

Life between Church and Home : Leading Figures in Conservative Churches

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1. Introduction

How did South Korean women lead their lives both at home and in church during the 1970s and the 80s, a period which is known for the explosive growth of Korean churches? Have women been empowered by actively participating in the development and expansion of protestant churches? Or have they completely obeyed the existing rules of the conservative churches? This paper aims to illuminate the meanings in which the women, taking the leading role as "female seniors (gwon-sa)" by actively participating in the churches of 1970s and 80s, have placed upon Protestantism and how they carried out their religious practices. "Gwon-sa" is the highest status that a woman can acquire within conservative churches where women are not allowed to be presbyters or reverends. It is a contradictory status since it officially authorizes the respective female's leadership on one hand, yet also indicates that systematic gender discrimination exists within the church structure. Women who are dedicated to the church, not only to the services but also to the diverse tasks like doing chores, spreading mission, or organizing events, are respected both internally and externally by the followers of Protestantism when they are appointed/elected to this position. Thus, it would be meaningful to investigate what kind of women became a "gwon-sa" after showing significant passion and commitment towards the church, especially why these women so eagerly took part in conservative churches where oppression on women probably have existed. Since the main activity these women needed to perform in order to be officially recognized is missionary work and since this ultimately contributes to the expansion of church membership, this paper focuses on the explosive growth period of Korean churches, the 70s and 80s, to find out what kind of activities were carried out by female followers and what meanings they placed upon their religion.

The reason why this paper focuses on the conservative churches is not only because it shows the contradictory relationship between churches and women more effectively but also because the conservative denomination, being the majority of Korean Protestantism, holds significant influence over the Korean society. As mentioned above, the systematic discrimination within the church structure, as well as the exclusive interpretation of the doctrine, and the right-winged extremist ideologies on social issues are all criticized as the main problems of church aggravating social conflicts (Lee Won-Gyu 2002a; Kim Sung-Gun 2013). Unlike the protestant churches of other countries, which are gradually moving towards being more open and receptive towards radical issues such as abortion and homosexuality, Korean churches are still obstinately rejecting such changes. Could this be incurred by the fact that the expansion of Korean churches was the result of women's active, passionate missionary work? This paper can offer insights and answers to questions starting with what made these women participate in the churches so ardently in the first place and ultimately why the Korean churches have turned out to be so conservative in its nature. Moreover, the period of the explosive growth of Korean churches is the 70s and 80s, which is marked as the period of Korea's rapid industrialization, also known as compressed modernization. The ground of why this paper concentrates on the 70-80s is that this period was when the missionary activities were strongly encouraged, and such activities were a decisive factor in granting women a "gwon-sa" title. The fact that the explosive growth of Korean churches and the industrialization of Korea happened simultaneously is not just a mere coincidence. It is witnessed in many literatures that the expansion of protestant churches is one of the results of cultural industrialization (BS Kim 1985), and from the

precedents of the numerous western societies, it can be derived that the more a society was modernized, the more women surpassed men in the degree of participation to the church (Aune 2008). This paper, then, would examine the possibility of how the compressed modernization unique to South Korea can be connected to the close relationship between the industrialization and the participation of women in churches.

2. Literature Review

There is a scholarly interest in the patriarchy and the politics of gender in Korean churches. First of all, researches which focus on the early arrival of Protestantism to Korea (HJ Yi 1985; AE Kim 2000; Park Jung-shin 2011) indicate that Protestantism may have enlightened women with its spirit of egalitarianism. As women learned the values of Protestantism, there were even drastic attempts to overthrow the existing patriarchic order and gender roles within their families such as living alone independent of their husbands and in-laws. In the colonial period, Protestant churches were the centers of anti-Japanese movements carried out by females, enabling the female activists to play a more central role instead of merely assisting the male activists. Compared to the majority of literatures (Bartkowski & Read 2003; McDuff 2001; Ozorak 1996; Neitz 2004; Hastings & Lindsay 2013) where the relationship between church and its female followers are depicted to be a dominant-subordinate one that was suppressive to women, Korean church and women at these times seems to be in a more positive light. However, such harmonious relationship changed to an oppressive one when the Korean churches grew rapidly, in the 1970s and 80s, and a lot of literature (Lim HeeSook 2011) prove that churches imposed restraints on women during this period. While the explosive growth of Korean churches are explained as a result of cultural changes provoked by the modernization of Korea, women took up 70% of the whole membership body during this period in which the expansion of church membership took place (Lee Won-Gyu 2002b). In a more critical point of view, it is pointed out that the lesson taught to women at churches during this time was to “obey your husband”, and most women were injected these types of Biblical doctrines by the church. These researches agree with the idea that there existed a systematic discrimination considering the fact that women were forced to be obedient to men: not only to their fathers and husbands but also to male reverends and theologians (Park Jung-shin 2011).

However, the fact that almost 70% of the entire church membership consisted of women indicates the possibility that there could have been a strong inducement that led women to actively participate in church. Chong, a sociologist of Kansas University who carried out a 16-month-long ethnography in the late 1990s, maintains that Korean churches acted as an alternative to activities outside the domestic sphere for women especially in Korea (Chong 2006; 2008). In other words, women could be empowered by taking charge of nondomestic duties such as carrying out missionary works and organizing cell meetings. Owing to this, a new possibility of gender politics was aroused, allowing women to negotiate with the patriarchal system. Thanks to the recognition of church, Korean women could be empowered by healing their wounded hearts from the Confucian-patriarchal Korean family. Yet, there is a contradiction between women and the patriarchal structure called “Deliverance and Submission” in that experiences which can be considered as deliverance facilitate the submission to the existing family gender regime.

This paper aims to examine in depth such contradictory relationship between deliverance and submission by focusing on female leading figures, ‘gwon-sa’s, who participated in churches in the 70s and 80s, which is known as the explosive growth period for Korean churches. Trying to take a step further compared to the works of Chong, who prioritized the family-centric climate and the pervasive norm of motherhood as the answer for the question of women’s consent to patriarchy (Chong 2006: 714-718), this paper will look into what other factors played the intermediary role of drawing such consent, and whether or not the ardent participation of women had strengthen the patriarchal structure and conservatism of Korean churches. Around the world, there exist numerous protestant churches seeking changes of its conservative and patriarchal doctrine by embracing even abortion or

homosexuality issues (Warner 1993; Sherkat & Ellison 1999; Aune 2008). Yet, it seems that it will not ever happen in Korean churches. In addition to analyzing the hidden reason behind this phenomenon, this paper tries to explain why Korean churches have become politically conservative since the 1980s, why the development of Korean churches is politically oriented in a particular way (Kang In-cheol 2013).

3. Method and Data

Since this paper seeks to illuminate the ironical relationship between the patriarchy of the church and the agency of women by focusing on the life of the women who were part of conservative churches in the 70s and 80s, in-depth interviews were carried out and described accordingly by its themes based on the method of analyzing life history. Due to the fact that life history is a research data grounded on the sociological understanding of individual and society being inseparable from each other (Yi Hee-young, 2005), this paper intends to trace the diverse meanings of Christianity to each of the interviewees in every stage of their lives. By asking the interviewees what meanings of religion they have incorporated into their lives, this paper will answer the question of whether the women, in the process of having their acts of service acknowledged, have taken part in churches actively enough to challenge the patriarchal system, or whether their actions have stayed within the boundary set by the conservative churches, only allowing them to play subsidiary roles.

Adhering to the theme of this paper, women aged above 70, who are currently a gwon-sa or a retired gwon-sa, were selected as interviewees since women included in this age range were the ones who actively participated in their churches during the 1970s and 80s. The church participation this paper focuses on is not that of a mere churchgoer, but that of an ardent, passionate follower who practiced his or her religious faith in everyday life by engaging in missionary and volunteer activities. The purpose of this paper is to examine how these religious practices reached its peak during the rapid growth period of the Korean churches and also how these practices mutually influenced the identity or the set of values of those performing such practices. In the study, the life histories of three interviewees were analyzed and the common features that appeared in all three life histories were examined. One interviewee was interviewed twice, two were interviewed once and the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees are as follows.

Anonymous name	Born Year	Children	Marriage Status	Occupation	Occupation of Spouse
Okhyang Jeon	1935	2 sons and 3 daughters	Bereaved	Homemaker	Businessman
Heeja Kim	1940	3 sons	Divorced	Real Estate	-
Young-soon Bae	1933	1 daughter	Bereaved	Teacher(before marriage) / Homemaker	Government official

Table 1. The socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees

To form the necessary rapport with the interviewees before the actual interview, I visited them a bit earlier than previously planned, introduced myself, participated in their Sunday service, and had small talks with them about the common denominators we've shared, which are Christianity, churches, religion and so on. Furthermore, I introduced the topic and purpose of the research, "how female seniors have contributed to the development of Korean churches" to the interviewees. To prevent the case of the interviewee limiting the content of one's narrative for the purpose of this research, no further information regarding the research was provided. The in-depth interviews were conducted in their own houses or churches where they felt most comfortable to narrate their own life stories. Interviews were recorded under informed consent.

4. A Reconstructed Story from Three Life Histories

1) Summarized Life Histories

Ok-hyang Jeon's 79 years of life cannot be described without God. She has been attending to church A (anonymous) for about 30 years and was appointed to a "gwon-sa", simply "female senior," the highest position a woman can reach in Presbyterian churches that women are not allowed to be a presbyter. As a "gwon-sa" for about 20 years, she also served as chairperson of the church's Women Missionary Association for four times. The first time she learned about Christianity was when she got an offer from her neighbor at the age of 30. Although a year later she moved to a new town, the current residence, she remembers the neighbor's exact name some 50 years after the suggestion. She settled down in there at age 31 and had been attending church B (anonymous), but in her age 51, she founded church A with a few fellows because one of her best colleagues, Reverend Han, got a conflict with one of the leaders of church A. Since then, church A has had about 100 regular members for about 30 years, and according to Ok-hyang, it is all thanks to God. She has never missed her daily dawn prayer service (*sae-byeok-gi-do-hoe*) held every morning from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. which led her to earn a plaque for recognizing her service. She is a mother of 3 daughters and 2 sons and was bereaved of her husband in 2012.

Heeja Kim, the second interviewee, is also one of the "foundation mothers" of church A along with Ok-hyang, and is as ardent as Ok-hyang when it comes to religious beliefs. Heeja was born in Seoul in 1940. Unlike Ok-hyang, the closest fellow believer in her church who has numerous older sisters and brothers, Heeja's siblings are younger than her. Among them is her youngest brother who is 15 years younger than her. He has become a reverend with her help and she feels quite proud of herself for this. Heeja graduated high school which makes her the most educated person among the three interviewees who only graduated elementary, middle school respectively. Her educational background led her to describe the exact process of establishing church A more specifically compared to Ok-hyang. For example, she remembered how money was needed for the clay figures that were going to be used in foundation of the church, how they had to mortgage one's house to get a bank loan, and how long it took to pay off the debt. Ironically, this clever and well-educated woman spared most of the time allotted for the interview concentrating on the mysterious experiences she had. She converted to Protestantism when she was 40, contributed to found church A, carried out the position "gwon-sa" and the head of the Women Missionary Association of her church. She divorced her husband and her daughter, whom she gave birth to at the age 33, is now living in Japan. Heeja never told the interviewer the exact year that her divorce took place, yet it can be inferred that it occurred quite early considering the fact that the stories of her middle-age life events included statements like "when I was living with my mom", or "I was living alone". She is currently engaged in real estate business and visits Japan to see her daughter every 6 months.

Young-soon Bae, the third interviewee, was born in 1933 as the second of 8 children in Seong-joo, Gyeongsangbuk-do. The 82-year-old woman started her religious belief quite naturally when she was introduced to the religion by her aunt at a young age, rather than after a dramatic life event like Heeja. In 1958, at the age of 26, she married her husband who was one year older than her by arrangement. She followed her husband, a public service official, to another city where she gave birth to her first and second sons who are three years apart in age. Then, her family moved once more, where Young-soon settled down and gave birth to her third son. Her husband was constantly appointed to positions at different cities, but she stayed in the city where they decided to settle down with her children in order to provide a sustainable educational environment for their sons. She went to a relatively big church on a regular basis with her entire family members, and from her early fifties, she served as a gwon-sa for twenty years along with her husband, who was a presbyter. Under the policy of the church which only allows the duties be valid just until the person is 70 years old, Young-soon is now retired from her service. When she was bereaved of her husband 6 years ago, she decided

to live with her first son and daughter-in-law, causing her to move to a place that is in one-hour driving distance from her original church. Nowadays, she is not able to participate in church activities as much as in the past when it only took her ten minutes to get to the church from her house and when she could take part in almost every activity of her church including the Wednesday Services, Friday Services, Sunday Services and the social groups like meetings with the members of the Women Missionary Association within her church. She now goes to her original church only on Sundays, and she takes the Wednesday's and Friday's Services in her first son's church.

2) Inner Scars of the Patriarchical Society

One common aspect of the interviewees was that they all had either big or small inner scars created within the patriarchic society before their conversion into Protestantism or before they had seriously committed to their religious beliefs. These scar-yielding-events had direct or indirect effects on their conversion to Protestantism and happened to be the decisive cause behind their active religious practices.

When Ok-hyang was 15 years old, the Korean War broke out so that she fled to Dae-jeon with her family, the hometown of her mother. Her oldest brother who worked for the Bank of Korea was abducted by some communists who hated capitalism and mysteriously disappeared. Her family was not to know whether he was alive or dead. That was the reason why her mother refused to come back to Seoul even though South and North Korea reached a truce, and instead her family settled down in Dae-jeon. Ok-hyang had no schooling until she married her 26-year-old husband through arrangement (*jung-mae*) at age 23. Her husband was a talented university graduate, which was not common those days, and worked for a company in A-hyeon-dong. Ok-hyang came to Seoul and gave birth to her first baby. However, she had to go back to Dae-jeon only two days after her delivery since her parents-in-law forced her to do so. She was temporarily paralyzed (*poong-i-o-da*) due to the exhausting 5-hour-taking trip from Seoul to Dae-jeon in the dust. Her parents-in-law pushed her to take care of them and even their two daughters, Ok-hyang's sisters-in-law. It turned out that Ok-hyang's husband had been adopted just five years before their marriage, and that her mother-in-law became an alcoholic due to the shock of having lost her two baby boys. Ok-hyang took care of her mother-in-law who behaved badly whenever she got drunk, served her father-in-law, and cared for her sisters-in-law, taking responsibility of all the house chores and memorial services for ancestors (*jae-sa*). About that time, her baby died before his first birthday. Her son's death led Ok-hyang to consider her parents-in-law as goons who had made the young couple separate from each other.

These painful experiences of Ok-hyang were reframed after her conversion to Protestantism. She concluded that the harsh acts of the North Korean army who took her brother's life and of the parents-in-law who let her first-born child die resulted from the fact that they did not believe in God. In particular, according to Ok-hyang, the decisive reason that her parents-in-law suffered from the loss of their children was because they held the Confucian memorial services. Ok-hyang also agreed to the idea that the United States is a God-favored country, mentioning the aid from the U.S. It is noticeable that Ok-hyang found the grounds of the moral justification in whether the North Korean army and her parents-in-law believe in God or not when assessing them.

Heeja, who is currently 75 years old, started her religious life when she turned 40, but had never believed in Christianity before that. Nobody around her, not even her mother and her siblings, nor her divorced husband had ever been a churchgoer and what is more, she had refused to convert to Christianity even though one of her closest friends tried to make her a Christian. However, she changed her mind after the dramatic event she had experienced at the age of 40 and decided to surrender to God. She proudly mentioned that such a change brought on a comment by fellow believers that her surrender was like the story of Jericho Castle crumbling into ruin. This story, which appears in the Bible, tells how the Israeli people, after having received a divine revelation from God, could take the strong and giant Jericho Castle from its native people in order to conquer the Promised Land. The fact that Heeja made this metaphor that relates her conversion to the Jericho Castle story

indicates that she interprets her conversion as a dramatic change of her life and also that she is now obeying God unconditionally. The motive behind her conversion was not as simple as Ok-hyang's, whose conversion was merely triggered by the offer from her neighbor, yet it was a series of events that inevitably led her to believe in God

Heeja married her husband between in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s and gave birth to her only daughter at 1972. Her divorce seems to have happened just after the birth of her daughter. Since Heeja's parents were quite affluent, she could afford to run a small art academy while living with her mother and her daughter. Then, at the age of 40, the event that changed her life forever occurred. One day, when she had announced the beginning of summer break to her students and returned home, she suddenly started bleeding. It turned out to be a melena. Based on her statement "I suffered from it for a long time", the symptom must have continued for several months. The pain incurred by the constant bleeding was so terrible that when she decided to go outside for once after lying in bed for quite a while, strangers came up to her to ask why she had such a pale face. And she also had to walk all the way to the pedestrian overpass instead of walking straight across the crosswalk of an eight-lane road in front of her house because she was afraid of not being able to pass it in time. She tried every medicine and folk remedies she could find, but they all failed to make her better. Because she was literally "dying out" due to the pain, she, as an act of grasping at straws, decided to contact the friend who had constantly tried to convert her in the past so that she could ask the friend to pray for her. Three weeks after Heeja joined her friend to church, she received an offer to pray out loud for the people who were participating in the overnight prayer service. Even though she didn't even know how to, she started praying out loud and soon found herself so ardently praying that she could not stop the words coming out of her mouth. And one night, while she was dreaming, a hymn was constantly heard with lyrics that went "Oh, hallelujah, yes, 'tis Heav'n, 'Tis Heav'n to know my sins forgiv'n; On land or sea, what matters where?— Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there.". She asked her friend what kind of song this was, and it turned out to be the refrain of the 495th hymn.

Amazed by such events, Heeja went to the church for a couple of more months, and one day, when her fellows asked her to join, she went to a fasting prayer circle. The fasting was planned to last for 3 days, but it was so difficult for Heeja not to eat anything at all that she could do nothing but lie flat with her face on the floor. The very moment she felt like she could not go on, she saw a vision of a devil with black clothes and a peaked black hat who was offering her a plate of steaming porridge, and this vision disappeared after her third refusal to take a bite. After the first three days of fasting and five more additional fasting days had passed, Heeja found out that her bleeding had miraculously stopped. On her way back home, she tried to walk across the crosswalk of the eight-lane road in front of her house instead of walking all the way to the pedestrian overpass. When the green light was about to change to the red light, she decided to run, which was the very first time she had ever tried to since the bleeding had started. She arrived home safely, and proudly told her mother that she had succeeded in running and that she was now feeling fine without any pain. Therefore, for Heeja, her conversion to Protestantism was a graceful moment that played a huge role in her recovery from illness.

Young-soon Bae was schooled only up to middle school, which could be attributed not only to her family being poor but also to the social atmosphere of that time that favored only the sons to go on to college. The daughters, on the other hand, were considered undeserving of proper education as far as they learned how to read. However, after her family's economic circumstances got better, her younger sisters were able to finish high school and even community college while Young-soon and her older sister graduated only from middle school. It seemed like she regretted the fact that she could never enter college when her bereaved husband and second son had graduated a prestigious college. But fortunately, and partly owing to this feeling of regret, she was able to teach at an elementary school after the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial ruling for 3 years. When asked how she was able to become a schoolteacher with such a limited educational background, she answered that all the Japanese teachers who had taught at schools during the Colonial Period had to return to Japan, and the need to fill up the vacancy of these positions worked in favor of Young-soon, who simply had to pass a test in order to become a temporary teacher. At that time, almost anybody could become a

teacher and later on when she was middle-aged, she went to the reunion of her elementary school, only to find that almost every one of her 40 to 50 peers in the past had the experience of teaching students at schools. Someone had maintained the teaching position up to 40 years, the point where one had to retire under the age limit, making Young-soon envious of him/her. Young-soon had quitted teaching only after three years, and because she felt as if something was missing afterwards, she decided to continue providing her teaching service at the Sunday school of her church as 'ban-sa' on a regular basis until she became middle-aged. During the interview, she stated, "when someone is in such teaching position it means that, compared to others, the person is at a higher stage of the intellectual class. Because those people that know more can lead people" and this statement shows her desire for gaining recognition from the society.

To sum up, the first interviewee Ok-hyang had to suffer a traumatic event before her conversion. When she was 15, her eldest brother, who worked in the bank, became a missing person due to the communists during the Korean War, and when she was 23, she had to endure such a horrible treatment from her parents-in-law that her first born died before he reached the age of one. Heeja, the second interviewee, divorced her husband and was left behind with her first and only daughter, which was considered immoral at the time, and was suffering from an illness. Because the symptoms due to the illness were extreme, her face turned pale, making it difficult for her to walk by herself without people stopping to talk about her conditions. And lastly, the third interviewee, Young-soon regretted the fact she had to give up the opportunity to receive higher education for her brothers and also the fact that she had quitted her job as a teacher. At this point, it is important to understand that all interviewees were able to heal their inner scars through churches. Ok-hyang was able to find a sense of moral superiority towards the communist who took her brother or the parents-in-law who she thought was the cause of her baby's death by feeling sorry for them for not believing in God, and the Biblical expression that inspired her to do so was "don't revenge, God will take all instead". Heeja testified that her miraculous healing experience from the illness was possible by surrendering to God. Young-soon said that her unfinished dream of higher education was compensated by her volunteer activities at the Sunday school, and thanks to the teaching duties, she now considered herself more elite compared to others.

3) Church, a Place to Be Publicly Recognized

During Ok-hyang's two in-depth interviews, the statements about the activities in church were focused on activities after the year 1986 when church A where she is attending now in a regular basis was founded. It is probably because she positively contributed to the development of church A by cooperating harmoniously with other devotees like Reverend Han, Samonim Yi (*Samonim* is a polite way of addressing the wives of reverends), Gwon-sa (female senior) Kim Heeja, Gwon-sa Choi, Gwon-sa Moon, and Gwon-sa Yim, which was a more meaningful experience in her life. To found a new church is called "*gae-chuk-hada*" in Korean, which can be translated simply into "to bring it under cultivation." This indicates that churches are figuratively considered as precious crops for the land

- The members of the foundation (gae-chuk) are me, Gwon-sa Kim, and Gwon-sa Choi.

- Reverend Han and Samonim Yi were very smart. They assessed church B and said it had no possibility of revival anymore. So they convinced me to found a new church which would be a great honor to God in our lives. That made me listen to them.

- And then, we resolved prayer and prayed every single night for 40 days. Praying was the best way. Praying was relayed from a person to another person for 40 days respectively.

-First Interviewee Ok-hyang

As mentioned before, Ok-hyang and her fellows separated from church B where she had been attending right after her moving into and founded church A. Ok-hyang and Heeja enjoyed the

honors of participating in the foundation of church A led by Reverend Han, allowing Ok-hyang call herself as “one of the 4 foundation members.” What is unique here, however, is that Ok-hyang did not state clearly about the financial basis needed for the foundation or the political dynamic of church B which facilitated the separation of church A in her interview. She simplified these matters saying “*they got a quarrel,*” or “*praying was the best way.*” From her statements, it can be inferred that the key of the successful foundation was an absolute and blind devotion.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that Ok-hyang is empowered by her enthusiastic church activities. She became confident about herself through her innumerable church activities. She was recognized through participating in diverse church activities like organizing events, making networks, and so on. For example, Ok-hyang considers cooking at home as an exhausting, supplementary, and limitative chore but regards cooking for church events as a crucial job. It was because feeding the members after Sunday services was a crucial act of practicing faith and a way of doing missionary work for a church leadership in Korean Protestantism. In addition to cooking, doing the dishes, and cleaning, she said that she was in charge of diverse activities preparing great yearly events like Easter Day and Christmas, thereby making important decisions as the head of the Women Missionary Association. It was a very special experience for her when she said that nobody but the chairperson of the Women Missionary Association could do so.

Young-soon showed a great pride in herself for the fact that she made her husband believe in God and all of her three children had received infant baptism. Because infant baptism is only possible when both the parents of the infant are proved to be churchgoers, it was a glorious event that the children of the other two interviewees could not receive. Moreover, Young-soon told the stories of how she helped a poor student who were in the same cell meeting both financially and spiritually as a *gwon-sa*, and how she was acknowledged by the others because she would volunteer loyally and faithfully without any complaints. She additionally mentioned that when there was a difference of opinion with another deacon, those who were leading figures of the church, including the reverend, stood by her side. She maintained a humble attitude during the interview and stated that these stories were not worthy of being documented, yet she seemed to be very proud of her lifelong service and sacrifice for the church. Especially, she mentioned that she was publicly recognized for her support in front of an audience when the poor student she had helped ultimately became a reverend and was invited to give a speech in the Sunday service. Additionally, unlike the other two interviewees who were appointed to the ‘*gwon-sa*’ position, Young-soon proudly mentioned that her church, being quite large in size, had elected her as a *gwon-sa* when she was in her 50s through voting.

So the church was a precious place in which the interviewees were publicly acknowledged. Ok-hyang and Heeja still regularly attend the same church that they co-founded 30 years ago. Because this church was separated from another church, these two people were crucial members for Rev. Han, who was the leader of the church. These two women proactively took responsibility of securing finances along with Rev. Han and Mrs. Han, and willingly took part in the building process of pulling down the previous building of the purchased land and constructing their new building. They had literally built a church from the scratch with their bare hands and this church, offering a stable environment for about 50 regular churchgoers, is currently a 5-story-building that has been remodeled over time. These women were appointed as a ‘*gwon-sa*’, after being credited for their contributions in establishing this church. The third interviewee, Young-soon attended a much bigger church where only a handful number of *gwon-sas* were elected annually through a very competitive and thoroughly carried out selection. She was quite proud of the days in which she actively participated by helping a poor student who happen to be a reverend in the end and volunteering for church activities without any hesitation.

4) Justifying Secularism

Firstly, Ok-hyang could accumulate economic resources for her children’s tuition and marriage funds through her network. Shi-heung-dong was the place where real estate business was just about to start

booming, and just in time one of her fellows had a child who was engaged in real estate business. At that time, people would just build without any residents while Ok-hyang occupied and signed a real estate contract in advance thanks to the help of her fellow. Consequently, she could sell her houses in doubled price, thereby bringing her a good profit. Actually, Ok-hyang had no financial leeway back then but could raise investment by favor of her fellow, Heeja. This was possible in Protestant community rather than other religious communities since protestant churches were the very places where unconditional trust could be established between church members. In protestant churches, the “love between brothers and sisters” is stressed in its doctrine, and believers follow the doctrine of their own accord.

Heeja explained how she and Ok-hyang became friends during her interview. As mentioned in the previous statement made by Ok-hyang, the so-called “foundation members” held the first service of church A on “27th December, 1987” in the bedroom of Rev. Han. As few more members joined this church, they held the service out in the living room where there was more space. One day, more exactly on “4th February, 1988”, in the middle of the service, Heeja got a message that her ill mother had abruptly fallen down. Ok-hyang cleaned Heeja’s house where the Heeja’s mother had vomited before being sent to the hospital. After this event, they formed an even closer relationship as Ok-hyang helped Heeja out with her mother’s funeral. They were almost like sisters. What is interesting is that the church was able to incorporate such sisterly affection into commercial activities, which marks a distinctive characteristic of Korean churches. According to Max Weber, who wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, protestant spirit had facilitated stoicism, which ultimately caused the outbreak of capitalism of the Western society. But in South Korean society, which was far from the concept of stoicism, acts of profit were unreservedly welcomed. Lending money to each other was even strongly encouraged since it was justified as a sign of love between the church members. Ok-hyang and Heeja have known each other as friends for 10 years at that time and they would never have loaned or borrowed money for and from each other if they had been in religious groups other than Christianity.

Young-soon also had a similar experience. She was married to her husband who came from “a house where there was no faith” and made it “the house full of faith” along with her husband and her brother-in-law. She didn’t preached Christianity to her first sister-in-law who was from a Buddhist family, but did so to her second sister-in-law by telling her that she was married to someone from a family of faith, so now it was mandatory for her to follow the family custom. The second sister-in-law initially refused to believe in God but ultimately decided to convert, and what’s unusual is the fact that the reason behind this conversion is quite secular. Young-soon said that her second sister-in-law compared the values and living standards of the two families –Young-soon’s who believed in Christianity and the first sister-in-law’s who believed in Buddhism. The second sister-in-law came to a conclusion that Young-soon’s, those who believed in Christianity, were better off not only morally but also financially compared to the other’s, and Young-soon’s husband, being the only one who graduated from college in his family, also supported such conclusion. That means that Young-soon was seen as an exemplary Christian just because she had a well-educated husband with a stable job and because she was financially secured. This played a big role in converting the second sister-in-law into an ardent believer. Young-soon also mentioned that two of her three sons have graduated from prestigious colleges after participating in many volunteering activities within the church as teenagers and they currently have professional occupations. It’s almost as if the success in the secular world was a result of passionate religious life.

So the three interviewees, in common, justified secularism by having carried out a variety of profitable activities within churches or by having evangelized someone with success in the secular world as motive. Ok-hyang, with the help of Heeja, was able to accumulate the wealth needed to pay for the tuition and wedding ceremonies of her children by relying on speculation in real estate, together with the other church members as well. As Heeja was engaged in real estate business at that time, she helped the fellow followers earn profit through speculative investment in real estate by lending them money without any interests once a trusting relationship was built. Young-soon differed

from the other two interviewees in that she did not engage in profitable activities, but she also related secular success to an exemplary religious life. She mentioned that the key of evangelizing her second sister-in-law was the fact that she was in a better economic circumstance compared to that of a Buddhist.

5) Adhesion of Patriarchy

These three interviewees stated that they were fully acknowledged by the church, but this is actually a double-edged sword. The acknowledgement was possible only because they showed their consent to the patriarchal structure of their own families by being immersed in their religious life, which eventually reproduced the existing order of male domination within the church. For example, Young-soon's husband was so conservative and old-fashioned that it was almost impossible for her to talk with other men at school reunions. Furthermore, her husband had a stroke when Young-soon was in her 60s and became paralyzed on the right side. Since then, Young-soon had to take care of her husband for about 16 years and this limited her time to enjoy any social life. How could this type of suppressive marriage be maintained until Young-soon's husband passed away? Hochschild (1988) offers an answer to this question with the phrase, "home becomes work, and work becomes home", which indicates that Young-soon had a free place to rest outside her home, which was the church. However, this place that offered liberalization from her domestic life was another space where patriarchal system was deeply embedded, a place where women were expected to obey their husbands unconditionally. Through this, we can confirm one of Chong(2006)'s findings that women who concentrated on church brought themselves right back to the gender regime already existing at home.

Ok-hyang, on the other hand, has a story that she fixed her husband's drinking problem in her early 50s. Her husband used to get drunk too much, and thus he was sent to hospital one day. "After the doctor examined him carefully, (...) he said that my husband should stop drinking unless he wanted to die in a year. When I was told that, I was like, 'thank you God, You blessed me.' How could he not help but quitting alcohol?" The difference between Korean traditional fortune-wishing faith and Protestant faith is that there is no obvious subject who actualizes the wishes in the former, but in the latter, the subject is as much obvious as the mighty God and the connection between Him and the believer is directly built. Therefore, the degree of self-confidence would be higher in Protestantism when prayers' wishes come true. The possibility of enhancing self-confidence through the protestant faith means that women lacked the ability of setting an agenda or forcing her husband to do something back then (Lee Hye-jeong 2010). Thus, women's self-esteem could be enhanced when their prayers were responded by God. However, the problem here is that the function of religion is much like that of opium since women relied unconditionally on its authority and since it concealed the existing power inequality. The avoidance of actual confrontation with her husband and the trial to solve his alcohol problem simply by praying and depending on God is nothing but a bypass strategy that is caused by the inability to directly stand up to her husband.

Reverend Han was formidable. He feared no one and if something was wrong, he would just yell at somebody. (...) (Did the Gwon-sas fear him?) Of course, Gwon-sas feared him more than anyone else. If we did something wrong, whether there are other deacons or not, he would just scold us severely. Then we would be as still as could be.

(Weren't there any male presbyter? Only female elders?) Yeah. Reverend Han had never appointed a presbyter. (Why not?) He said that there were no would-be-presbyters at all. He used to be so perceptive. (...) In my opinion, there were three would-be-presbyters. Deacon Han was one of them. He would be offered to pray in Sunday services on behalf of us by Reverend Han.

-First Interviewee Ok-hyang

It is interesting to figure out that Ok-hyang and Heeja were the foundation members, putting aside male deacons or presbyters. How could they earn Reverend Han's trust as companions in the beginning? Even though the number of male members did not reach even half that of female members, men monopolize decision-making right under the patriarchic structure of churches and women are excluded from it. Although women were the main foundation members, they could still not have right of decision-making. As mentioned above, Oh-hyang thought of great would-be-presbyters, but it could not change Reverend Han's decision at all.

Ok-hyang's assessment that Reverend Han is a very smart and decisive man is mentioned repeatedly in interview. It gives a feeling that she overestimated his ability beyond respecting his authority, and that is because she counted on his decision too much when separating from church B. Through this, it is possible to figure out that the ethic "women need to follow four men" of Korean Protestantism was still valid then, which was overallly accepted in the first arrival period of Korean Protestantism. Furthermore, it can be figured out that as Chong pointed out, one of the main characters Korean churches have is that there is no equality in reverends' authority. And according to Heeja, Rev. Han was so stubborn and strict that he didn't like the idea of employing someone else to build their church. Instead, he insisted on the entire church membership working together to build up the church from the very beginning. Heeja recalled the moment they would heap up dirt from the ground to build their own sanctuary as the moment when "*nobody said no, and everyone was always pleased*". Through this episode, it can be concluded that the ethics of following four men was still valid in the 1980s and that the authority protégé, the male reverend, was an influential part of Korean Protestantism.

However, the problem was that the empowerment of women did not develop in a critical and resistant way about the patriarchal structure of Korean churches. In fact, it was more of epoch-making under the consent of the existing system, which is more likely to support the patriarchal structure. It is also reflected in Ok-hyang's interview. She said, "*Seeing the young people preparing for the meals in church makes me feel pity of their husbands. They don't know even how to cook properly, and that's why their husbands go out to eat.*" Nowadays, being in charge of cooking in church is considered as sex discrimination to young women, but it is not applied to Ok-hyang. Serving as chairperson of the Women Missionary Association, she felt being publicly recognized and appreciated by cooking on Sundays outside home. This is why there exist conflicts between generations about the cooking duties in her church. The patriarchal values that confine women only to family responsibilities are still valid because of the strong influences of "Gwon-sas" like Ok-hyang.

Unlike the early expectation of the author that active participation in church might have incurred empowerment of women, the patriarchal values within the churches were still effective. This finding can be explained by the fact that women lacked the ability of setting an agenda or forcing their husband to do something and that the male dominant order became even more solidified within the church. Firstly, in order to explain the ability of setting an agenda, the examples of Ok-hyang and Heeja can be useful. While giving her statement, instead of being discontent of the fact that her husband mostly ignored her advices regarding his drinking, Ok-hyang was rather proud of the fact that God had responded to her prayers and helped him stop drinking. In fact, it was the recommendation made by the doctor that actually stopped her husband from drinking rather than her own efforts. And Young-soon chose lessons given by the church as the key of her successful caring of her seriously ill husband. Whenever she felt exhausted looking after him, who could barely talk due to the stroke, she would remind herself the phrase, "to women, why don't you who are much more better, just endure your husband?", which she had heard during the Sunday sermon. Through this, instead of taking a more critical perspective on the patience and obedience being unilaterally imposed on women, she simply accepted what was emphasized by the church; the hierarchy of gender and the discriminative gender roles.

Secondly, the existing values of conservatism and the patriarchal system, instead of showing the possibility of change, were further solidified. Ok-hyang and Heeja completely obeyed Rev. Han during the process of establishing their church even if he was not a reverend at that time and was in

the same age bracket as them as well. Thus, it can be inferred that the secret behind this absolute obedience must be lying on the fact that his gender is male. Of course they did explained how they had befriended Mr. and Mrs. Han, but on the account of the fact that these two women repeatedly mentioned how he was such a formidable man, it is clear that they were in a vertical relationship with him rather than an equal one.

5. Conclusions

Being distinguished is nothing special. Jesus made the sacrifice for the sin of the world and carried his cross. If you do just a part of it, you are royal to God. Spread mission, do the right thing, and do not shift a responsibility on to another's shoulders in church. You will be blessed when you regard it as your own duty.

-First Interviewee Ok-hyang

This paper analyzed three life histories of women who were committed to their churches their entire lives in order to find out how the South Korean women, especially the ones in leading positions of conservative churches, led their lives both at home and in church. First, all the three interviewees were given the opportunity to heal their inner self previously wounded by the patriarchal society through the process of conversion into Protestantism, and they were also justifying the injuries and problems derived from their patriarchal family within the boundaries of the patriarchal church. For example, Ok-hyang recited a phrase of the Romans that was about revenges, and this shows that, through her religiosity, she relieved the stress that came from the Korean War or the 2 years of harsh life with the in-laws. She also explained that her husband stopping his drinking habits was an act of God responding to her prayers, which clearly illustrates how the limitation of power for women who lacked the ability to set agendas and enforce behaviors was overlooked. For Heeja, although she had no specific explanations about her divorce, it is possible that she was hurt by patriarchy considering the fact that she had suffered from melena after her marriage and divorce took place. She failed to examine and critically view the fundamental problems that caused her illness. Rather, she simply accepted her recovery as a miraculous healing by God. Magical experiences, which cannot be proven scientifically, often appear in the Bible and functions as an index of how much the person's religiosity have matured, which would be the reason why Heeja is only focused on the experience itself. Lastly, the emotion of love and hate Young-soon had for her husband, who banned her from talking to other men at school reunions and whom she had to take care of for 16 years until his death, was resolved through the sermons delivered in church. Moreover, she could partially fulfill her unfinished dream of being a teacher by offering to serve at the Sunday school of her church and being acknowledged for her services.

Secondly, it is witnessed that the interviewees were engaged in profitable activities or considered their secular success as their level of religiosity. Ok-hyang and Heeja have accumulated some wealth through the real estate business, which was ultimately interpreted as a manifestation of their deep belief in Christianity. They think of their success as an act of God blessing them because they were such ardent believers of the religion. Young-soon, who did not personally engage in profitable activities, perceived herself as an exemplary Christian to her sister-in-law because she showed how one could acquire a bachelor's degree or a fancy job by staying faithful to God. The fact that she was a churchgoer who was in the middle class made other people envious of her status and such feelings ultimately converted them to Christianity, which was a glory for God. This whole situation clearly shows an absence of introspection and also the receptive attitude towards the content of the Bible without critical thought, especially towards the phrase that those who believe will be blessed with fortune.

Comparing this empirical finding to the theory of Max Weber, unlike the West where the internal tension regarding the meaning of salvation was settled by being ascetic, the means of honoring the God in Korea was by carrying out secular activities in this world. Based on the idea that

the meaning of religiosity could be found in actual religious practices (Ha Hong-gyu 2010), Korean Christians find no contradiction in church engaging in profit-making activities. That is, the growth of Korean churches was so simple and the church had become nothing but an iron cage lacking of the essential religious meanings inside. And it was the patriarchy that facilitated the process of Korean churches becoming this empty iron cage. That's because women who stood in the forefront of the expansion of church settled their internal conflicts caused by the patriarchal society by engaging themselves in secular activities initiated within the church. This is clearly the result of the women's attempt in getting rid of the discontent they had of their husbands by relying solely on God, and making up for the spiritual deficiency of the newly emerging middle-class while simultaneously justifying their economic activities.

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