

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN: UNIFICATION CHURCH AND JESUS MORNING STAR (JMS)

CRISTINA BAHÓN ARNAIZ

cristina.bahon@uam.es

Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies and a Research Member at CEAO (Center of East Asian Studies) at the Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain). She has a PhD in Korean Studies, Master degree in Korean Literature and a double Bachelor degree in Japanese Studies and Korean-English Translation. Her research interests include Korean society and culture, Korean literature, and Korean linguistics.

Abstract

Christianity has a relatively short history in Korea, yet it has grown rapidly, consolidating the biggest percentage of Christians among East Asia. Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches are some of the mainline Protestant denominations in the country. Furthermore, alternative Christian groups, also referred to as new religious movements (NRMs), started to appear in the country after 1907 Pyeongyang's Great Revival Movement and expanded during the Korean War (1950-1953). Some of the most dynamic groups at the moment are Guwonpa, the World Mission Society of God, Shincheonji Church of Jesus the Temple of the Tabernacle, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification and Christian Gospel Mission. This paper will focus on the origin of these two last groups' core doctrine, widely known as Unification Church and Jesus Morning Star (JMS) or Providence. Similar to other Korean NRMs, both founders emphasize their doctrine as new and unique, yet this paper will bring light to show how their narratives are interrelated and emanate from the same grassroots, namely Kim Sung-do, Baek Nam-ju and Kim Baek-moon¹.

Keywords

Unification Church, new religious movements, JMS, South Korea, messianism, NRM.

Resumo

O cristianismo tem uma história relativamente curta na Coreia, mas no entanto tem crescido rapidamente, consolidando a maior percentagem de cristãos na Ásia Oriental. As igrejas presbiterianas, metodistas e batistas são algumas das principais denominações protestantes do país. Além disso, grupos cristãos alternativos, também referidos como novos movimentos religiosos (NMRs), começaram a aparecer no país após o Movimento do Grande Reavivamento de Pyeongyang, em 1907, e expandiram-se durante a Guerra da Coreia (1950-1953). Alguns dos grupos mais dinâmicos do momento são Guwonpa, a Sociedade Missionária Mundial de Deus, a Igreja Shincheonji de Jesus, o Templo do Tabernáculo, a Federação das Famílias para a Paz e Unificação Mundial e a Missão Evangélica Cristã. Este artigo concentrar-se-á na origem da doutrina central desses dois últimos grupos, amplamente conhecidos como Igreja da

¹ Romanization of Korean follows the Revised Romanization of Korean system, including for place names. Individual's own personal names do not follow a standardized romanization in most of the cases. Therefore, *hangeul* was included when necessary to avoid confusion.



Unificação e Jesus Morning Star (JMS) ou Providência. Semelhante a outros NMRs coreanos, ambos os fundadores enfatizam a sua doutrina como nova e única, mas este artigo chamará atenção a como as suas narrativas estão inter-relacionadas e emanam das mesmas bases, nomeadamente Kim Sung-do, Baek Nam-ju e Kim Baek-moon².

Palavras-chave

Igreja da Unificação, novos movimentos religiosos, JMS, Coreia do Sul, messianismo, NMR.

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² A romanização do coreano segue o Sistema da Romanização Revista do Coreano, inclusive para nomes de lugares. Os nomes próprios dos indivíduos não seguem uma romanização padronizada na maioria dos casos. Portanto, o *hangeul* foi incluído quando necessário para evitar confusão.



NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN: UNIFICATION CHURCH AND JESUS MORNING STAR (JMS)³

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Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that the United States of America has the largest number of new religious movements (NRMs), some of them with wide international coverage, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism and the Church of Scientology. Since the ratification of the Constitution of the United States in 1788, the free exercise of religion has been permitted, contributing to the proliferation of significant religious diversity in the country. The terminology referring to these alternative religions is large, including cults, marginal religions, sects and new religious movements (NRMs). This last term, originated in the 1970s, is commonly used by scholars as a neutral, non-pejorative phrase (Lewis, 2012).

Similar to the US, South Korea hosts some of the most sizable Protestant congregations in the world. Seoul's Yoido Full Gospel Church was included in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest church in the world in 1993, with around 700,000 members at that time. While the number of NRMs originated in South Korea from the 19th century is ambiguous, it is thought that around 500 groups have been established since then, including those which gradually collapsed (Kim, 1998). Despite the fact that Korean NRMs are hermetic-secretive congregations, controversies related to these groups have made headlines in the country, some of them even capturing global attention. The biggest scandal, concerning former president Park Geun-hye and Choi Soon-sil, Park's spiritual mentor, culminated with the first impeachment since democracy was established in South Korea, and a 22-year prison sentence. Choi Tae-min (1912-1994), father of Choi Soon-sil, was the founder of Yongsae-gyo (영세교, 永世教), a syncretistic new religion which combines elements from Buddhism, Christianity, *tonghak* and Shamanism. In line with this incident, the sinking of the Sewol ferry, in which more than 300 passengers died, including around 250 high school students, was related to a Christian-rooted group, the Evangelical Baptist Church, better known as Guwonpa, or the Salvation Sect. Yoo Byung-eun (1941-2014), an entrepreneur-pastor and leader of the cult, was the former chief of Semo Group, a ferry operator which went bankrupt during the Asian financial crisis. After

³ This work is part of the research project titled "Memory and Forgetting across the Borders in East Asia (PID2021-124485OB-I00)", funded by the Spanish State Research Agency within the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities of Spain.



the bankruptcy, Yoo's family is believed to have continued operating ferry companies, together with Chonghaejin Marin, the operator of Sewol. Other recent controversies associated with Christian groups are the involvement of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus in the spread of the Covid-19 virus in South Korea; the National Revolutionary Party's Huh Kyung-young (허경영), also known as the leader of Heaven Palace cult, being a candidate in the 2022 South Korean presidential election, and the assassination of the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He was assassinated by a man who allegedly repudiated Abe's promotion of the Unification Church in Japan as Abe delivered video speeches at the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a Unification Church related organization. These are only some of the recent incidents related to Christian religious groups, yet more could be mentioned.

Notwithstanding the important contributions related to Korean Christian NRMs in Korean, the study of these groups in the West is still insufficient, as it only extends to an introductory overview of these new movements. This article will focus on two prominent NRMs in South Korea: The Federation for World Peace and Unification, commonly known as the Unification Church, and the Christian Gospel Mission, better known as Jesus Morning Star (JMS). The former, founded by the self-proclaimed messiah Moon Sun-myung in 1954 and established in the US around the 1970s, is probably one of the most influential Korean NRM in the US and Japan, in terms of political and economic ties with local governments. The latter, launched by self-proclaimed messiah Jung Myung-seok in 1982, is infamous for sexual abuse and rape allegations, both nationally and overseas (especially in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan). Similar to other Korean Christian NRMs, both founders claim to be the second coming messiah, by preaching what they call a "new" biblical canon or a "new" gospel that Jesus has exclusively revealed to them to complete his mission on earth. Despite the emphasis on uniqueness and newness, the fact is that these groups' narratives are usually interrelated and emanate from the same roots. This paper will present the origin of the Unification Church's *Divine Principle* and JMS's *Thirty Lessons* by introducing the three main figures from whom the core teachings were derived.

Reverend Moon and the Divine Principle

Moon Yong-myung (1920-2012) was born on January 6, 1920⁴ in the North Pyeongan province in North Korea close to the Yalu River and Liaoning province in China. He later changed his name to Moon Sun-myung (文鮮明), probably due to the negative biblical connotations of the dragon *yong* (龍), which was the first syllable of his first name. Being the fifth of eight siblings, his family converted to Christianity after two elder siblings, a brother and a sister, became seriously ill. On the Easter Sunday of 17 April, 1935, Moon had his first spiritual encounter with Jesus at the age of fifteen⁵, while praying on Mount Myodu (Euh, 2008). During this first mystical experience, Jesus encouraged Moon to continue his unfinished mission, literally saying "You must take on a special mission on Earth having to do with Heaven's work" (Moon, 2009). From that day on, he immersed himself in what he called "the Word of God" which subsequently became the basis of his

⁴ According to the lunar calendar.

⁵ Ages are counted according to international age. He was 16 years old in Korean age.



biblical exegesis for the *Divine Principle*. According to Breen (1997), Moon's teachings combine a syncretistic interpretation of the Old and New Testaments, with elements included from other religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Shamanism and Confucianism. Further, in October 1945, Moon stayed for six months at Israel Monastery, founded by Kim Baek-moon (김백문), an important figure in Moon's theology who will be mentioned in the following pages.

Up to 1945 North Korea, and especially Pyeongyang, was the epicenter of Christianity on the Korean peninsula. However, after the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), Busan, originally considered as the land of Buddhism, became a refuge for Christians who had escaped from the north. Consequently, Busan became the fortress of Korean Christianity during that period (Tark, 2006). Moon, who was imprisoned in the North Korean Labour Camp of Heungnam in 1948 for a public disturbance with a five-year sentence, escaped to Busan shortly after being freed by the UN troops in October 1950 (Euh, 2008; Moon, 2009). This became a turning point in his life. He founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in Seoul in 1954, which later changed its name to the Family Federation of World Peace and Unification, widely known as the Unification church. He published the compilation of his doctrine in the book *Divine Principle* in 1957 and married for the second time with Han Hak-ja in April 1960; she became the "True Mother" inside the Unification Church. In 1971, Moon and his family settled temporarily in the United States where he expanded his religious, diplomatic, and political influence in the West. The diplomatic achievements of his group include the sponsoring of the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS), which recruited more than 900 participants including Nobel laureates; the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA); and the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS). Furthermore, it created the newspaper *The Washington Times* in 1982, and established NGOs such as The Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), a United Nations-affiliated NGO instituted in 2005, which hosts the Summit for Peace on the Korean Peninsula with participants from more than 160 nations. The UPF's World Summit held in February 2022 was chaired by the former UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, and featured virtual speeches from Donald Trump and Shinzo Abe, and the attendance of political celebrities such as former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and former US Vice President Mike Pence, among others (Pokorny and Zoehrer, 2022). The Unification Church progressively expanded into a movement named as the Unification Movement or Unificationism, which aims to extend religious, cultural, diplomatic, politic and economic influence worldwide, in search for "unity among all major religions, and, on that basis, build the Kingdom of God on earth or *Cheonilguk* (天—國)"⁶ (Mickler, 2006: 1).

The *Divine Principle* or *Exposition of the Divine Principle* is a compilation of Moon's main theological beliefs, written during his stay in Busan with the assistance of Yu Hwo-weon, an early disciple. The book is divided into two main parts. The first part consists of seven chapters: the principle of creation, with a section related to the purpose of creation; the human fall, eschatology and human history, with a section about the last days; the Messiah — his advent and purpose of his second coming, resurrection, predestination and Christology, with a section concerning the Trinity and the Holy Spirit. The second part focuses on the providence of restoration, the period of preparation for the second

⁶ For further information about Unificationism in America, see Bromley and Shupe 1979 or Mickler 1980.



advent of the Messiah and the second advent itself. Despite its length at 536 pages, and its complexity, the first two chapters, related to the principle of creation and the fall, contain the main pillars of the Unification Church doctrine.

In the opening chapter, creation is viewed in terms of the Taoist concept of duality, with the creation of man and woman being the most complex level of complementary opposites. The chapter covers the purpose for the creation of the universe and humanity, emphasizing the three blessings mentioned in Genesis 1:28 which are: "to be fruitful (mature and ready to bear fruit), multiply and have dominion over creation" (Moon, 1996: 43). Chapter two connects the purpose of creation exposed in Genesis 1:28 with the fall of Adam and Eve. According to Moon's exegesis, God created Adam and Eve and established them in the Garden of Eden with the purpose that they would first spiritually and physically mature and become God-centered individuals. After this, he would bless them with a God-centered marriage, having children and multiplying as God-centered families. These families would eventually populate a God-centered world, receiving the last blessing of domination over the creation. However, Eve succumbed to Lucifer's temptation, which is represented as a serpent in the book of Genesis. She ate the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil and then gave it to Adam, who ate it with her. Before they fell, Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their nakedness, yet directly after taking the fruit "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Genesis 3:6). Thereafter, in Genesis 3:16, God punished the woman with severe childbearing pain. These verses illustrate Moon's vision of the fall as the sin of sexual immorality, and eating the forbidden fruit of sexual intercourse with Satan represented as the snake, and afterwards with Adam, before becoming God-centered individuals. Hence, they sexually "fell" before being ready to receive God's blessing of marriage. Accordingly, she received the "essence of his evil nature and multiplied an evil lineage from which our sinful society descended" (Moon 1996, 64). This 'original sin interpretation' connects with the concept of restoration, the second cornerstone in Unificationism. For Moon, Jesus was not able to restore God's Kingdom since he died before marrying. Therefore, a new Adam must come and conclude God's mission of creating a God-centered family, becoming the "True Father" of humanity. In this way, his wife, or the "new Eve", would become the "True Mother" and they would begin a new era called the "Complete Testament". Furthermore, Moon claimed that the messiah would be born in Korea between 1917 and 1930, where Moon coincidentally was born in 1920. Beside the main doctrine compiled in the *Divine Principle*, Moon continuously preached further revelations, "centered on the role that he and his family played in laying special foundations for the restoration of God's Kingdom" (Barker, 2018: 23).

Pastor Jung and the Thirty Lessons

Jung Myung-seok (1945-), who was born in Seokmak-ri, region of Geumsan, South Korea, proclaimed himself in 1982 as the messiah and founded the Christian Gospel Mission, widely known as JMS or Providence⁷.

⁷ For English bibliography related to Christian Gospel Mission check Nathalie Luca's PhD dissertation, book, and articles (1994, 1997, 1998, 1999-2000).



Jung, who is the third of five brothers and has one sister, embraced Christianity when he was still in elementary school after Presbyterian missionaries dispensed free Bibles to each family in Seokmak-ri. Unable to continue his education at middle school due to extreme poverty, he was immersed in faith, having his first spiritual encounter with Jesus at the age of thirteen⁸. Since then, he claims to have maintained an ascetic life of prayer, fasting and evangelism, including reading the Bible over 2,000 times over 20 years, which concluded with the theological enlightenment comprising the *Thirty Lessons*, which is the JMS core doctrine. After enlisting for the Vietnam War twice, on June 1, 1978 he departed to Seoul to start his mission as “the second coming of Jesus”. In 1982, he founded the MS Gospel Association, which later changed its name to the Christian Gospel Mission (Jang, 2004). Jung’s *Thirty Lessons* is divided into three different levels: beginner, middle and advanced. Despite its length, his core doctrine can be summarized as the purpose of creation, the fall, and judgment of fire, with the exposition of three different time periods: Old Testament, New Testament and Complete Testament; the second coming, Holy Son and the rapture.

Although there are some differences with the Unification Church, which may be the object for further studies, important similarities can be noticed between the core doctrines of Jung and Moon. The first is related to the fall. Jung claims to have learned directly from Jesus, struggling over 18 years, until he realized that the fall was a sexual sin. Likewise, he emphasizes his own sexual purity as the main condition why these unique revelations were given to him (Jung, 2016), yet Moon proposed this theory before Jung did. With regard to the purpose of creation, Jung bases his doctrine on the same verse as Moon, Genesis 1:28, which introduces three different blessings: be fruitful (the blessing of growth, self-perfection or individual heaven); increase in number and multiply (the blessing of marriage, starting a family or family heaven); and rule the creation (the blessing of governance or heaven on earth). However, Jung developed a theory proclaiming that human beings were created to become God’s brides (disregarding their gender)⁹. Due to the sexual fall, humans lost their value as brides and fell to the level of servants. Hence, the purpose of creation is to restore to their level to that of a bride. In this way, Jung is both considered the first bride in front of the Trinity and the bridegroom of humanity as the Holy Son’s body (Oh, 2010). These two lessons, considered as the core doctrine in JMS or Providence, connect with the idea of restoration into brides and the transition to a new time period. Accordingly, the Old Testament is considered a time of servants, the New Testament a time of children, and the Complete Testament a time of brides, with its main representatives being Moses, Jesus and Jung respectively (Jung, 2016). Beside these core teachings which emphasize chastity before marriage¹⁰, similarities with Moon’s *Divine Principle* can be observed in their vision of resurrection, the last days, predestination, the notion of a Korean messiah, and the shamanic concept of spiritual possession and spirits working through the body of a person. In this way, scholars view the *Thirty Lessons* as a plagiarism, a sub-Unification Church, a cult secluded from the Unification Church, or “a sort of updating of the Unification Church doctrine” (Luca, 1997). In fact, Jung’s name can be found in the Unification Church registers dated

⁸ For more details check <https://jungmyungseok.net/pastor-jung-myung-seok/>.

⁹ The bride theory was first exposed by Lee Yong-do (이용도).

¹⁰ In case of JMS, there is a group of people (both female and male) who do not marry and remain celibate, known as faith stars, who devote their lives to serve God and Jung. According to Taiwan’s JMS data, there are 110 faith stars in Taiwan, from which 67.2% of them are female (Tsai and Peng, 2022:56).



1975. He was registered as a member on March 20, 1975, and lectured on Moon's doctrines occasionally (Roh, 2013). Jung lately compared Moon to John the Baptist and himself to Jesus, alleging that Moon's mission finished in 1978, the year when Jung proclaimed himself as the second coming messiah and departed to Seoul (Jang, 2004). Additionally, Jung's numerology proposed in the advanced lesson "A Time, Two Times, and Half Time" has also been confirmed as having been first published by the unorthodox theologian Han Enok (한에녹) in his book *Eternal Gospel*, published in 1947.

In this way, although Jung himself assures his followers that they have received a unique and new gospel, which Jesus exclusively revealed to him because of his devotion, chastity and spiritual submersion, the reality is that Jung's *Thirty Lessons* is mainly based in Moon's *Divine Principle*. The question is whether Moon actually compiled his doctrine himself. In fact, there is nothing new under the sun and despite the emphasis on uniqueness and newness claimed by both Jung and Moon, their core theologies emanate from three main sources: Kim Sung-do (김성도, 1882-1944), Baek Nam-ju (백남주, 1902-1949) and Kim Baek-moon (김백문, 1917-1990).

The Foundation of Native Korean Christian NRMs: Kim Sung-do, Baek Nam-ju and Kim Baek-moon

In the early twentieth century, two important revival movements occurred in Wonsan and Pyeongyang, in present day North Korea, which contributed to the growth of Protestantism and the emergence of native Korean Christian NRMs. Wonsan Revival Movement (1903-1906), led by Mary Culler White, a Methodist missionary, and Louise Hoard McCully, a Presbyterian missionary, expanded to Pyeongyang with the rise of the Great Revival Movement (1907-1910)¹¹. Though this paper does not focus on the possible reasons for the rise of mysticism and Christian spiritual revival in the peninsula, it is important to emphasize the syncretism of religions in Korea and how religious tradition, referring to shamanism, has set the foundation for assimilating new religions into the ongoing religious history (Chung, 1959). In fact, evidence of shamanist practices remaining in Korean Christianity are well-known (Martin, 2002). The northern part of the peninsula became the center for Protestantism and alternative phenomena until the end of the Japanese colonization in 1945, and the establishment of the communist regime in North Korea (Tark, 2006).

Kim Sung-do (김성도, 1882-1944) is commonly considered as the founder of native Korean Christian NRMs. Although she was not the first person who announced a union with Jesus, or expanded prophetic activities in the country, her theology inspired a large number of groups that emerged after the Korean War, including the Unification Church or JMS. Born on July 1, 1882¹² in Cheolsan, in the North Pyeongan Province of North Korea, she converted to Christianity after miraculously recovering from a psychological

¹¹ The expansion of the 1907 Pyeongyang's revival movement, widely known as the Great Revival Movement, was documented by missionaries at the time, being a well-studied phenomenon in Korean Christianity. For empirical considerations on the revival check *Gold in Korea* (1936) by William Newton Blair. For further noteworthy sustained academic publications in English check *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* by Lak-Geon George Paik (1980).

¹² According to the lunar calendar.



disorder that developed after the birth of her second son in 1906. She visited shamans and tried conventional medicine, yet none of them relieved her symptoms¹³. It was after attending church for three months, under the advice of a deaconess encouraging her to believe in Jesus, that she totally recovered. Her first mystical experiences began during the March 1st Movement protests in 1919, when she engrossed in prayer for the country's independence, and in 1922, after Jesus encouraged her to pray for the world's Christianity. One year later, in 1923, she alleged that Jesus had incarnated within her, and thus, dwelled in her body¹⁴ (Choe, 1999). The essence of her theology can be summarized as follows (Choe, 1999: 37):

- a) The root of original sin was not caused by simply eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. According to Kim, metaphors in the Bible should be interpreted. Indeed, original sin did not emerge from dietary disobedience, but it was due to the sexual intercourse between Eve and Satan, disguised as a snake, and afterwards with Adam. Hence, Kim was the first person in Korea who claimed sexual immorality as the root of the original sin.
- b) Despite the orthodox belief that Jesus's crucifixion was part of God's plan to redeem the sins of mankind, Kim maintained that Jesus was not supposed to die, but that he was expected to live and preach the gospel until he naturally passed away. Therefore, she emphasized the unfair death of Jesus as the result of ignorance and disbelief by the Jewish people. Furthermore, this exegesis was used to promote the second coming of a messiah, as the only way to complete the first failed plan.
- c) God is filled with sorrow due to firstly, Adam's sexual fall and, secondly, the death of Jesus caused by humanity's scepticism. Between the paradox of free will and theological determinism, which connects omniscience to predestination, Kim emphasized human's free will over omniscience. Thus, none of the incidents above were part of a divine plan, but the result of mankind's ignorance.
- d) Contrary to the popular belief that Jesus would return on clouds (Revelation 1:7, Daniel 7:13, Matthew 24:30, Luke 21:27), Kim stated that the clouds represent the body of a woman, meaning that the coming messiah would be born from a woman, just like any other human on earth, and denying any divine nature. Likewise, the shamanic concept of *ipsin* or union with Jesus' spirit was emphasized. The chosen person would spiritually unite with Jesus and become his body just as John the Baptist received the spirit of Elijah in the Old Testament (Mal 4:5-6, Matt 11:14).
- e) The messiah will be Korean, and Korea will become the second Israel, being admired, and recognized by the world.

Being expelled from the Presbyterian Church in 1925, Kim held services at home, healed and taught her followers about her beliefs, emphasizing the importance of repenting, sexual abstinence for married couples and celibacy for those who were single. Soon, her followers started calling her the New Lord (Breen, 1997). Significant parallels are found

¹³ Despite the importance of Kim Sung-do in the field of Korean NRM studies, Choe Joon-hyun (최중현) was the first person who compiled a detailed bibliography of Kim based on primary sources. Since most of Kim and her followers' descendants live in the south, he was able to gather their testimonies, including Kim's son memories.

¹⁴ This phenomenon is expressed in Korean as *ipshin* (入神), which literally means that God enters and dwells within a body. This connects with the shamanic ritual of *kangshin* (降神) or spiritual possession.



in Kim Sung-do's theology with the doctrines of Moon and Jung, including their core principle related to the fall as being sexual immorality. In order to understand the way these revelations were transmitted from Kim to both these founders, two key figures must be analyzed: Baek Nam-ju and, last yet most relevant, Kim Baek-moon.

Baek Nam-ju (백남주, 1902-1949), born in Gapsan, North Korea, on 3 January 1902, graduated with honours from the Pyeongyang Theological Seminary, and was specially recognized for his proficiency in Greek and Hebrew. After graduating in 1930, he moved to Wonsan and worked at the Wonsan Women's Seminary, teaching Greek, Hebrew and his self-translated versions of the *Gospel of John*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis, and *The Confessions* by St. Augustine of Hippo (Choe, 1999). Wonsan did not only have a strong Protestant foundation due to the Wonsan Revival Movement (1903-1906), which led to the Pyeongyang Great Revival (1907-1910), yet it was also the epicentre of mysticism, along with Kim Sung-do's Cheolsan region. Wonsan was the birthplace of Yu Myung-hwa, a former Methodist member who claimed that Jesus had incarnated in her body in 1927, and thus that she was united with him. Whilst it is not clear the exact date Baek joined Yu's prayer meetings, records show it may have been around 1932. Baek had previously been influenced by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Sundar Singh (1889-1929), and sympathized with mysticism and spiritual phenomena. In June 1932, Yu prophesied the establishment of a new era, that he named the "Path of a New Life". The history of salvation was divided into three different stages: firstly, the Old Testament, secondly the New Testament, and finally the "Path of a New Life", each of them guided by a different central figure according to the age.

In 1933, Baek published a booklet with Yu's core revelations, including the division of the three ages, and gave the date of birth of Jesus as January 3. He also emphasized the importance of prayer and revelations, excluding the Bible as the only source of spiritual realization, and the possibility for every person to receive the spirit of Immanuel, and thus, become Immanuel's body¹⁵ (Choe, 1999). A year later, in June 1933, Baek and Lee Yong-do, together with others, followed Yu's prophecy of building a church, and established the so-called Jesus Church. In parallel with the Jesus Church, an annexed monastery that was named Wonsan Shinhaksan was founded, with Baek as the chairman. The aim of this place was to teach and train future pastors, regardless of their gender, providing seminaries and practicing ascetic lives. In 1934, Baek's behaviour drastically changed. He was spotted entering the room of a female seminary student every night around 2-3 a.m. and leaving after dawn, yet he maintained that he was devoted to dawn prayer. Baek, who was married, ordered his wife to undergo a fast for forty days. Despite her initial refusal, she finally obeyed and died within a month. Two months later, Baek held a ceremony called "heavenly wedding" (天國結婚) on a snowy night at 3 a.m., and officially married the student who had recently become pregnant and gave birth to a girl. As a result, Baek was expelled from both the Jesus Church and Wonsan Shinhaksan within a year (Choe, 1999). The next place to which he travelled was Kim Sung-do's home in Cheolsan region. He was not alone, as he was always accompanied by a faithful disciple, Kim Baek-moon. When both Baek and Kim arrived to Cheolsan, Kim Sung-do had around 130 followers, a number that had slightly increased after both of them joined the group and helped lecturing and holding revival meetings.

¹⁵ Immanuel's name is used referring to Jesus. Check Isaiah 7:14.



According to the memoirs of Chung Su-won, Kim Sung-do's grandson, Baek was overwhelmed after listening to his grandmother's new interpretation of the Christian scriptures (Chung, 1986). In 1935, Baek registered Kim's church as the Holy Lord Church or Seonju Church (성주교회, 聖主教會), at the Religious Affairs Division of the Japanese General Government. However, the Holy Lord Church scattered and ultimately dissolved after Kim's death in April 1944. Persecutions from the colonial authorities, opposition from the mainstream churches, Kim's death and Korea's division hampered the continuity of the Seonju Church. Baek's ministry was not rooted, and he moved to the south in 1946, where he worked as a teacher until his death in 1949 (Choe, 1999). However, the alternative theology of these ephemeral individuals became a long-lasting foundation for successive Christian NRMs in the country due to one key figure: Kim Baek-moon.

Kim Baek-moon (김백문, 1917-1990), born in North Gyeongsang province, South Korea, was the second child of a family of four sons and two daughters. In 1934, he travelled to Wonsan when he was only 17 years old and became a disciple of Baek Nam-ju. Kim did not grow up in a Christian family, yet it was due to Kim Nam-jo, a member of the Jesus Church, that he converted to Christianity and became influenced by mysticism. Baek was still in Wonsan at the time they met, but he soon left for Cheolsan, after he had been expelled from both the Wonsan Shinhaksan and the Jesus Church. Kim's admiration of Baek endured despite the scandal, and he followed his spiritual mentor to Cheolsan to join with Kim Sung-do's group. When Seongju Church was founded in 1935, Kim Baek-moon presided at the opening ceremony. Also, he lectured people at Seongju Church and assisted Baek during his revival meetings. However, his stay in Cheolsan was relatively short, as he enrolled in Joseon's Institute of Theology (朝鮮神學院) in Seoul around 1940. Allegedly having been tortured by the Japanese Government for rejecting Shintoism, he escaped to Paju, in South Korea, where he later established the Israel Monastery¹⁶ (Choe, 1999).

On March 2, 1946, an extraordinary phenomenon defined a milestone in the history of the group. Kim affirmed that he had had mystical experiences since 1937, yet on March 2, 1946 he stated that the Holy Spirit came down to him during a spiritual gathering with thirty-three followers at 11:00 a.m. During this mystical experience, Jesus appeared, and Kim started preaching unusual revelations regarding Korea's role as the new chosen country, and the second Israel. For this reason, March 2, 1946 was interpreted as the date of the Jesus' second advent, which Kim designated as the "Heaven-opened Day" or Gaecheonjeol (개천절/開天節)¹⁷, and he considered himself as being the body of Jesus. Accordingly, March 2, 1946 was the beginning of a new era, to which was given the name of the Complete Testament, while March 1, 1946 became the end of the New Testament (Euh, 2008).

Kim Baek-moon's relevance in Korean Christian NRMs history lies in his having three main books published, compiling the basis of this alternative theology for the first time.

¹⁶ It is not clear the exact month or year when the Israel Monastery was founded. Most authors affirm it was in August 1945, right after the liberation of Korea, yet others debate it was in 1944.

¹⁷ Gaecheonjeol originally refers to the date when Hwanung descended from heaven to live on the earth. This is related with Dangun and the creation of the first Korean state of Kojoseon in 2333 BC. This day started to be commemorated from 1909, during the Japanese colonial rule, to vindicate the ethnic hegemony of the Koreans. At present, Gaecheonjeol is commemorated every 5, October as the National Foundation Day.



Neither Kim Sung-do, nor Baek Nam-ju recorded their doctrines, which meant that they disappeared with the groups' dissolutions, and the division of the peninsula. However, due to Kim's documenting his efforts, this new biblical interpretation did not disappear, and was spread to the south and became the canon for countless groups in the country, including the Unification Church and JMS. Despite the continuation of the books in *Theology of the Holy Spirit* (聖神神學) published in January, 1954; *Basic Principle of Christianity* (基督教根本原理) released in March, 1958; and *Theory of Personality and Faith* (信仰人格論) published in October, 1970; Kim's core doctrine can be summarized as three main ideas (Euh, 2008: 216-221):

- a) The history of Salvation is divided into three different periods, connecting it to the concept of the Trinity. In other words, each entity of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) fulfils its role during a different time period. In this way, God governed the Old Testament, the Son ruled the New Testament, and the Holy Spirit controls the third and last stage when the second advent takes place, named the Complete Testament. According to Kim's theological vision, the Old Testament and the New Testament referred to an old and a new promise respectively. Just as the name the Complete Testament indicates, it is the time when God completes or fulfils this promise. Furthermore, March 2, 1946 is considered as the last day of the New Testament, also as the first day of the Complete Testament. Despite the alleged uniqueness and singularity of this exegesis presented in the *Theology of the Holy Spirit* (聖神神學), the truth is that Kim simply elaborated Baek's idea of the "Path of a New Life".
- b) Kim distinguished Jesus's physical nature and spiritual nature by using two different names: Jesus and Immanuel. Jesus referred to the human body and Immanuel to the spirit. In this way, the second coming was interpreted spiritually, where the spirit (Immanuel) descends to earth and uses the body of a chosen person. Kim proclaimed himself as being the Messiah, denying Jesus' physical coming, and emphasizing his mission to his followers. Once again, the shamanic concept of spiritual possession was nothing new, but existed as a similar phenomenon among Kim's predecessors.
- c) The original sin was the result of sexual transgression. Kim differentiated the concept of salvation into 'spiritual salvation' and 'solving the problem of hereditary sin'. Jesus' redemption involved salvation from spiritual death and reconciliation with God. However, solving the problem of hereditary sin, meaning sexual transgression, could only be done by a person who reveals the essence of the original sin and guides humanity, so as to "restore" it to the original state before the fall. Therefore, Kim emphasized "restoration" beyond salvation. This core doctrine is summarized in the *Basic Principle of Christianity*, which is divided into three parts: the principle of creation, the principle of the fall, and the principle of restoration. To this extent, Kim Sung-do's influence is indisputable, yet he enhanced it by including the concept of restoration, which he used to justify and emphasize his mission as the second coming messiah.

Similarly to his predecessors, Kim Baek-moon failed to succeed in gathering a consistent number of followers, and in conserving a well-organized group. Yet his books established the theological foundation for most of the NRMs that emerged after the Korean War,



including Unification church and JMS. After his death in December 1990, his group had only around 25 active members (Choe, 1999). This number progressively decreased to 5 people who still considered themselves as Kim's disciples in 2002, while none of them celebrated any gathering at the Israel Monastery (Choe, 2002).

Conclusion

In parallel with the US, South Korea not only hosts some of the biggest churches in the world, but also produces numerous Christian NRMs, some of which have significant political and economic ties behind-the-scenes. Despite the continuous scandals and controversies related to these alternative groups, this topic is insufficiently addressed within Korean society, probably because of the damage this could cause to the country's image, as recently popularized by the *hallyu* wave. This paper focused on two leading NRMs in South Korea, namely the Federation for World Peace and Unification, commonly known as the Unification Church, and the Christian Gospel Mission, better known as Jesus Morning Star (JMS) or Providence. The former is probably still the largest and most influential NRM in the West.

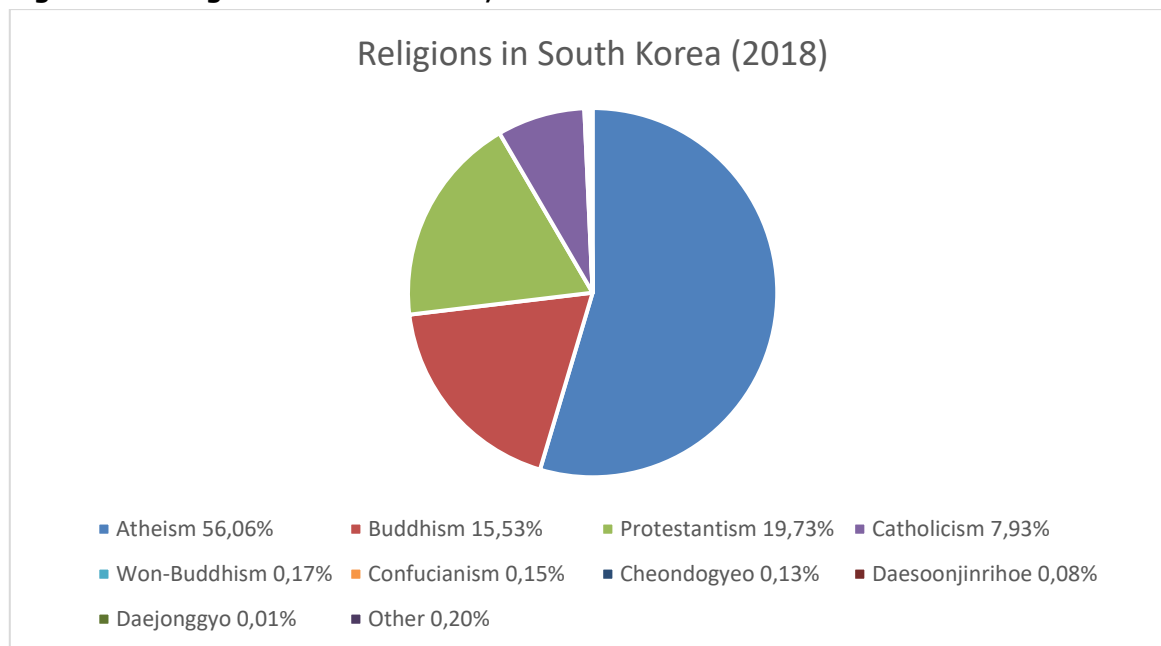
Like any other Korean Christian cult, both founders justify themselves as being the second coming Messiah, as having received exclusive and original revelations from Jesus, and preaching what they call a "new" biblical canon, or a "new" gospel. However, in reality the narratives of these two organizations are neither new or exclusive. In fact, their core doctrines are interrelated and emanate from the same roots, i.e., Kim Sung-do, Baek Nam-ju, and Kim Baek-moon.

This does not mean that the two teachings are exactly the same, but important similarities are obvious in both Jung and Moon's core doctrines. Furthermore, when compared to Kim Baek-moon's *Basic Principle of Christianity*, which was divided into three chapters — the principle of creation, the principle of the fall and the principle of restoration — the foundations of the core doctrines of Moon and Jung are clearly visible. Moon stayed for six months in Kim Baek-moon's Israel Monastery before establishing his own movement. Similarly, Jung was a member of the Unification Church from 1975 onwards. The same is true of Kim Baek-moon, since he compiled Kim Sung-do's and Baek Nam-ju's theologies, yet explicitly claimed them as his own original revelations.

To conclude, this paper has identified the origins of the narratives of two major Korean Christian NRMs. Despite their founders' allegations of authenticity and originality, historical evidence demonstrates that there is nothing new under the sun. What has been, will be again, and what has been done, will be done again.



Figure 1 – Religions in South Korea, 2018



Source: *Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea* (2018)¹⁸

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¹⁸ The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea publishes a report every five years on the status of religions in the country. The next study is expected to be published in 2023.



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