

7th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities, 21 October 2000

CHRISTIANITY IN KOREA

Dear friends,

Welcome to the 7th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities. Thank you for coming and for showing your interest and support for this program. Your presence here on a Saturday morning and this beautiful autumn day is quite a statement. I am deeply moved by it. As most of you know, the HMS Colloquium in the Korean Humanities Series at GW has provided a forum for academic exchanges on Korean arts, history, language, literature, thought and religious systems in the context of East Asia and the world.

The HMS Colloquium series is meant to promote friendly dialog in a relaxed atmosphere among participants coming from many walks of life. By now many of you know that the late Hahn Moo-Sook was my mother. The colloquium series was created in order to uphold her spirit of openness, curiosity and education, for which she was as well known as she was for her writings. The Colloquium's strategy is to invite two world-renowned scholars to speak to us on a religious, philosophical, social or artistic element of major significance to our understanding of Korea. Typically, one is a Korean, and the other a non-Korean. We ask the speakers to enter into a dialogue and to engage us as the audience by presenting their ideas from different angles reflecting their own experience in Korea.

In previous gatherings, we have discussed Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism in Korea. Indeed, three times over the last two thousand years, Korea has undergone a radical transformation of its dominant beliefs and values. 1,600 years ago, Buddhism entered Korea from China and replaced shamanism as the preferred provider of rituals promising protection from bothersome spirits and relief from the uncertainties of life. One thousand years later, Neo-Confucianism challenged the Buddhist hegemony and provided a new set of philosophical assumptions and ethical principles around which both state and society were reorganized. The most recent transforming force has been Christianity. The time has now come to turn our attention to the impact of Christianity in Korea.

Christianity first appeared on the Korean peninsula a little more than two centuries ago. Its long-term impact on Korean society is still being assessed. However, it is abundantly clear that Christian influence on Korean society, culture, and polity has been remarkable and is worthy of serious academic analyses. The impact of Christianity is readily visible in Korean cities; and, some of my friends have asked me "Why are there so many Korean Christians and so many churches?" "What are they like?" Others have noted that some of the most prominent people in Korea's recent history have been Christians. Syngman Rhee and So Jae-p'il who are two of GW's most honored graduates were Protestant Christians. President Kim Dae-jung, the Nobel Laureate for Peace this year, is a Catholic. So was President Chang Myon who held his abbreviated tenure in the early 1960s.

This morning, we are fortunate to have two eminent scholars with a deep understanding of Christian religion, its transformation, and its meaning in Korea. Dr. Baker comes from the University of British Columbia. He will approach this topic from a Catholic point of view, starting with early history of Christianity. Dr. Chai-sik Chung of Boston University will guide us through modern Korean times from a Protestant view. Both speakers will now discuss the impact that this third religious, philosophical and ethical force has had, and continues to have, on Korea.

In the interest of time, I will not attempt to give you now the academic credentials of our two speakers. I only want to mention how happy I am to have Don Baker back to GW. Don is an incredibly versatile person. His interests are both wide and deep. I actually first met him, a long, long time ago, at a Linguistics conference although he is a historian. I am also thrilled to be making a new acquaintance thanks to the HMS colloquium. Dr. Chai-sik Chung is a world-famous author and researcher in his field. In fact, as I was inviting him to speak to us, I was thinking specifically of my valued student Will Pore, who is here today. Will has expressed at numerous occasions his admiration for Dr. Chung and his wish to meet him in person. We are all happy for the opportunity to know Dr. Chung.

Welcome again to all. And let us begin. Our first speaker will be Professor Don Baker. The title of his talk is "Unexpected Fruit: Catholicism and the Rise of Civil Society in Korea."

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Now Professor Chung will speak under the title, "Which Christianity? The Gospel, Culture, and the Problem of Cultural Transformation in Korea."

Young-Key Kim-Renaud