

A Literature Review of the History of Korean Christian Education

Young Woon Lee

Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, Korea

Korea has a relatively short Protestant church history compared to other Asian countries. Protestant missionaries arrived in the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, the Yi dynasty prevented foreigners from entering Korea. Soon after the arrival of Protestantism, Christian missionary schools were opened and used as a means of evangelism.

While Perry Downs contends in the American context, “Christian education starts at the end of evangelism” (Downs, 1994, 16), many Korean church historians (and Christian educators) argue that Korean Christian education *began* with evangelism. That the first Protestant missionaries used Christian education as a means of evangelism is aptly demonstrated in the Korean word for “church.” “Gyo-hoe” (교회), the Korean term for church, has an educational emphasis and the Chinese characters (教會) convey the idea of a “gathering of teachings, meeting of/for education.” Thus, the Korean Protestant church began with Christian education.

In spite of this rich history of Christian education in Korean Protestantism, there is a dearth of English-language books on the subject. Thus, the purpose of this study is to introduce a brief overview of one side of Christian education that focuses on the Protestant system of educating Koreans. The hope is that this study will provide an initial framework for future studies.

There are several limitations and qualifications to this study. First, while Roman Catholicism had schools in Korea well before the rise of Protestantism, Roman Catholic educational history lies outside the scope of this article with its emphasis on Protestant history. Second, this survey is based solely on secondary sources (in Korean) by a variety of Christian education scholars and church historians since a study based on primary sources would be impractical for a survey article. This article relies on the works by Deuk-Ryong Kim, Joon-Guan Eun, Jong-Chul Jang, and Mee-Rha Hahn, especially. Third, I translate the names of terms, people, and organizations into English from the Korean sec-

ondary sources. However, uniformity in translations and transliterations among the various works is difficult and there are certainly alternative spellings in other works, especially those unknown to me. Lastly, this is an article with broad Christian interpretations because of the audience of this journal is mostly from a mixture of Christian backgrounds.

There are many issues that need to be addressed on the subject of Christian education history in Korea. One issue concerns definitions and scope. What is “Christian education”? Where and when does it occur? Another issue is the use of categories. Should a scholar emphasize its historical development or rather, its educational development? Further, there are other important questions. In regard to history, are we speaking about the history of Christian education or of church education? Similarly, in regard to its emphasis on education, is it more theologically driven so that it highlights doctrines, or more field-centered, which stresses practice? Rather than tackling these debatable problems one by one, this article seeks to survey how scholars have approached the subject of Protestant Christian education in Korea and organize generally for the reader the approaches as an introduction to the history of Christian education in Korea. Therefore, this paper is organized into five sections, each corresponding to the various approaches: (1) chronological events, (2) organizations, (3) theological positions, (4) movements, and (5) denominational history.

Chronological Events

History by “chronological events” is arguably the simplest form that narrates a nation’s history according to significant events. Under this category, there are two groups of scholars and approaches. The first group uses the date of Korea’s liberation from Japanese imperialism, August 15, 1945, to divide Christian educational history into two periods: pre-independence and post-independence. Indeed, dividing Korea’s history on its liberation day is common for many Korean scholars in different fields. Deuk-Ryong Kim (1976) and Yong-Won Kang (2007) are two scholars who represent this first group.

The second group argues that 1960 is a dividing point for Korean Christian educational history. Christian education before 1960 emphasized a curriculum based on the policies created by Korean churches to advance evangelism, who also held follow-up classes for converts. After 1960, Christian education opened up church education to all ages and employed theory-practice oriented education. Two scholars who promote this second division in history are In-Tak Oh (1999) and Jong-Seok Park (2005).

The significant difference between these two groups begs the question of how much focus should be placed on Japanese annexation rather than the intrinsic growth and development in church education. The first group inherently stresses the importance of nationalism and underscores suffering as a stimulus for Christian change. The second group has more universal applications because it is not affixed to Japanese colonialism. Therefore, the second group's methods and conclusions may be applied to situations in other countries.

Organizations

A history of Christian education may focus on significant educational organizations that stimulate local churches to work together and facilitate collaboration between denominations. For example, Yo-Sub Um (1959) divides the history of the Sunday school programs into three periods: (1) pre-federation of Chosun Sunday schools, (2) post-federation of Chosun Sunday schools, and (3) associations of Korean Christian education. The first period is characterized by the establishment of Christian mission schools followed by the opening of Sunday schools (D. Kim, 1976, 155; Um, 1959, 8). Um sees Christian education during this initial period corresponding with the rise of modern Western education through missionary work (1884–1922). The second period is characterized by a nationalistic, civic education during the Japanese occupation (1922–1945). Christian education in this period developed to defend Koreans from Japanese aggression and to protect church education. The third period is characterized by the liberation and recovery of Christian education from Japanese influence (1945–present). After 1945, the name of the organization changed from “the Federation of Chosun Sunday Schools” to “the Korean Council of Christian Education.”

Theological Positions

A history of Christian education in Korea may be classified by theological positions. Under this heading, orthodox and liberation theologies serve as examples. Emphasizing orthodox Protestant theology, Hyung-Tae Kim (1967) divides Korean Christian education into three periods: (1) missionary education (1885–1919), (2) Korean nationalistic civic education (1919–1945), and (3) education by relationships (1945–present). The first period begins with two American Protestant missionaries, Horace Grant Underwood and Henry Gerhard Appenzeller, who arrived in Korea in 1885. The Sam-Il movement follows the first period and ends with the Japanese occupation. The final period is defined by the

relationship built between educational organizations and local churches after 1945. It continues to exist today.

Deuk-Ryong Kim (1976) is another proponent of dividing Korean education through the lens of orthodox Protestant theology. He classifies Korean Christian educational history into three periods. But his first period begins in 1777 when Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Korea, and it concludes in 1876 when Protestant missionaries arrived. This period is called, "the Christian missionary period." The second period is "the Sunday school movement" from 1885 to 1945. "The modern period of Christian education" begins with Korea's independence in 1945 and ends in 1976 when Kim wrote his article. His paper explicates the contents of Christian education rather than detailing political and contextual issues.

Minjung (the Korean term for "people") theology is the best-known form of Korean liberation theology. Dong-Hwan Moon (1974) espouses this belief system and describes movements as part of Korea's liberation history. He classifies Christian educational history into three periods according to liberation theology. "The traditional church educational period" lasts from 1884 to 1919 from the arrival of Protestant missionaries to the Sam-Il movement. This is followed by "the cultural movement" from 1920 to 1945, which is described as self-independent. Lastly, the "liberation in church education" period starts in 1945 and ends in 1974. Liberation is divided into two subcategories: recovery and reflection. Thus, Moon describes social characteristics and situation of the church through Sunday school educational history.

Woong-Sub Jung (1991) and Jong-Chul Jang (1993) interpret Korean Christian educational history according to Minjung theology. Christian education in Korea is defined as a nationalistic form of civic education to inculcate the Korean Minjung (people) to defend themselves against their Japanese oppressors. Hence, church education is equivalent to Minjung education. Jung (1991, 60) establishes four periods: (1) transplantation (1884–1919), (2) confrontation (1920–1945), (3) compromise (1946–1969), and (4) seeking identity (1970–1991).

Jong-Chul Jang (1993) wrote *Christian Education History* and used Minjung concepts to divide Korean Christian educational history into five periods. The first is called, "the acceptance of Protestantism and the formation of nationalistic education," from 1885 to 1910. The second period continues from 1910 to 1919 as "the oppression of churches and persecution of nationalistic education." The third period is "the depoliticalization of the church and Sunday school movement." It lasts until 1932, when the fourth movement arrived as "the cultural policy on the liquidation of Korea and the weakening of education for Koreans." Finally, "the awakening of the churches and the birth of education for

people” begins in 1945 to present times. Jang focuses on how the Christian educational system was implemented by the Minjung, and how Koreans in recent times learned to cope with the history of oppression and suffering during the Japanese occupation. Thus, in a way, Minjung theology is used to analyze the relationship between the Korean church and Korea’s national educational programs.

Jae-Yong Joo (1981) is a Christian historian rather than a Christian educator and embraces Minjung beliefs. He emphasizes the ideological trends of society into five parts. The first period is the acceptance of Christianity (1876–1896) followed by the formation of the people’s church (1896–1919). The third period is described as depoliticalization (1919–1932). The penultimate period is the “Babylonian Exile” of Korean churches (1932–1960). The last era continues to the present, which is a period of awakening (1960–present).

In classifying history by theological affiliations, the two examples of orthodox and liberation positions show contrasting characteristics. According to Harold Burges (1975), the relationship between theology and religious education can be categorized in four parts: (1) traditional theological, (2) socio-cultural, (3) contemporary theological, and (4) social-science. Educational theology in Korea closely follows Burges’ first two categories; the Korean orthodox theological position is similar to the traditional theological approach while the Minjung theological position is similar to the socio-cultural approach. However, for the most part, Korean Christian education is difficult to categorize using Western models. For example, David Tracy (1975) divided contemporary theology into five basic categories: orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical and revisionist. His theories are inapplicable for Korean research on the Christian educational system.

Movements

Under this heading, six scholars will be discussed, each representing a different perspective on various Christian educational movements. Yang-Sun Kim (1971) classifies Christian education history into three periods. The first period is called “the start of Christian schools and the introduction of modern Western education” (1885–1909). This first period is further divided into three parts: (a) the initial period of Christian schools (1885–1893), (b) the reformation of Kabo and the invasion of Japan (1894–1906), and (c) the development of Christian schools and private schools (1907–1909). The second period is identified as “the persecution of Christian schools and protection of Korean nationality” (1910–1945). This too is further divided into three subsets: (a) the transitional period (1910), (b) conflict period (1916–1929), and (c)

the persecution period (1930–1945). The last period, “Christian schools after liberation in 1945” (1945–present), focuses on historical events according to political change.

In-Tak Oh (1999) categorizes the conflict between national and religious education during the Japanese oppression into four stages: (1) the formation of Christianity and nationalism at the end of the kingdom (1885–1910), (2) the persecution of Korean churches and crisis of education on nationalism (1910–1919), (3) the elimination of churches from the mainstream in Korean history and the weakening of churches (1919–1931), and (4) the surrendering churches and persecution of Korean churches (1931–1945). According to Jong-Chul Jang (1993), Oh “interprets national education and religious education in Korea through its relationship with social history,” (p. 388). Therefore, Oh’s classification system is based on social change.

Joon-Guan Eun (1988) establishes 1885 as a watershed year for the Korean culture and for the church, and considers 1885 as the year when modern Korean Christian education begins. He divides modernity into three phases. The first phase concerns cultural transitions (1885–1910). He states that the goal of Christian education during this stage is to promote national awareness and dignity to further Korea’s salvation. The second phase is characterized by the political avant-garde (1919–1945). Korean self-consciousness and historical consciousness are two crises that were stimulated by the avant-garde. The last phase is a secular period (1945–1988); it is characterized by scientific and technological education that follows after Korea’s liberation from Japan. In regard to educational history, Eun (1988) divides this inquiry further into four periods according to denominational distinctions, calling it, “Christian education field theory”: (1) the informal Sunday school movement (1888–1905), (2) the formation of the federation of Sunday school (1905–1930), (3) the differentiation of Sunday school (1930–1945), and (4) the growing period in church education (1945–1985).

Choon-Kee Han (2004) largely classifies the history of Protestant education in Korea into three periods: (1) early (1885–1919), (2) middle (1920–1945), and (3) later (1945–present). He further divides the third period into four sections: (a) confusion (1945–1951), (b) conflict (1951–1967), (c) growth (1967–1980), and (d) maturation (1981–present).

Two scholars build on the research of previous scholars. Sun-Ae Joo (1984) uses a mix of scholars to interpret Christian educational history in Korea. The “socialization process” of John Westerhoff III, and Kyung-Bae Min’s formation of the national church were used to discuss the beginnings of the church in Korea, the attitude of Christian education, how the church matured over time, and the purpose of the education in

missionary history. Mee-Rha Hahn (2005) also constructs her historical interpretations on the works of others: Yo-Sub Um, Dong-Hwan Moon, and Joon-Guan Eun. She divides Christian educational history into five periods: (1) the informal Sunday school movement (1888–1905), (2) the formation of the federation of Sunday school (1905–1930), (3) the differentiation of Sunday school (1930–1945), (4) the growth of church school education (1945–1985), and finally, (5) the mature church school (1985–present).

Unfortunately, the main problem with focusing simply on the Christian educational movements in Korea is the lack of theological frameworks which often stimulated these movements. In addition, this emphasis on events (at the exclusion of the beliefs that created them) contains a very narrow focus and thus excludes other outside influences as well.

Denominational History

Finally, there are approaches that study the denominational histories of Korean Christian education. The starting dates of each denomination vary and thus, their developmental histories will not necessarily correspond with one another. If further studies are conducted, it is imperative that each denomination learn to compare and correlate their historical progression with other groups. The following academics have written initial histories of a few denominations (M. Hahn, 87).

Pauline Kim (1992) presented a Methodist educational history in *Christian Education History*. The title is slightly misleading because the book clearly reflects Methodist history. Chapter twenty-one summarizes her educational view, where Minjung concepts play an important role in the Korean church and Christian education. Her theories and interpretations are very similar to the scholars previously mentioned who promote Minjung values.

In-Tak Oh published *History of Christian Education Among Korean Protestant Denominations* in 1999. Several scholars contributed to the making of this book, representing various denominations. The following section will describe briefly each contributor's understanding of Korean Christian education according to denominations.

Four contributors examined various Presbyterian denominations. Yong-Soo Ko (1999) describes the denominational history of the Tonghab Presbyterian Church of Korea. Its history is divided into six periods: (1) dawn, (2) preparation, (3) flowering, (4) dark, (5) reflection and leap, and (6) growth. Chun-Kee Han (2004) bases his work on Deuk-Ryong Kim's classification system. Thus, the educational history of the Habdong Presbyterian Church is divided into four parts: (1) recovery

(2) reflection, (3) arrangement, and (4) leap. Two more scholars follow the histories of other Korean Presbyterian churches: Woong-Jin Yun (1999) examines the history of the Keejang Presbyterian Church while Yong-Won Kang (1999) chronicles the Koshin Presbyterian Church. Two contributors discuss charismatic denominations. Jung-Hyo Lee (1999) separates the history of the Korea Evangelical Holiness Church into four sections: (1) reconstruction, (2) revival, (3) settlement, and (4) growth. Moon-Ok Park (1999) examines the Assemblies of God of Korea in three periods: (1) preparation, (2) growth, and (3) settlement.

Conclusion

Comprehensive historical studies of Christian education in Korea are greatly needed. What is available tend to be uneven and too focused. Scholars must approach the subject with minimal personal intrusion from their own beliefs, which detrimentally affect the presentation of these studies. As an ordained pastor in charismatic denomination and a professor of an interdenominational seminary, I myself have attempted to exclude my own bias to the best of my efforts. Yet, a comprehensive history cannot be accomplished alone. There are at least four issues in current scholarship that require attention and collaboration of researchers. Firstly, there is a need for an in-depth look into the current state of denominations in Korea and a full description of each denomination's unique characteristics, which then can be used to describe their educational system comprehensively. Secondly, new studies should explain the relationship between Korean theologies and educational philosophies. Thirdly, missing is a comparative study of other Asian nations, which might prove very helpful in understanding Christian education in Korea. And finally, serious research needs to be undertaken to correlate Christian educational history to Korea's general history.

References

Korean Resources

- Eun, J. G. (1988). *Field theory of Christian education*. Seoul: Daehan Christian Press.
- Hahn, M. R. (2005). *Protestant church education*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Han, C. K. (2004). *History of Korean church education*. Seoul: Educational Department, Presbyterian Church (Yejang) Press.
- Jang, J. C. (1993). *History of Christian education*. Seoul: Methodist Theological Seminary Press.

- Joo, S. A. (1984). *History of Christian education*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Joo, J. Y. (1981). *History and theological testimony*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Jung, W. S. (1985). "Perspective on the educational issues of the Korean Protestant Church education for the last 100 years: Emphasis on the Sunday school" *Journal of Hanshin*, 2. Hanshin University.
- Kang, Y. W. (1997). "Christian education history of the Koshin Presbyterian Church of Korea." *Studies on Korean Christian Education*. V. Association of Korean Christian Education.
- (2007). *Introduction to Christian education*. Seoul: The Word of Life Press.
- Kim, D. R. (1976). *The foundation of Reformed Christian education*. Seoul: Chongshin University Press.
- Kim, H. S. (1997). "Christian mission school under Japanese rule." *Journal of Christian Thought*, 4. Institute for Christian Thought at Goshin University.
- Kim, H. T. (1967). "Modern Christian education in Korea". *Modernity and Theology IV*. The United Graduate School of Theology Yonsei University.
- Kim, N. H. (1984). "Influence of introduction of Christianity on Korea's modern education: On the center of Protestantism." *Journal of Daegu Health College*, 8. Daegu Health College.
- Kim, P. (1992). *History of Korean Christian education*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Kim, Y. J. (1978). "Effect on the awakening toward Korean modern educational thoughts." *Journal of the History of Korean Education*. 2. Association of the History of Korean Education.
- Kim, Y. S. (1971). *Research on Korean church history*. Seoul: Kiedok-Gyomoonsa.
- Ko, Y. S. (1988). "Trends of Church education curriculum: Emphasis on the church of the USA." *Church Education*. 88, 151. (1988, Nov.).
- (1997). "Christian education history of the Presbyterian Church of Korea." *Studies on Korean Christian Education*. V. Association of Korean Christian Education.
- Kwon, Y. K. (2007). "Yesterday, Today, and Future of Korean Christian education." *Korean Christian Theology*, 50. Association of Korean Christianity.

- Lee, J. H. (1997). "Christian education history of the Evangelical Holiness Church of Korea." *Studies on Korean Christian Education*. V. Seoul: Association of Korean Christian Education.
- Lee, K. Y. (1979). *Brief history of Christian education*. Seoul: Educational Department. Presbyterian Church (Yejang) Press.
- Lee, S. J. (1994). "Missionaries and Chosun during the Japanese annexation." *Korean Christianity and History*, 3. Institute of Korean Church History.
- Min, K. B. (1981). *Church and nation, the Christian Literature Society of Korea*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Moon, D. H. (1974). *History of Korean Christian education*. Seoul: Association of Korean Christian Education.
- Oh, I. T. (1999). *History of Christian education among Korean Protestant denominations*. Seoul: Korean Presbyterian Press.
- Park, J. S. (2005). *Map of Christian education*. Korean Evangelical Holiness Church Press.
- Park, M. O. (1997). "Christian education history of the Assemblies of God of Korea." *Studies on Korean Christian Education*. V. Association of Korean Christian Education.
- Um, Y. S. (1959). *Brief history of Korean Christian education*. Seoul: Korea Council of Christian Education.
- Yoon, H. S. (2006). "Historical foundation of Christian education." M. R. Hahn (ed.). *Introduction of Christian education*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Yun, W. J. (1997). "Christian education history of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea." *Studies on Korean Christian Education*. V. Association of Korean Christian Education.

English Resources

- Burges, Harold (1975). *An invitation to religious education*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press.
- Clark, Allen, D. (1971). *A history of the church in Korea*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea.
- Downs, Perry G. (1994). *Teaching for spiritual growth: An introduction to Christian education*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Kang, Wi J. (1997). *Christ and Caesar in modern Korea*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Tracy, David. (1975). *Blessed rage for order: The new pluralism in theology*.
New York: Seabury Press.