christian churches scattered throughout Korea, north and south, east and west; and where there are not churches there are Christian societies which meet and worship in a private house, usually that of the class leader. These societies are ministered unto by native helpers largely...³⁵⁰

Korean Christians worked as leaders in the Korean church in places all over Korea that missionaries were unable to reach. One female missionary wrote that there were sixty-one regular meeting places in her jurisdiction and out of those sixty-one, she only visited fifteen

³⁴⁹ John Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, (New York: Foreign Mission Library, 1899).

³⁵⁰ Rev. C.S. Demin, “How the Gospel is Propagated in Korea”, *The Korea Mission Field I*(1905): 19.

during the year.³⁵¹ Native helpers oversaw the majority meetings. Because of the rules of seclusion for women, Korean female leaders taught women and male leaders taught men. At least one photograph of mission work in Korea shows a church comprised solely of women.³⁵²

The use of the Nevius System greatly influenced how often Korean women actually heard teachings of Christianity from American missionaries, thus how well Korean women understood principles of Western Christianity as the missionaries saw them. Korean Bible women made the most contact with Korean women in the country and made only sporadic contact with the missionaries who oversaw their work. For example, Methodist missionary Margaret Jones plainly stated in her 1901 report that “The country work was left to the care of the Bible women as I was unable to make but one country trip into the interior.” However, Jones also wrote in the same paragraph of the despair she felt due to the lack of understanding of the “country people” under the care of the Bible women.³⁵³ Missionaries at the Syen Chyun station also believed that new converts lacked spiritual understanding. In their 1903 report on evangelism, the missionaries stated:

Spiritually the church has hardly kept pace with the numerical growth. This is no doubt due to the limited attention the missionaries have been able to give it. On the other hand, there has been a very gratifying increase in efficiency among the officers and other leaders of the church [native Korean leaders]...these are capable workers either in their villages or in different parts of the city and with their help an effective oversight of the congregation is maintained.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ “Women’s Classes Outside of SyenChyun,” *General Report Syen Chun Station, 1902-1903*, (Seoul: Press of Methodist Publishing House, 1902), 19.

³⁵² Photo. “Church the Women Built”, box 2, William Butler Harrison Papers 1895-1931, RG 1140, PHS.

³⁵³ Margaret B. Jones, “Report VIII – woman’s Work on the Chemulpo Circuit”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 19.

³⁵⁴ “Evangelistic”, *General Report Syen Chun Station, 1902-1903*, (Seoul: Press of Methodist Publishing House, 1902), 19.

This account directly described the dichotomy some Americans saw between the perceived effectiveness of Korean leaders and the perceived lack of “spirituality” or spiritual understanding present in Korean believers. Native helpers played a primary role in the Nevius System and American missionaries wrote of that role and of the benefit Korean leaders brought to their missionary efforts. Missionaries also, however, wrote of a lack of understanding they perceived among the Korean converts under the care and supervision of Korean leaders.

Korean women did not understand Christianity in the same ways that missionaries did in the early days of mission work in the country. This different interpretation arose through American women missionaries’ efforts to teach principles of Christianity in a language they found difficult to use, through a cultural lens they considered superior and within a missionary culture that relied on the evangelistic method of “seed-sowing” and on the use of native help.

Korean Women Converts as Evangelizers

Beyond language difficulties and the Nevius System, however, another dynamic was at work among early Korean women converts that led to further propagation of a Korean understanding of Christianity. That dynamic was the great zeal with which Korean women converts evangelized other Korean women. During the Joseon era, Korean women seldom encountered opportunities to speak out in “public” spaces. Causing a problem by talking was grounds for divorce, often causing Korean women to be very circumspect about speaking out in certain circumstances.³⁵⁵ Meetings in the homes of missionaries became “public” spaces Korean women felt they could speak in. Missionary Nellie Pierce explained the habit of Korean women

³⁵⁵ Bokyoung Park, “The Contribution of Korean Christian Women to the Church and its Mission: Implications for an Evangelical Missology,” (dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 23-32.

referring to themselves as “mutes,” a perception most likely due to the Confucian expectation that women not speak in public. Pierce went on, however, to describe a woman who referred to herself as “mute” but talked at length of her faith. Pierce reported that she was glad the woman “had at last found her voice.”³⁵⁶ Many Korean women converts “found their voice” in the process of evangelizing. One such woman was Martha, a patient of Dr. Mary Cutler.³⁵⁷ In a 1902, H.B. Skidmore, the doctor’s “official correspondent,” described Martha’s eagerness to evangelize. “Martha,” Skidmore wrote, “...teaches with a zeal seldom equaled.”³⁵⁸ Korean women evangelized other Korean women in large numbers.

Missionaries also indicated that Korean women actively took up evangelism. While Korean women’s opinions were mediated through the lens of American report writers, the language American women used showed that Korean women proved to be the “deciders” in whether they wanted to evangelize or not. In the 1903 Syen Chun report missionaries related what seemed to be the thought process that propelled Korean women to evangelize. According to the report, a Korean women stated, “Old women have been saying they did not know enough; as for the young women, it would not be in good taste for them to speak; and who would listen to a little girl?” Despite this opinion on their restrictions, according to the mission report, the women went on to state “Almost two hundred of us are here tonight; if we each decide to bring one

³⁵⁶ Nellie Pierce, “Report VII – Bible Woman’s School and Evangelistic Work, Tal Sung, Seoul”, *Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House), 18.

³⁵⁷ Missionaries sometimes gave Korean women names, as they often did not have them. See explanation in chapter one.

³⁵⁸ H.B. Skidmore, official correspondent, “Korea”, *Thirty Third Annual Report of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1901-1902*,

woman to Christ during the coming year, there will be four hundred of us next year.”³⁵⁹ In this instance, the women came up with a plan to evangelize despite the cultural restrictions and expectations of the society they lived in and despite their belief in their limited knowledge.

Methodist missionary Mary Follwell also encountered Korean women eager to teach and tell others about the Christian religion. Follwell reported that after just three-weeks in a Bible training class for women in Pyeong Yang, the women in attendance “begged to be allowed to go out to do a little teaching.” Follwell supported them in their desire and the women apparently left to speak in surrounding villages. From the record, it was hard to tell how long they travelled, but when they came back, Follwell made the following observation. “When the women returned,” she wrote, “they asked me to continue the Training Class as they realized more than before their need of study.”³⁶⁰ The women in the class showed a great enthusiasm for teaching and for transmitting Christian religious ideas. But in the process of transmitting those ideas, they returned and expressed their desire to learn more.

Examinations

As missionaries sent Korean women out as evangelizers and Bible women and established them as women’s teachers in churches, they tried to assure some uniform understanding of Western Christianity by giving examinations. I argue, however, that these examinations did not produce a widespread and uniform Western understanding of Western Christianity. Missionary motivations for the exams were to assure “better oversight and more instruction” and to make sure a candidate for church admission was “satisfactory both as to

³⁵⁹ “Eui Ju Kol”, *General Report Syen Chun Station, 1901-1902*, (Seoul: Press of Methodist Publishing House, 1902), 23.

³⁶⁰ Mary Harris Follwell, “Report of Evangelistic Work in Pyeng Yang”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898).

character and knowledge.”³⁶¹ Examinations on Christian knowledge were given to all Koreans who wanted to join a particular denomination. Basic questions were asked such as “Since you became a catechumen, have you found joy in believing? Why?” or “Can anything sinful enter heaven?” or “Is it right for a man to have two wives?”³⁶² The very existence of the exams pointed to missionary concerns over understanding and while missionaries intended exams to ensure uniform belief, they did not.

First, Korean women did not have to take any exam to simply “believe” and then tell their neighbor about their newfound understandings. Korean women became believers before they became church members and for many before they had any contact with a missionary. After they became “believers” they in turn told their friends and neighbors about their new religion. Belief came before exam.

Secondly, evidence in articles and reports suggests that these exam protocols were not strictly followed. One Korean woman when asked where Jesus dwelt answered, “With me at my house,” which seemed to be a satisfactory answer to the question, although the answer was not precise according to the Christian missionaries’ script.³⁶³ Mary Scranton fully believed that a woman had become a believer when the woman answered her question on whether the “Holy Spirit had come down into her heart” by saying she was ignorant and “The only words I know how to say about it are – *My heart is all full*” (emphasis Mary Scranton). This again seemed to be

³⁶¹ Anabel Nisbit, *Day In and Day Out in Korea*, (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1920), 69-70. And “Country Work: Dr. Underwood”, “*General Report of Seoul Station, 1898*,” *General Reports of Stations of Korea Presbyterian Mission for the Year 1898-1899*, (Seoul: Annual Meeting of the Presbyterian Mission, 1899) 19.

³⁶² For a list of questions see: Annabel Nisbet, *Day In and Day Out in Korea*, 69-70.

³⁶³ “Country Work: Dr. Underwood”, “*General Report of Seoul Station, 1898*,” *General Reports of Stations of Korea Presbyterian Mission for the Year 1898-1899*, (Seoul: Annual Meeting of the Presbyterian Mission, 1899) 19.

a satisfactory answer but it also happens to be an English idiom often used by missionaries in their writing. The Korean could have picked up this answer by listening to missionary speech. Whether she did or not, it again was an ambiguous answer.

Thirdly, Bible women were often put in charge of teaching Korean women preparing for examination. According to missionary Lulu Frey, “The Bible women have been faithful in their work...bringing in new converts and preparing them for examination before baptism.”³⁶⁴ In light of the communication problems and misunderstandings, this situation may have engendered a “teach to test” mentality as Bible women knew what the missionaries wanted to hear and taught Korean women to say it. Use of an examination system to determine fitness for baptism added another space for the development and perpetuation of a Korean understanding of Christianity.

In the propagation of Christianity in Korea, Korean Bible women and Korean women believers did much evangelism. Missionaries wrote of the great enthusiasm Korean women had for evangelizing and within the spaces of their everyday lives, Korean Christian women shared with Korean women their ideas of the “Jesus Doctrine.” American missionary women also described the role of Korean Bible women as they purposefully itinerated in villages all over Korea, taking with them their own version of Christianity. Missionaries believed in sowing seeds. Missionary women sowed their “seeds” and Korean women sowed theirs.

(Mis)understandings and Syncretism

Scholars of Korean Christianity have established the syncretic nature of the faith – that it contains elements of indigenous Korean religion and culture. In essence it is not Western Christianity but it is instead a uniquely Korean Christianity that contains ideas commensurate with Confucianism and Shamanism. Within the spaces for miscommunication and

³⁶⁴ Lulu Frey, “Evangelistic Work, First Church, Seoul”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 13.

mistranslation, as well as in American missionaries lack of understanding of the role of ritual and Shamanism in Korea, Koreans interacting with missionaries developed a uniquely Korean understanding of Christianity. These “Koreanized” principles of Christianity included aspects such as the enduring belief in respecting Confucian hierarchies and the melding of Shamanistic ideas of evil spirits and the supernatural into Christianity. And when looking at the writings of American women missionaries, early indications of the development of these elements into a syncretized Korean Christianity can be found.

In looking at syncretism between Shamanism and Christianity, correlations between the work of Korean Bible women and a Shaman *mudang*, or priestess, show a fusion of the religions. According to Lee-Ellen Strawn, Korean Bible women in many cases took the place of the Korean shaman by performing similar spiritual responsibilities such as exorcisms and prayers for healing.³⁶⁵ Due to their shamanistic beliefs, many Korean women believed evil spirits inhabited everything from their homes, to their bodies, to their diseases. Mattie Ingold Tate encountered a woman who would only whisper her symptoms to the missionary as she did not want the disease to hear her. Tate encountered many other instances when women declared the cause of their illness lay in an evil spirit and only the leaving of or appeasing of the spirit, in other words an exorcism, would alleviate the sickness.³⁶⁶ As praying for the sick and afflicted was common practice for Korean Bible women and American women missionaries, these Christian women took on analogous roles with the Shaman *mudang* and their prayers, and casting out of evil spirits, took on a similar role as Shaman exorcisms.

³⁶⁵ Lee-Ellen Strawn, “Korean Bible Women’s Success: Using the Anbang Network and the Religious Authority of the Mudang” *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol. 6 no. 1 (December, 2012).

³⁶⁶ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892-1929, RG 1010, PHS. Tate’s medical journal contains several entries referring to evil spirits.

In writing about the experiences of one of the Bible women she oversaw and had taught principles of Western Christianity, Missionary Ella Lewis described a syncretism of Shamanism and Christianity. In the report, Lewis described a Korean Bible woman's efforts to pray for two people she encountered while itinerating in the countryside. According to Lewis, the two Koreans "had been possessed with evil spirits," but after the prayers of the Bible woman, "the spirits had departed, leaving them quiet, peaceable Christians."³⁶⁷ This exorcism blurred lines between Christianity and Shamanism. Despite the missionaries' efforts to distinguish difference between Christianity and Shamanism, Bible women performed very Shamanistic-like activities as they evangelized to a Korean women's audience.

In her medical journal for October 20, 1903, Mattie Ingold Tate described another example of Shamanism-Christianity syncretism when a Korean man showed up at her office asking her to bring his dead son back to life. Although the entry described her encounter with a Korean man and not woman, the entry gives good insight into syncretic ideas that could be occurring throughout the Korean population.

On returning from visiting a patient, was met by a man who said that a few hours ago a house had fallen down on his 11 yr. old boy & killed him & he wanted some medicine to restore him to life. I told him that such a thing was beyond human skill. He said he had heard that if a dog or any animal died, we could bring it to life again. I told him that this was not true...³⁶⁸

The father in this story picked up on an idea that Christians could perform a "miracle" and bring people back to life – in essence they could "raise the dead." The Bible story of Jesus rising from the dead three days after his crucifixion, as well as other miracles outlined in the Bible, more

³⁶⁷ Ella A. Lewis, "Report of Evangelistic Work in Chong Dong", *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 20.

³⁶⁸ Medical Journal of Mattie Ingold Tate, October 30, 1903 Martha B. Ingold Tate Papers 1892- 1929, RG 1010, PHS.

than likely influenced this man's ideas concerning missionaries and their abilities bringing him to the belief that missionaries could raise animals/dogs/sons from the dead as well. This Korean man possessed a partial understanding of a Christian tenet.

Tate's experience, as well as the experiences of the Bible woman in Lewis's story, suggests that a Christianity influenced by beliefs in the supernatural, such as miracles and evil spirits, began to develop in Korea.³⁶⁹ Sung Deuk Oak wrote in *The Making of Korean Christianity* that "Korean converts often transferred ideas from old belief systems onto Christianity, including the idea that Christianity simply had more powerful magic, with its own talismans and spirits."³⁷⁰ The passage in Tate's journal hinted at (mis)understandings of Western Christianity, based on a literal meaning of Christian allegories and of the merging of Christianity with beliefs in the supernatural, a mainstay of Shamanism in Korea.

Another example of the fusion of Shamanism, Confucianism and Christianity can be seen in the actions of a Korean Christian family. In Nellie Pierce's 1903 annual report she explained the "problems" encountered by two Bible women when they visited a village on New Year's Day and found a Christian family bringing the New Year's ancestral sacrifice to the Red Cross flagpole.

The people of the village were eating, drinking and making merry, worshipping their idols and fetiches (sic) as on previous years. The members of our one Christian family were in a quandary; they had been forbidden to worship idols and had been told these sticks and stones were nothing. What should they do? They did what to them was the next best thing...taking their offerings they placed them at the foot of the flag pole and there prayed to the God "whom they ignorantly worshiped."³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 183.

³⁷⁰ Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 149.

³⁷¹ Nellie Pierce, "Bible Woman's Training School", *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 20.

The American Red Cross flag was often raised at Red Cross stations in villages around the countryside of Korea. Idols and fetishes were often used in Shamanism and presenting offerings to ancestors on New Year's Day was part of a highly developed and mature culture of performativity surrounding ritual in Confucian Korea.³⁷² In conflating Shamanism, Confucianism and Christianity this Christian family did their best to worship within the parameters of their new religion on a very important holiday in Korea. They in essence practiced a syncretic Christianity.

Nellie Pierce saw these actions by a Christian Korean family, as unenlightened. In her report she declared, "This is the most pathetic report I have ever heard." This declaration illustrated the missionary's perceptions of the Koreans as a less than enlightened or a less than modern people for taking offerings to a flag pole and "ignorantly worshipping." Confucian and Shamanistic ritual was important to Koreans, something American missionaries did not understand. In seeing the actions as "ignorant" instead of an intricate part of culture in Korea, the missionaries did little to address situations such as these except to lament that more teaching needed to be done or perhaps to not put up flagpoles.³⁷³

In her 1903 report, Nellie Pierce also hinted at the development of a Confucian hierarchy among the Christian women in her local church. Writing on the problems she encountered in 1903, Pierce noted a quarrel developed among the Korean Christian women in which "one of our Bible women seemed unable to live at peace with our Day school teacher" despite repeated exhortations by the missionary for the women to settle their problems. Pierce went on to observe

³⁷² See chapter one on Zhu Xi and ritual performativity, p. 3-4.

³⁷³ Nellie Pierce, "Bible Woman's Training School," *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman's Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 20.

that “In this [situation] a peculiarly strong characteristic of the Korean people has been noticeable – their devotion and attachment to a teacher.”³⁷⁴ What Pierce described in the report as an unusual loyalty was in fact a Confucian relationship, the relationship between teacher and student. Although hierarchical relationships are central to Confucianism, Pierce seemed to have no awareness that this loyalty to a teacher was part of a highly developed Confucian culture and instead described it as a intrinsic characteristic of Korean people. In Confucianism, teachers expected students to show filial piety, or great respect. From a Confucian viewpoint, “a teacher is not merely an instructor, but someone far greater.”³⁷⁵ Students exhibited fierce loyalty to their teachers. The behavior of the Korean women towards their teacher seemed completely foreign, unknown and strange to the American missionary. In essence the Korean women’s belief in this Confucian principle remained shrouded to the culturally unaware missionary even though it existed in the community of women directly under the missionary’s supervision. Despite working side by side, each group of women held culturally-determined beliefs pertaining to relationships within Christianity and these differences seemed unbeknownst to each other. While at times frustrating to American missionary women, this nebulous area of unknown (mis)communications or (mis)understandings served as a type of “middle ground” between American women missionaries and Korean women, which helped facilitate cross-cultural interaction and the growth of new ideas.

Development of a Middle Ground

Many missionary reports, letters and journals penned by American women missionaries to Korea talk about the perceived success they attained in reaching Korean women with the

³⁷⁴ Nellie Pierce, “Bible Woman’s Training School”, *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 16.

³⁷⁵ “Chinese Student Teacher & Relationship”, <http://www.chikung-unlimited.com/Teacher.html>.

“gospel.” Methodist missionaries Rossetta Sherwood, Nellie Pierce, Lulu Frey, Mary Folewell and Mattie Wilcox Noble all at some point wrote on it and in an 1899 yearly report Methodist missionary and doctor Rosetta Sherwood summed up their avowed accomplishments. Sherwood began by reflecting on the many similarities and repetitions between reports. She espoused that she does not believe this “to be a real error.” “We might object,” she wrote, “to a constant repetition of failure, but thank God we have had little of this, and we can ever be thankful for the repetition of success.”³⁷⁶ American women missionaries’ writings showed they deemed their efforts to communicate the Christian religion to Korean women “a success.” They believed they communicated well with Korean women in effective ways and that the Christian religion grew “wonderfully” in Korea.³⁷⁷

According to other missionary publications, it seemed that Korean women also believed they were “doing” the Christian religion well. American missionaries did write of Korean women’s perceived need for Bible study, but they wrote most often of Korean women’s confidence in understanding the religion well enough to encourage their friends and neighbors to believe. In essence, Korean women felt they knew the religion well enough to evangelize. One Korean woman, who spent many days visiting in the *anbangs* of other Korean women, stated in a memoir published by an American missionary, that “Many a debate did I have with

³⁷⁶ Rosetta Sherwood Hall M.D., “Kwang Hya Nyo Won or ‘Woman’s Dispensary of Extended Grace’ Pyeng Yand Circuit”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 14.

³⁷⁷ Mattie Wilcox Noble, “Evangelistic Work, Pyeng Yang”, *Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of the Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea* (Seoul Korea: Methodist Episcopal Church in Korea, 1898), 47.

the people in their homes as I preached to them.”³⁷⁸ Missionaries also wrote in praise of the good job Korean Bible women did in telling the “story.”³⁷⁹

In Korea, most American women believed that Korean women understood what they taught and Korean women believed they also understood. To return to the ideas of historian Richard White, in a true “middle ground,” both sides in differing cultures believed they were communicating well – that the same understanding as to a concept, such as religion, existed between the two cultures.³⁸⁰ They proceeded to interact as if they both understood each other. However, misunderstandings on some aspects of the concept occurred. It was within these “misunderstandings” that new understandings emerged. In the case of Christianity in Korea, new understandings included syncretic Christianity. In this Korean Christianity, supernatural manifestations and the enduring belief in respecting Confucian hierarchies could be seen.

American women and Korean women brought their own understandings to Christianity. American women often assumed Korean women understood principles of Western Christianity in the same ways that they did despite hints to the contrary and Korean women had confidence in their understanding of Christian principles as outlined by the women missionaries. In reality, however, they shared some understandings with each other, but also differences in understanding between the two groups existed. Because differences in understandings were either not known or often ignored by the American women missionaries and because American missionaries made decisions to assume their teaching was effective, places appeared in which Korean women could

³⁷⁸ Sadie Kim, “The Story of My Life”, in *Victorious Lives of Early Christians in Korea*, ed. Mattie Noble, (Seoul: Kyujang Publishing Company, 1985), 105.

³⁷⁹ For an example of this see: Mary R. Hillman, “Evangelistic Work and Day Schools, Cheulpo and West Korea District,” *Fifth Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (Soul: Methodist Publish House, 1903), 31.

³⁸⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650-1815*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

develop possible new interpretations, such as exorcisms of evil spirits under the auspices of Christianity. In this milieu, mutual misunderstandings arose as a “middle ground,” a bridge that spanned a cultural divide. Over time, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam purports, “approximation, improvisation, and eventually a shift in the relative positions of all concerned” began to take place.³⁸¹ According to Seung Deuk Oak, missionaries’ relative position on the existence of evil spirits and the use of exorcism as a practice of the church changed from a cessationist viewpoint (that miracles and casting out of devils ceased after the apostles) in the early years to a believer in evil spirits and exorcism in later years. For Koreans, their beliefs began to incorporate ideas of Jesus, forgiveness of sins and the use of Christianity in exorcising demons.³⁸² In Korea, “new understandings” of Christianity began to develop – new understandings that became a “Koreanized” Christianity.

Conclusion

During the early years of American mission work in Korea, Christianity gained a foothold in the country. The Christianity that evolved there, however, was not a “transplantation” of Western Christianity. It was syncretic. It was “Koreanized.” From the earliest days of mission work, elements pointing to the development of the syncretic nature of Korean Christianity can be traced through (mis)understandings of the religion presented by the American missionaries. The work of American women missionaries is of particular importance as the largest number of converts in the early years were women. Translation activities, “halting speech,” and “difficulty in making their explanations understood,” on the part of American women missionaries all played in to creative understandings and new interpretations of Christianity on the part of Korean

³⁸¹ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 29.

³⁸² Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity*, 141-187.

women. Korean women then took their understandings and propagated them throughout the countryside from home to home in their zeal to evangelize, as Bible women who mimicked a Shaman *mudang* and as revered *songsangnim*, or teachers. These conditions helped create a syncretic Christianity in Korea.

When looking at the rise of Christianity in Korea, looking at the development of syncretism and the ways in which these differences of understanding did not lead to major disagreements between women missionaries and native Korean women becomes significant. Missionaries and native Koreans navigated the very real differences that arose in their understandings of Christianity through language, many interactions and as mediated by Bible women. I argue that the differences in understandings, which could have thwarted the rise of Christianity in Korea, were mitigated as the women created a “middle ground” of understandings, misunderstandings and new understandings in the very early years of the mission in Korea.

Conclusion

In 2015, I sat in the pew of a Korean church in America. The pastor spoke Korean. Korean script predominated in the bulletin and singers sang in Korean. The church was full of people, ex-pats who traveled to America for a few years to attend a local university. I often went to the church, and though like the women missionaries in this study I struggled with the language, sometimes the sermons points landed within my optimum nexus of vocabulary and sentence structure.

On this particular Sunday, as I listened intently to try to comprehend the Korean, I began to understand the pastor's main point. His sermon was on respecting others and he framed that respect within traditional Confucian hierarchies. Using words that particularly signify these relationships – older and younger colleagues, teachers and students and older and younger siblings – the pastor taught his Christian audience the importance of Confucian relationship hierarchies. In my many years as an American pastor's daughter, I had never heard respect explained in the same way. The Korean Minister's sermon would not fit into most American Christians' cultural understanding.

Korean Christianity today reflects a Western Christian tradition melded with traditional Korean ideas from Confucianism and Shamanism. Roots of the development of this fusion can be found in the everyday, on the ground, exchanges between Korean women and the first generation of female missionaries to Korea. According to scholars, similarities in theological terms, iconic images and the existence of evil spirits in both Christianity and Shamanism led to

this syncretism.³⁸³ In this study, I look at ways the initial cross-cultural, everyday encounters between American and Korean women helped and enabled the development of this syncretism. Their very earliest encounters, facilitated by acts of commensurability and centered in the Korean language, led to a space of commonality, but also of difference. This “middle ground” smoothed over disparities, allowed the development of a distinct Korean Christianity to begin and eventually brought a change of position, or belief, to both Americans and Koreans. Koreans began to believe in one God instead of many and Americans began to believe again in the power of evil spirits.

Through actions of commensurability, American women built cultural bridges with Korean women. By purposefully participating in commensurable activities, in traveling in palanquins, in eating *kimchi*, and communicating in the Korean language, American women connected with Korean women through shared experiences. In using a highly phonetic alphabet to teach reading to a population of Korean women eager to learn, they connected with Korean women in a shared search for Korean language literacy. The confluence of commensurability, a unique alphabet and a search for literacy created a bridge for evangelization and the conversions of Korean women to Christianity.

Likewise, by modifying or building gendered spaces for Korean women in their homes, American women provided a place for mutual interaction between American and Korean women, thus creating another bridge. Confucianism prescribed spaces women could occupy and American missionaries quickly modified or built space to accommodate it then opened that space, often morning, noon or night, for interaction with Korean women.

³⁸³ Oak, Sung Deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions 1876-1915*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013). Oak’s book explores the development of syncretism in Korean Christianity.

American missionary women also created a bridge through the development of a “middle ground.” In intentional and unintentional ways centered on (mis)understandings of the Korean language and non-understanding of deeply-held Korean religious beliefs and rituals, American women missionaries created a space for Korean women to develop their own understandings of Christianity. Both Korean and American women felt they understood Christianity in very similar ways and proceeded to interact based on that assumption. These assumptions opened the door for the fertile development of a middle ground of understandings and new interpretations that led to a more Koreanized Christianity.

This study opens a discussion on the ways commensurability, spatial decisions and a “middle ground” facilitated a cross-cultural encounter and effected the evangelization of Korean women. It begins a look into aspects of this encounter, but suggests other areas for research. In going forward, a study into the power dynamics between Korean and American women would be warranted. Also a study looking at the interactions of male missionaries and how they differed from women missionaries would be enlightening.

Cross-cultural encounters involve people. Similarities and dissimilarities between cultures are explored, termed and evaluated, but these evaluations are often done after initial encounters happen. In the very early years of cross-cultural confrontations, it is people steeped in their own cultural ideas, who navigate these differences. It is also people who decide they want to navigate difference and it is people who make, or don't make, accommodations to bridge cultural divides. In order to evangelize, American women missionaries to Korea made purposeful decisions to build cultural bridges to connect with Korean women. Because they made these purposeful decisions, Christianity became an option for Korean women to choose.

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