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**Missionary Destinations and Diaporic
Destiny:
Spatiality of Korean/American Evangelism and
the Cell Church**

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The existing literature on immigrant Korean Protestant churches in North America typically addresses identity formation and dynamics of assimilation in the context of North American religious pluralism and multiculturalism, particularly focusing on the role of religion in “maintaining ethnicity” and “preserving traditions.” In this literature, the immigrant Korean church is depicted as an ethnic enclave, a bounded territorial enclosure that facilitates adjustment and transition into the mainstream. The argument presented in this paper reconceptualizes the immigrant Korean church as an “extroverted space,” with a profoundly “global sense of place.” First, I examine the articulation of divine destiny and theological conservatism in the production of a missionary designation called the “10/40 Window,” locating Korean and Korean American evangelicals in transnational and transdenominational movements pivoting around the U.S.-South Korea axis. Second, in a case study of an evangelical cell church, which employs multiple strategies to propagate across spatial scales, I underscore the extent to which the cell church reproduces hierarchical and patriarchal regimes of power. Finally, in foregrounding interconnectedness at all spatial scales, as illustrated by the cell church, this paper reconceptualizes the immigrant Korean church not as an enclosure, but as a power-laden field of both material and metaphorical practices that stretch far beyond the locality.

Introduction

I began this project with broadly formulated questions about the political geography of immigrant Korean Protestants in the United States, and primarily wanted to examine the political and ideological aspects of religion as it attempts to legitimate certain socio-economic configurations. Moving beyond the popular conception of the immigrant congregation as a “safe haven” from external social forces such as racism and xenophobia, I wanted to understand how the Protestant church was also becoming a major social force to be reckoned with.¹ In order to understand the ways in which theology, political ideology, and religious practices mutually inform and shape one another, I approached a local congregation as a site for ethnographic research. In part, this project began as an attempt to use what Michael Burawoy (1998, 1991) describes as the extended case method.

I am grateful to all the graduate fellows at the Institute for the Study of Social Change, especially Hamsa Murthy, Cid Martinez, Allison Pugh, Clem Lai, Jon Norman, and Nitasha Sharma for their comments, suggestions, and encouragements over the last two years. Many thanks to the ISSC, especially Rivka Polatnick, David Minkus, and Rachel Moran, and an extra thanks to Christine Trost for her meticulous copy editing and suggestions for revision at the final stage. This paper has benefited from presentations and feedback received at the annual meeting of Association of American Geographers (AAG) in 2004 and 2005; the Asian and Pacific Americans and Religion Research Initiative (APARRI) at Northwestern University in August 2004; the Center for Korean Studies Regional Seminar on the Korean Diaspora at UC Berkeley in May 2004; the Graduate Students Symposium on Korean Studies at UC Berkeley in April 2004; and the “New Metropolis: Social Change in California’s Cities” conference at UC Berkeley in April 2004. And last but not least, much love and gratitude to Jennifer Chun and Puca and George who make everything possible.

¹ For example, conservative Korean pastors, almost all of them male, have lately become a highly visible bloc in the political arenas of several denominations. In 2000, arguing that “homosexual partnerships are incompatible with God’s created order,” as “clearly and unambiguously written in the Scripture,” the National Korean Presbyterian Council, representing 350 Korean-American congregations and over 37,000 individuals in the Presbyterian Church (USA), sent every PCUSA congregation a letter urging them to support an amendment prohibiting Presbyterian ministers from conducting marriage-like ceremonies for same-sex couples. The letter read, in part: “We give thanks to this denomination that sent missionaries whose shed blood and broken bodies stirred our sleeping forefathers in the Land of Morning Calm (Korea) to call the great name of Jesus Christ in their fervent early morning prayer. In recent decades, many Koreans came to this blessed land with the legacy of Presbyterian Church and built churches and worshipped the true and only God wherever they settled... [If same-sex unions were allowed, the] Korean-American constituency, which has experienced 50% increase in membership and 90% increase in per capita during the last ten years, will see a devastating blow in its membership growth because Koreans, particularly young people, are conservative and evangelical in their faith and will turn away from our denomination. In a word, the blessing of same-sex union would bring our demise as a church of Jesus Christ” (Shim, Sik, and Lee, 2004). The conservatism expressed by the Korean Presbyterian Council is not limited to the leadership. The Presbyterian Panel Study of 1997-99 found that 90 percent of Korean Presbyterians “highly disapproved” same-sex partnership or lifestyle, compared to the relatively lower proportions of African American and White Americans (about 50%) who “highly disapproved” of an openly gay or lesbian lifestyle (Kim and Kim 2001, “The Presbyterian Panel: Listening to Presbyterians” 1998).

Heeding the assertion that religious belief “is not merely or even primarily an inner conviction, but the Church as an institution and its rituals (prayer, baptism, confirmation, confession...) which, far from being a mere secondary externalization of the inner belief, stand for *the very mechanisms that generate it*” (Zizek 1994, 12), I examined the historically specific constellation of forces that gave rise to the conservative Korean evangelical Church in a global context, explicating its shape and form from a complex web of rhetoric and practice. How do we understand the relationship between the evangelical perception of the “world in crisis” and the historical conditions that produced Korean evangelicals’ sense of divine destiny—being the “Choson people”?² What theological doctrines and ideological apparatuses produce and reproduce the assertion that Koreans would be the best-qualified successors to replace White Americans in world evangelism? How do immigrant Koreans, whose survival purportedly depends on socio-economic arrangements in ethnic enclaves, assert their subject position as vital and central on local, denominational, national, and global scales? To paraphrase Michael Watts, I ask, in part, how is the “outside” of the evangelical church an integral part of the constitution and construction of its “inside” and vice versa (Watts 1992)?

As a participant observer from August to December 2003, I examined the social practices and institutional arrangements of the Korean Evangelical Church (KEC)³ in Northern California, regularly attending Sunday services—sometimes three or four redundant but separate services on one day—as well as Wednesday night services, special prayer/revival services, leadership trainings, cell group meetings, missionary training workshops, special events, and other occasions that allowed me to interact with members of the congregation. Ethnographic research and several follow-up interviews that I conducted at this church informed this paper, but are not

² Christians often use this pun to link the Biblical Israel to the people of the Choson (Yi) Dynasty, which preceded the modern nation states of South and North Korea.

³ Korean Evangelical Church (KEC) is a pseudonym, as are all proper names used in this case study.

explicitly used here. For the purposes of this paper, I draw heavily from primary sources such as church and other organizational documents, local newspapers, online writings, and audio-taped sermons freely distributed at churches and businesses.⁴ In turning observations into explanations and data into theory, I engage with numerous secondary sources in fields ranging from sociology of religion and theology of mission (missiology) to cultural geography and feminist postcolonial theory.

I should note that this paper is neither about Christianity as a whole, nor about Korean evangelicals as individuals. Instead, I am interested in the ideological motors of Korean Christianity, and in particular, two aspects of conservative, mission-oriented evangelicalism: as a transdenominational movement built around congregations and networks of parachurch agencies, and as a transnational social movement pivoting around the South Korea-U.S. axis (Marsden 1984, xiv). For the purposes of this paper, I define “evangelical Christian” as a person who “has had a born again conversion, accepts Jesus as his or her personal Savior, believes that the Scriptures are the authority for all doctrine, and feels an urgent duty to spread the faith.” (“Who Are the Evangelicals?” 1978, 42)⁵

In the first section of this paper, I introduce the evangelical worldview, discussing the notion of “Global Christian Leadership” as articulated by Paul Choi, a South Korean leader in world evangelism. Choi’s parachurch mission agency, InterCP, specializes in a missionary designation called the “10/40 Window,” which has particular implications for Korean evangelicals. I then connect the theological conservatism reflected in the production of the “10/40 Window” to the Korean evangelicals’ relationship to the New World Order. The second

⁴ Since all of these audio cassettes, CDs, and organizational publications were freely distributed at Sunday services and public meetings, I consider them to be in the “public domain.”

⁵ Christian Smith (1998) adds, “Evangelicalism today is composed of Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Independents, Lutherans, Anabaptists, Restorationists, Congregationalists, Holiness Christians, and Episcopalians” (13).

section of this paper presents a case study of a Korean American “cell church,” an organizational model widely employed by Korean Protestant churches in both South Korea and the United States, including my case study, the Korean Evangelical Church (KEC). I discuss the rhetoric of evangelization and propagation across spatial scales, underscoring the extent to which KEC’s cell church reproduces hierarchical and patriarchal regimes of power. Finally, in reviewing and unpacking the theoretical implications of an existing literature that deals with the Korean immigrant church as an ethnic enclave, I propose a re-conceptualization of the space of the enclave. In foregrounding interconnectedness at all spatial scales—the “10/40 Window,” U.S. global empire, the ethnic enclave, the congregation and its “cells”—this paper examines place not as an enclosure, but as “a subset of the interactions which constitute space, a local articulation within a wider whole” (Massey 1994, 4).

Geography of Missions

The final curtains have closed on the age of world mission led by the Western Christian Church, including the American Church. In other words, the age of our White brothers managing the world in the name of Christ has come to an end. At this time, the non-Western church, especially the Korean church is more important than ever. The West and the non-West will long suffer from the conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, and the Korean Church, since we are pro-West yet Asian, will play an important role as the peace maker... The “Global Christian Leadership” has been passed on to the Korean church.

Paul Choi (2004b), Director of International Cooperation Mission Agency (my translation).

“Global Christian Leadership”

This commentary by Paul Choi, a missionary leader in South Korea, reveals three commonplace propositions about Koreans and world evangelism. First, it is an explicit acknowledgement of the historical legacy of Western Christianity and the “old” colonial world

order, in which Europeans and Americans “managed the world.”⁶ Choi’s phrase “our White brothers” clearly aligns Korea with the West, as opposed to the “non-West,” suggesting the significance of the U.S.-Korea alliance.

Choi’s second proposition posits that the “final curtains” have closed on the age of empire, and a new chapter of history lies ahead. The belief that the Christian world is currently undergoing significant change is echoed by many theologians and religious historians who describe the “great transformation,” major “paradigm shift,” or “crisis” facing Christianity today (Raiser 1991, Wallis 2002, Walls 1996, Wickeri 2003). While the Western Church continues to exert financial, intellectual, and institutional dominance over Christianity worldwide, the growth and expansion of evangelical Christianity is simply not an exclusively Western phenomenon. In part this is due to demographic changes in population. *The World Christian Encyclopedia* speculates that 83 percent of the world’s evangelicals could be in the non-Western world by the year 2025 (Barrett and Johnson 2001, Jenkins 2002).

Put differently, the center of gravity of the Christian world is said to be shifting to the non-Western world, or the Global South. As the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti puts it, “the centers of the church’s universality [are] no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila” (Bediako 1995, 154). Conspicuously missing from this list of emerging global Christian cities is the South Korean capital of Seoul, where we can find ten of the eleven largest mega-congregations in the world today, including the largest Pentecostal congregation, the largest Presbyterian congregation, the

⁶ The assertion that Western Christians “managed the world” can be found in many speeches and writings from the height of American evangelical growth at the turn of the nineteenth century. For instance, Lewis French Stearns, a Congregational theologian proclaimed in 1890, “Today Christianity is the power which is moulding the destinies of the world. The Christian nations are in the ascendancy, the old promise is being fulfilled; the followers of the true God are inheriting the world” (quoted in Smith 1998, 3).

largest Methodist congregation, and the second-largest Baptist congregation (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001).

Finally, Choi describes Korean Christians as successors of the Western Christian church, inheriting the managerial and missionary legacy of Western Christianity. Depicted by Choi as both non-Western and pro-West, Korea occupies an intermediary position between the West and the rest in this geographical imaginary. Interpreting the in-between position as a strategic advantage, Choi urges Koreans to mediate as “peace makers” in the continuing conflict between the Old Testament’s Isaac and Ishmael—Abraham’s warring sons, who are said to be the respective progenitors of Judeo-Christianity and Islam.

Geography of Missions—The 10/40 Window

Having moved from being a “missionary-receiving” church to an aggressive “missionary-sending” church, South Korea now ranks second in the world as sender of missionaries, behind only the United States, with almost 11,000 long-term and short-term Korean missionaries working in 156 countries as of the year 2001 (Park 2002, Johnstone and Mandryk 2001). Out of this growing number of missionaries, almost half of Korean missionaries are deployed to an area called the “10/40 Window” (see Figure 1), stretching from ten degrees to forty degrees north of the Equator, and covering nearly half of the world’s population and 62 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, West to Central Asia, and East Asia. Ninety-seven percent of those least touched by the Gospel are said to be concentrated in this area (Aikman 1995).

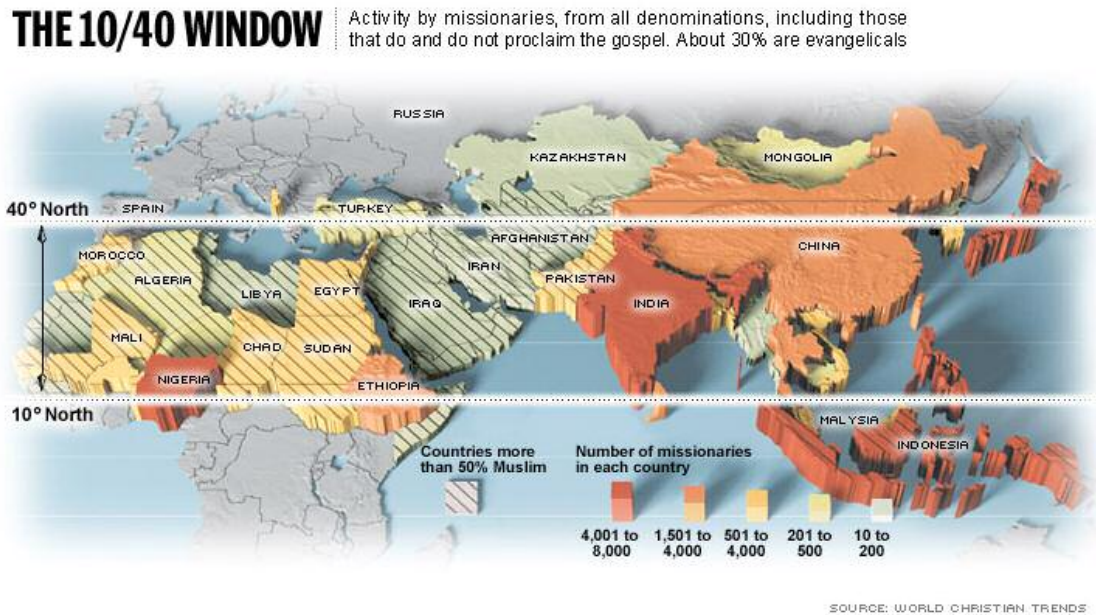


Figure 1. “The 10/40 Window,” from *Time Magazine* website (June 30, 2003).

The development of the 10/40 Window as a distinct geographical area and a missionary target can be traced to a worldwide conversion movement called the AD2000 & Beyond. Funded mostly by American evangelical groups, the AD2000 movement was launched in 1987 by a Chinese American evangelical leader named Thomas Wang. Wang convened the first meeting in Singapore in 1989, followed by a much larger second meeting in Seoul in 1995, which drew almost 4,000 Christian leaders from 186 countries.⁷ With its purpose “to develop strategies and plans to achieve Christian evangelization of the entire world by the year 2000,” the AD2000 movement was designed to set the stage for a systematic, sophisticated and self-

⁷ Formerly the international director of the Lausanne Committee, Thomas Wang currently heads the Great Commission Center International in San Francisco, and organized several protests against same-sex marriage. Identified as a member of the Chinese Ministerial Committee, a missionary group based in Mountain View, California, Wang told the *San Jose Mercury News*: “We will not stand by to watch biblical marriage be destroyed by a radical agenda” (Ostrom 2004). Wang reportedly also told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that “legalizing same-sex marriage would eventually lead to polygamy, multipartner marriage and incest” (Torassa 2004).

sustaining “harvest” of un-evangelized people throughout the world (Aikman 1995).⁸ Extending Pope John Paul II’s 1987 proclamation of 1990 to 2000 as the “universal decade of evangelization, in order to put the Good News of salvation in the hands of every person before the dawn of the Third Millennium,” the Seoul gathering determined that the 10/40 Window was to be the primary focus for evangelism for the coming decade.⁹ The Seoul conference’s International Director Luis Bush said in his welcome speech, “The core of the spiritually and materially neediest people of our world live in a rectangular-shaped window. [It] is where humanity suffers more than any other region in the earth... due to the historic bondages and alliances made with Satan himself” (Bush 1995).

The 10/40 Window, of course, is precisely the area where we find the entire “Axis of Evil” including Iran, Iraq and North Korea; U.S.-occupied Afghanistan and Iraq; the majority of the world’s Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist populations; almost two million ethnic Koreans living in China; and half a million ethnic Koreans in the Commonwealth of Independent States including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In addition to references to Satanic bondages¹⁰, the architects of the 10/40 Window draw an explicit connection between Christianity and material prosperity. For instance, Bush writes, “The poor are lost, and the lost are poor” (Bush 1996).

In the 10/40 Window, the *objects* of mission are at a standstill—poor and un-evangelized. In contrast, Korean evangelicals are mobile subjects, traveling breezily in and out of the 10/40 Window, enabled in part by the newly gained prosperity of South Korea. In fact, as if equating prosperity with Christianity, the writers of the evangelical almanac *Operation World* maintain

⁸ This is a quote from the media backgrounder for AD2000 and Beyond Movement, written by David Aikman, former Senior Correspondent for *Time Magazine*, and author of *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (2003) and *A Man of Faith: The Spiritual Journey of George W. Bush* (2004). This material was distributed at the 1995 Global Consultation On World Evangelization (GCOWE) meeting in Seoul, where the convening theme was “A church for every people and the Gospel for every person by AD2000.”

⁹ The Pope is quoted in Coote 2000.

¹⁰ For instance, Bush (1995) writes, “Persia of old is Iran of today, and sits in the center of The 10/40 Window, still a stronghold of Satan.”

that South Korea is the only “evangelized” nation in the 10/40 Window. They explain, “[The Korean church] was founded on sound indigenous principles, blessed with a succession of revivals, refined by persecutions and is now foremost in the world for vision” (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001, 387). Timothy Park, theologian and Director of Korean Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Southern California, writes that, “unlike western missionaries who launched their missionary work in abundance and with the political power of their sending countries, Korean missionaries worked from a weaker position. It was a new missionary movement by Asians among Asians” (Park 2002, 113). While the United States still dominates with about 70,000 missionaries worldwide, South Korean missionaries’ rate of growth remains phenomenal. (See Figure 2.)

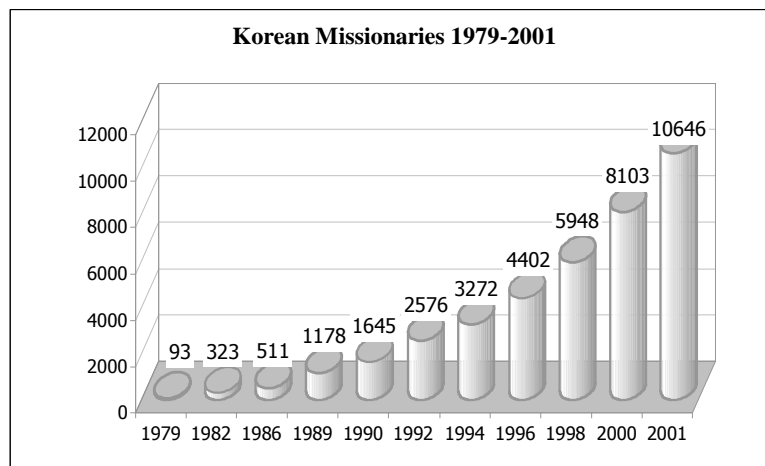


Figure 2. “Korean Missionaries 1979-2001,” from the Korean Research Institute for Mission (KRIM).

Evangelicals like Park, and Paul Choi, whose “Global Christian Leadership” commentary opened this paper, articulate a distinct sense of national destiny for Korean missionary projects, similar to the doctrine of manifest destiny behind American expansionism. They depict Koreans as a chosen people, delivered from Communism, indebted to America, and now basking in the

glow of economic prosperity. By extension, they assert a diasporic destiny for Korean Americans.

In October 2003, Choi visited KEC, where I was conducting research, and delivered a guest sermon. He introduced himself as the first Asian missionary to work in Turkey in the early 1980s, at a time when there were only twenty Christians among the total population of almost 65 million. Presenting an unusual world geography, Choi described Turks as the long-lost blood relatives of Koreans, who had settled in the westernmost peninsula of Asia while Koreans occupied the easternmost peninsula of Asia. Because of these ancient ties, Choi explained, Korean missionaries may be able to identify with Turks. Choi also asserted that Korean missionaries could relate better than American missionaries to people throughout Asia—because as a people, Koreans have also experienced the trauma of war, poverty and political oppression—historical difficulties now overcome.¹¹

Choi told the congregants at KEC that Koreans must be grateful to white American missionaries who have brought the Gospel to Korea, and asserted that Koreans can do even better—by reclaiming the Silk Road, as opposed to following the costal line.¹² An Elder at KEC demonstrated this to me by pointing to a map on the wall, sweeping his hand westward from Korea on the east to Israel on the west. “We will follow the Silk Road through the 10/40 Window,” he said as his finger traced the red horizontal line across Asia, “and we will deliver

¹¹ During the 2003 World Cup Soccer games held in Seoul, Turkey catapulted into the status of South Korea’s “blood brother nation” for two reasons. One was the dubious claim that Choi also makes here—that Turks and Koreans descend from the same ethno-linguistic heritage and thus are “genetically” related. The second reason was historical—during the Korean War (1950-1953), Turkey had deployed nearly 15,000 troops, and was the third largest number among all U.N. nations that had sent troops to fight alongside South Korea. For a short time, there was a boom in all things related to Turkey, and major department stores and bookstores prominently displayed all sorts of Turkey-related paraphernalia. During his sermon at KEC, Choi also talked about Chechnyans and Kurds as two groups of people with whom Koreans share a common experience of marginalization and dispossession, colonization and state repression.

¹² Paul Choi, “The Lord’s Vision,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 12 October, 2003 (my translation). A variation of this theme is discussed by Luis Bush, a leader of the AD2000 movement, and Ralph Winter, a famous evangelist. Winter describes three historical stages in missionary targets: first, the coastlands of the world in the 19th Century; second, the interiors of the continents in the 20th Century; and third, the emphasis on the “unreached people” defined as “the two billion people in the world who have never heard of Jesus as Savior, and are not within reach of Christians among their own people” (Bush 2002). (Bush proposes adding the focus on the 10/40 Window as the fourth stage for the new century.)

the Gospel to the unreached people. Ultimately, when Jerusalem returns to Jesus, when Jews finally accept the Gospel, then we will know that the time has come for the Second Coming of Christ our Savior.” The map, produced by Choi’s agency, InterCo-op, was titled *Swift World Evangelization: To the Last Frontier!* (See Figures 3 and 4.)



Figure 3. Photograph of *Swift World Evangelization: To the Last Frontier!* on display at KEC. Map by InterCo-op.



Figure 4. Detail of *Swift World Evangelization*, highlighting the “Turkic Window” of the 10/40 Window. The red line that cuts across is the Silk Road.

Theological Conservatism and the New World Order

Sociologist Pyong Gap Min faults the general “direction of Asian American studies” for the lack of research on Asian immigrants’ religion. Agreeing with David Yoo, another noted scholar of Asian American religion, Min claims that the “bias against religion as an opiate of the masses and [the scholars’] postcolonial association of Asian Christianity with Western missionary activities” have resulted in the neglect of the study of Asian American religious experiences (Min 2002a, 6). I could not disagree more with Min’s argument that “Marxist, postcolonial, postmodernist, and feminist theories” have prevented “studying religion at face value” (Min 2002a, 6). Rather, I believe these theoretical directions are precisely what make the study of religion more fascinating and relevant today. If anything, we could use *more* critical

geography and postcolonial theologies to examine the significance of the conservatism of Korean churches.

Using data from the Presbyterian Panel Study of 1997-99 and the Racial Ethnic Presbyterian Panel Studies, Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim (2001) have found that 87 percent of Korean Americans received the most conservative score possible on theological questions about the material existence of heaven and hell, the existence of the Devil (Satan), immaculate conception of Jesus, and Christ's return to earth on Judgment Day. They report that theological conservatism among Korean Americans is "basically identical to evangelicalism"—the majority of Korean Americans prioritized activities dealing with personal relations with God, such as praying and attending church, rather than "actively seeking social and economic justice" (86). A similar argument could be made about the character of South Korean evangelicals as well.

Some have challenged the evangelical majority. At the 1991 assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Canberra, Australia, a South Korean feminist liberation theologian Hyun Kyung Chung rendered a dramatic shamanistic evocation in her opening address and called upon the spirits of those oppressed and murdered throughout history—including women burnt in witch hunts, victims of the Crusades, those killed in the Hiroshima bombing, as well as the spirits of indigenous people killed in the Christian colonial genocide.¹³ Chung was subsequently accused of syncretism, paganism, and heresy by conservative critics who saw the WCC as having fallen under the influence of radical feminists, lesbians, Communists, and worse. In the theologian J. N. J. Kritzing's typology, Chung represents the "liberationist/activist" approach as opposed to the "conversionist/evangelistic approach" on the continuum of Protestant missions (Kritzing 2003, 21). She is among the minority of

¹³ Chung declared in her plenary address at a 1993 conference called "Re-Imagining God, the Community and the Church" in Minneapolis, Minnesota: "The Christian church has been very patriarchal. That is why we are together, in order to destroy the patriarchal idolatry of Christianity." (For one observer's account of Chung's address, see Martin 1994).

ecumenical Christians, since “Korean Christianity today, both Protestant and Catholic, is basically conservative, concerned with maintaining social and political stability” (Clark 1986, xii).¹⁴ A fuller discussion of Kritzinger’s liberationist/conversionist continuum or David Bosch’s better-known ecumenical/evangelical polarity is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should suffice to say that conservative Korean theologians in the post-Korean War era stood alongside conservative, conversionist American theologians like William Carey and Andrew Fuller (Gaines 1966, Kim 1970, Zahrnt 1963, 1969) in part because of their staunch anti-Communist stance.

One South Korean ecumenical theologian comments on Korean missionaries:

The foreign missionary work of the Korean churches concentrates on propagating one’s own denomination and displaying the material prosperity of the Korean churches. It thus functions in a similar way to the market expansion abroad of business corporations, from a land that has only recently left behind the status of a developing country... This world mission, which very aggressively rejects other religions and cultures, resembles the business ethic which attempts to maximize profits with no consideration for other cultures, human rights or the environment. Korean foreign missionary work is criticized by partner churches, particularly in the third world, as being a mission driven by money instead of the *missio Dei* [mission of God] (Chai 2003, 543).

Evangelicals typically place Christian conversion in a developmental narrative, where market democracy and increased participation in global capitalism emerge as associated goals. A growing number of theologians—including Edgar W. Conrad (2002), Pui-lan Kwok (2002), Letty M. Russell (2003), and Philip L. Wickeri (2003)—engage with the “decolonization of

¹⁴ Clark wrote this in 1986, but the same could be said today. The declining ecumenical movement in South Korea does not attract as large numbers as the conservative evangelical churches. On the ecumenical end, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) works in partnership with ecumenical organizations such as the WCC and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and in solidarity and cooperation with non-Christian faith traditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the NCCCK had focused on missions with the urban poor, farmers and workers, addressing issues of human rights and democracy and fighting against the military dictatorship. Representing conservative evangelicals, the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), founded in 1989, reflects the conservative end of the political spectrum. The most visible megachurches in South Korea today, including the Yongsong Presbyterian Church and the Yoido Full Gospel Church, are theologically and politically conservative. The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, a member of the CCK, was founded by Reverend David Yonggi Cho, who helped form the Korean Christian Party in 2004, a conservative political party seeking to affect public policy according to a Christian worldview. Cho has been a frequent speaker at anti-communist, pro-American protest rallies, and is frequently quoted for expressing Korean indebtedness to American missionaries, and urging South Korean military support for U.S. war and occupation of Iraq.

Christianity,” and they draw from feminist and postcolonial theories produced by scholars such as Rey Chow (1992), Anne McClintock (1995) and Ann Stoler (1991). Wickeri (2003), for instance, writes that “churches involved in global mission can choose either to ride the coat tails of empire or criticize the project of empire, but we cannot remain neutral” (17). Ecumenical theologians acknowledge that colonialism and imperialism have been the vehicles for the presentation of the Gospel, and criticize the new American “theology of empire” (Green 2001, Horsley 2003, Snider and Hickey 2003, Wallis 2002).

In particular, I rely upon Stan Skreslet’s (1997) insightful “Emerging Trends in a Shifting Global Context: Mission in the New World Order,” for thinking about Korean evangelicals’ relationship to the changes in the landscape of world Christianity. Writing in 1997, before the latest developments of the unilateral “War on Terrorism” and military attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq, Skreslet outlines six different ways that the new world order has been characterized: 1) the emergence of a single superpower following the collapse of the Soviet Union; 2) the promise of multilateral global governance, reflected in the United Nation’s multinational *peace-making* force; 3) culture wars and the conflict between the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic East, popularized by Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis; 4) the idea of tribalization, or the dissolution of sovereign nation-states and the rise of ethnic and religious tensions; 5) the development of transnational networks of NGOs and the rise of the civil society in the global arena; and finally, 6) the end of secularism, and the evidence of a religiously colored new world order.

Skreslet’s argument is that these great changes in the religious landscape of the world are matched by major shifts in missiological theory and practice. The local patterns of Korean church growth and development, in other words, as well as the ways in which conservative

evangelicals mobilize for projects of world evangelism in the post-Cold War era, are new developments in Christian church and missionary history. Conservative evangelical interests appear to be closely aligned with the interests of transnational capital and empire, and particularly because of the overrepresentation of conservative evangelicals among Korean immigrants in the United States, this ideological alignment has tremendous local and transnational implications. Feminist and postcolonial criticisms have much to offer in the study of Korean American evangelical practices, especially their emphasis on world evangelization.

Cell Church Under the Microscope

The Korean Evangelical Church (KEC)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Christian church is at the heart of Korean American life (Kim 1981, Kim 1997, Kim and Kim 2001, Kwon 1997, Min and Kim 2002, Yoo 1999). Many scholars acknowledge that the Christian church has historically played a major role in promoting and facilitating immigration to the United States.¹⁵ Thus, to understand the Korean Christian Church in the United States is to understand the immigration dynamics of an overwhelming majority of Korean Americans, since over 70 percent self-identify as Christians, and are heavily concentrated in the conservative evangelical traditions of Protestantism.

The Korean Evangelical Church (KEC) is one of the largest Korean congregations in Northern California, having grown significantly in the last ten years and reaching almost one

¹⁵ Some scholars have noted the relative ease of obtaining visas for Korean immigrant religious workers, defined by the U.S. Department of State as “a person who for the past two years has been a member of a religious denomination which has a bona fide nonprofit, religious organization in the United States; and who has been carrying on the vocation, professional work, or other work described below, continuously for the past two years; and seeks to enter the U.S. to work,” for instance, as a minister. However, the number of Korean immigrant religious workers and the immediate relatives they sponsored, especially in the context of overall immigration patterns, remains unexamined.

thousand adult members by the year 2003.¹⁶ The church has outgrown the building that it currently occupies, which has resulted in the division of its Sunday worship into several consecutive and redundant services instead of a single large service. And they expect to grow. According to a deaconess of the church, KEC is currently seeking a new site with a multi-million dollar construction budget.

As an affiliate of the Korean Presbyterian Church, an independent national denomination that is distinct from the larger, mainline Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), KEC is located in the Presbyterian majority among Korean American Protestants, albeit in the smaller and more decentralized Korean Presbyterian denomination. It is among the older Korean churches in the area, and the pastor frequently appears in local newspapers in his capacity as a community leader. He also appears as a guest lecturer for parachurch organizations like the Oakland-based Spiritual Awakening Mission (SAM), which specializes in medical missions to North Korea and to North Korean refugees in China, and the San Jose program of the Father School Mission Center, a South Korea-based group that organizes several regional conferences for immigrant Korean men throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and China.

The institutional features of KEC appear remarkably similar to many other immigrant Protestant Korean congregations, judging from anecdotal evidence as well as ethnographic studies of well-known Korean churches in Atlanta and Houston (Kim 1997, Kwon 1997) and studies of second-generation Korean Americans in churches located in Boston and Chicago (Chai 1998, Chong 1998).¹⁷ Like these other churches, KEC is hierarchical and patriarchal in

¹⁶ From KEC's website.

¹⁷ Interestingly, with the possible exception of Chong, all ethnographies are done by self-identified Christian women sociologists, studying the church to which they already belong—each emphasizing their insider-outsider status. Although as a child I was raised as a churchgoer in a Christian family and feel well versed in the formalities of the Korean church, I no longer attend church. Thus, my position simultaneously as an “insider” (immigrant Korean) and an “outsider” (non-Christian and non-member) prompted many occasions, involving varying degrees of discomfort, when I became the object of recruitment and a target for evangelism.

structure, with the male pastor as the head of the organization, supported by an all-male Council of Elders, who supervise deacons and deaconesses under them.¹⁸

Several sub-groups co-exist within the congregation, divided most prominently along the lines of preferred language, age and gender; these include the women's ministry, children's ministry, and English Ministry. Services are held in three distinct clusters demarcated by both age and language—about eighty percent of the congregation belongs to the Korean-language Adults Ministry (KM), and the other twenty percent are evenly divided between the second-generation English Ministry (EM) and the Korean-language Young Adults Ministry (KYM). The Children's Ministry was not a part of this research. Each ministry maintains its own leadership structure, a distinct social circle, and a set of member activities. While the predominantly immigrant KYM is generally subsumed under the KM, the mostly Korean American EM functions almost as a separate church, with its own name, its own pastor, and a separate budget.

From Microbes to the Globe: The Cell Church Revolution

Like many other Korean immigrant churches, the KEC has operated for several years as a “cell church,” a model described by some as a “church without walls” (Green 2002). In short, the “cell church” disperses churchgoers into a network of small groups or “cells” that nonetheless maintain ties to the body of the “host church.” In addition to meeting on their own during the week, cell groups take turns volunteering on Sundays, by handing out programs and pamphlets before the service or setting up refreshments for post-service fellowship.

¹⁸ Found only in Korean denominations, deaconesses are female deacons, usually over the age of 50. As women are not permitted to become Elders, this is the highest obtainable title for women—except the title as the wife of the pastor, of course.

The biological metaphors are explicit and obvious. By definition, cells are the smallest membrane-bound biological units capable of replication that can function cooperatively as part of a tissue or an organ, or they can function independently as free-living microorganisms. Viruses, an example of a single-cell microbe, can enter host cells to reproduce, often wreaking havoc and causing disease.

Interestingly, one of the ministries at KEC operated an active website, the address of which contains the phrase “Jesus Virus.” Cell group members do not see themselves as a virus causing trouble in their own multi-cell host church, of course. Instead, they see their role as contagions or carriers of the Gospel out into the world. The EM pastor explained that “Jesus is the head, the church His body, and the cells are parts of the whole body.” Or, as Moses Tay (2002) writes,

Basically, in the philosophy of cell church, the cell *is* the church, which is radically different from a church with cells... In the cell church structure, learning takes place through experiences in the cells. Leaders are chosen and equipped through the cells, and every member must be mobilized through the cells. The clear locus is evangelism of the community by the cell through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (8-9).

I was surprised to discover that the majority of the sixty-four cells that make up the body of KEC have *geographical names* such as “Hungary Cell” “and “Uganda Cell,” while some also have Biblical names such as “Hannah” and “Samuel” (see Table 1).

North & South Korea	Europe / North America	“Non-West”	Thematic & Other
An-yang (SK)	Germany	Asian	Children
Chung-chong Province 1 (SK)	Hungary	China	Gold Mountains
Chung-chong Province 2 (SK)	San Jose, California	Dominican Republic	Hannah
Gumgang Mountains (NK)	Spain	Egypt	Hebrew
Han-bat (Daejeon, SK)		India	Mil-al (disabled ministry)
Huk-ryong River		Japan	New Light
Ik-san		Laos	New River
Island Village		Mexico	Samuel
North Korea		Morocco	Shepherd C.
Pyongyang		Papua New Guinea	Shepherd K.
Seoul		Philippines	Valerie
		Russia	Young Lamb 1
		Rwanda	Young Lamb 2
		Tanzania	Soldiers
		Thailand	
		Tunisia	
		Uganda	
		Vietnam	
		Yon-byon (China)	
		Zambia	
Total 11	Total 4	Total 20	Total 14

Table 1. Cell group names at KEC (November 2003). Total 49 cells.

These geographical designations connect the local cell directly to a long-term, residential Korean missionary working in that part of the world. The cell structure is designed to mobilize financial and spiritual support for the missionary, and to encourage short-term mission trips to their namesake.¹⁹ Since all of the supported missionaries are dispatched not from KEC but from other congregations or mission agencies, KEC is not solely responsible for supporting the

¹⁹ This arrangement is consistent with the traditionally conversionist “mission station approach” in which the North American church, at the core, financially sustained and administratively controlled missionary churches at the periphery, i.e. in the Global South. Especially common throughout Africa, this model prioritized proselytization over indigenous church growth. According to Kritzinger, (2003) those at the liberationist end of the continuum would be more likely to emphasize “the healing of social rifts and structural divisions, flowing from economic exploitation and political or cultural oppression... healing is here seen not merely as the absence of disease, but as the presence of comprehensive well-being, in the cultural, economic, social, and political sense of the word” (29). Also see McGavran 1963, 1974, 1979, 1958, McGavran and Wagner 1990, Priest 1994.

missionary. Rather, KEC works as one of many actors embedded in an extensive transnational network of world evangelism.

The cell church promotes aggressive growth and reproduction by cultivating small group meetings outside the church. However, it is important to note that the cell church doesn't always operate or succeed as intended. Every cell is expected to grow in size by evangelism, and to divide and multiply within a certain time frame. If a cell fails to propagate, it is deemed unhealthy and may be cut off. During the course of my research, I found that the majority of the cells did not in fact meet regularly. A handful of exemplary cells were always visible in volunteer or leadership roles, while other cells lay inactive.

In December 2003, during the last month of my ethnographic research, Reverend Shin²⁰ and the Council of Elders announced that too many cells were dead or dormant, and that it was time for major re-organization. The Uganda cell, for instance, had woefully neglected its obligation to the missionary in Uganda. The reorganization plan included the following items: First, the church will vacate all cells and repopulate from the top, starting with the pastor and the elders. Everyone in the congregation was instructed to choose a new cell group (flock) and a new cell group leader (shepherd) from a roster that listed the leader's name, gender, age, and number of children in the household. Although he acknowledged that it would be difficult to dissociate from friends and peers in the cell group, Reverend Shin urged everyone to let go of the past and to look ahead to a new beginning.

The second part of the reorganization plan was to intensify the "shepherd training" curriculum and institute mechanisms to supervise the cells more closely. At one such "shepherd training," Reverend Shin gave instructions in painstaking detail, recommending that meals be served *before* the cell meeting, not afterwards. He even pointed out that certain side dishes

²⁰ Reverend Shin is a pseudonym.

(*banchan*) are more suitable for simple meals than others, and urged women—more specifically, housewives—not to feel compelled to wash the dishes right after eating. Rather, he suggested, they should wait until *after* the cell meeting ends in order not to delay or disrupt the cell group meeting. In this revised structure, the Council of Elders would supervise the cell leaders, and report directly to the pastor.

The most controversial decision was to cancel the traditional Wednesday night service, which is often used for short-term or visiting missionary report-back sessions. There were audible gasps and grumbling when Reverend Shin announced this at a shepherd training, and one man raised his hand to question the decision. While appearing to be open to suggestions, Reverend Shin sternly reiterated that the cancellation of the Wednesday service was a necessary measure as the church moves towards something called the “G-12” variation of the cell church model. He repeated, “To help something live, we must help something die,” and insisted that it is impossible to maintain the traditional church while transitioning into the G-12 house church.

By most accounts, it was David Yonggi Cho who pioneered the first generation of cell churches (Pak 2003). Cho is a world-renowned pastor presiding over the world’s largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, which currently boasts 250,000 in worship attendance every Sunday. The model has since been adapted by Lawrence Khong of the Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) in Singapore, in partnership with a church growth expert Ralph W. Neighbour (Khong 2000, Neighbour 1990), and further modified as the Groups of 12 (G-12) model by César Castellanos of the International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Colombia, where a total of 50,000 people gather in worship and 150,000 attend the 20,000 weekly cell groups (Barrett and Johnson 2001, Comiskey 1998). The G-12 movement is a refinement of the original cell church structure, better emphasizing supervised discipleship and generational growth. It is said that

there are over 400 cell churches throughout the United States, and it is estimated that 75 million out of the estimated 200 million adults are in a small group (Wuthnow 1994).

Regardless of the variations, the central tenet of the cell church is that it encourages members to meet at least once during the week, in addition to attending Sunday services. It's a structure that provides fellowship and a sense of intimacy, which can be especially hard to find in large churches like KEC, and also demonstrates tremendous potential for mobilization.

The strongest organizational unit in the world's history would appear to be that which we call a cell because it is a remorseless self-multiplier; is exceptionally difficult to destroy; can preserve its intensity of local life while vast organizations quickly wither when they are weakened at the center; [and it] can defy the power of governments (Butterfield 1979, 24).

During a sermon, Reverend Shin explained the capacity of cells to effect social change:

Lenin once said that if a hundred soldiers gave their lives for the cause of the Communist revolution, he could turn the whole world upside down. That's what he said—about a revolution that turned out to be a total failure. What we need is a revolution that saves lives, instead of killing lives. If the cell church lives, the whole church lives. We need to love and encourage each other, take care of each other spiritually, and help raise worthy disciples. This is a bottom-up revolution of love.²¹

The rhetoric of revolution was common and frequent at KEC. Much more than being just another organizational trend, the cell church model appears to radicalize the very notion of what it means to congregate, what the church means to the members, and what the world means to the church. The frequent reminder of worldwide persecution of Christians, plus the view of the world as suffering from moral decay and mortal sins, repeatedly reinforced the worldview that Christians are at war—against Satan and against the un-evangelized. The role of an evangelical, then, is to work for radical social change. Paul Choi, the South Korean missionary whose commentary on the “Global Christian Leadership” opened this paper, said to the congregants of

²¹ Reverend Shin, “The Church in the Home, Part 4,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 28 September, 2003 (my translation).

KEC: “Do you want to dominate the world? Go to the center of the world. But if you want to transform the world, you must go to the remote frontiers! We must evangelize!”²²

It seems insufficient to describe the cell church as a “grassroots network,” because as I have explained, the central leadership of KEC *disciplines* with a heavy hand—at times more than it *disciples*—and regulates the minutiae of cellular activities. The call for loyalty and discipline frequently used military metaphors. (See Figure 5.)



Figure 5. A missionary soldier salutes, “Loyalty!” from *Christian Basic* (Kim 2000).

The overall success of the missionary cell church remains to be seen. I attended a “help the homeless” event at KEC during the Thanksgiving holidays. Volunteers from KEC and other partnering organizations like the local Lyons Club bussed in almost 300 non-Korean homeless men, women and children from the streets and shelters in San Jose. After a short worship service, the homeless were fed and groomed, given free sleeping bags and other gifts, and then KEC sent the homeless back to downtown—without trying to *incorporate* them into the body of the church. When I asked a volunteer if he thought it was odd to return them to the streets without trying to evangelize or recruit them for the church, he answered that it would be

²² Paul Choi, “The Lord’s Vision,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 12 October, 2003 (my translation). See also Choi 2004b.

impossible—because they are not Korean, and they do not speak Korean. It was clear—a Korean church is simply unable to *incorporate* non-Koreans into its *corpus*.

I do not doubt that most people volunteered their time and resources with “good intentions” and that social service activities like the KEC homeless event could serve a purpose, however short-lived or short-sighted. But when considering the common criticism that Korean churches prioritize overseas missions over the needs of their local neighborhood, I saw that the KEC members continued to perceive the “needy” as *other*, as inevitably non-Koreans. In a way, the homeless event reflected an inverted schema of the short-term overseas missions. In other words, instead of sending overseas missionaries to save the poor and the needy in the world, KEC brought to the church the poor and the needy from the local areas—for half a day out of the year, without a social justice framework or commitment to social change, and steadfastly adhering to the “us” and “them” dichotomy.

Evangelism and Reproduction: Church as Kingdom, Families as Flocks, Fathers as Shepherds

Through the biological metaphor of the cell church, evangelism emerged as a natural process, an organic impulse to reproduce and propagate. A church that does not evangelize was seen as working against nature, just as it isn’t “natural” for families not to reproduce. Explicitly equating the growth strategy of the cell church with its reproductive capacity, Reverend Shin consistently deployed the rhetoric of family. He even reproached families who did not reproduce, and criticized married heterosexual couples who were opting not to have children. Reverend Shin viewed it as a sign of selfishness not to have children, and asserted that it was

against the natural order of God. Likewise, a cell group that does not eventually divide and multiply was denounced as a selfish cell:

A family is where one man and one woman come together to raise children. Part of it may seem stale and boring at times, but a family always has the power to become new and alive. Why? Because there is power to reproduce. Sure, sometimes a couple decides not to give birth or raise children, and want to live selfishly like that. But still, there is power in the family. A church in the home [house church or “cell group church”] has the power to give birth and reproduce²³

The emphasis on authority and hierarchy is no doubt in part due to the legacy of Korean Confucianism. A traditional Confucian saying goes, *gunbusailche*, or “The king, the teacher, and the father are one and the same.” A clear hierarchy is drawn between the king and his subjects, the teacher and his students, and the father and his children. I found a book on Christian family life at the KEC library that prominently displayed this sentiment on its cover: “A man should cry only three times in his life: when his country is ruined, when his teacher passes away, and when his parents die.” These three proper moments for grief are predicated upon the downfall of the king, the teacher, and the father.

In addition to Confucian influences, however, there is theological basis for hierarchy in evangelicalism as well. KEC’s cell church model was infused with related but separate theological doctrines. On the one hand, the cell groups were referred to as *gajong gyohwe* or “home church,” based partly on the house church movement but also emphasizing the role of the heteronormative family as the fundamental unit of Christian reproduction. On the other hand, the cell groups were also called *mokjang* or “flocks,” creating names like the “Hungary flock” and the “Thailand flock.” Fusing the cell church model with ideas of discipleship, KEC urged church members to submit themselves to those deemed to be their overseers and spiritual

²³ Reverend Shin, “The Church in the Home, Part 2,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 14 September, 2003 (my translation).

counselors. Thus, KEC appointed a shepherd to lead each cell, in order to cultivate disciples until they were deemed mature enough to start a flock of their own.

The concept of discipleship is derived from the theology of Restorationism, which promotes restoring the kingdom of God—absent in its full power since New Testament times—and posits the installation of God’s kingdom to be the final chapter in the history of the Church in preparation for the establishment of a new heaven and a new world.²⁴

The kingdom of God is to be understood not as a place, but as the rule of God. God’s alternative society exists wherever God’s rule is obeyed. The kingdom enters the world through the Church which acts like a portal or a door. Once established, this kingdom derives its spiritual authority supremely through King Jesus but also through “His Body”: the Church (Walker 1985, 128).

If the Salvation Army uses hierarchical organization to self-consciously model itself after the secular army, conservative evangelicals might not only claim to belong to the Lord’s army, but also assert their identities as subjects of the sovereign King in a theocratic state of Christendom. In a two-page political commentary in the Oakland-based *The Korean Christian Times*, a pastor argued for the decoupling of democracy and Christianity, in what amounts to an open call for theocracy:

Democracy is a political system in which the sovereignty belongs to the *demos* or the people. However, the Bible irrefutably teaches us that only the Lord is our Sovereign. The Bible clearly presents theocracy—the nation and the world must be ruled by none other than the Lord our King. We must be concerned not for democracy in Korea, but advocate instead for a true theocracy. We

²⁴ Restorationism’s moral and theological positions are conservative, and the majority of its doctrines belong to the conservative evangelicalism of classical Pentecostalism.

must accept the Lord as our King, and only then would the nation be saved (Lee 2004, 4, my translation).²⁵

Likewise, fusing the Confucian *gunbusailche* with conservative evangelicalism, the leadership at KEC produced a set of religious practices that conflated the figure of Jesus as the shepherd *and* the father. This conflation is exemplified by the fact that Reverend Shin is also an active leader in the local Father School, and the more recently launched Mother School, both based on Christian assertion of family values and modeled after the Promise Keepers in the U.S. Both schools are designed to promote parental leadership and restore the waning authority of fathers. Although there were no fatherhood programs scheduled during the time I was attending his church, Reverend Shin made numerous references to the Father School Mission Center, echoing the following vision of the family:

At the final moment of his creation of heaven and earth, God created the family as his ultimate masterpiece. Family is the first community established on this earth, designed by God for us to experience the joy of Heaven... The crumbling of the family weakens the church, shakes up the society, and the world falls deeper into confusion, void, and darkness. Our utmost task today is to restore the family. That is the first step to revive the church, and a short cut to restore God's Kingdom. And remember, at the center of the family stands the father.²⁶

Another instance of likening church leaders to fathers was found in the dynamic between the Korean-speaking Korean Ministry (KM) and the English Ministry (EM). At KEC, very few of the members of the EM are children of members of KM. In other words, the EM is not the literal offspring of the KM members. However, the EM was almost without fail referred to as

²⁵Christians' participation in politics—or more broadly, the separation of church and state—continues to be a thorny issue. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1964), a well-known German theologian and martyr who opposed the Nazi regime, famously inspired a generation of liberation and *minjung* theologians and political activists in South Korea with his proposals for a “worldly interpretation of the Bible” or a “political hermeneutics of the Gospel”: “The world is the world and the Church is the Church, and yet the Word of God must go forth from the Church into all the world, proclaiming that the earth is the Lord’s and all that therein is. Herein lies the ‘political’ character of the Church” (49). Ironically enough, this very passage from Bonhoeffer is used by conservative Korean Christians to urge Christians to bring about regime change in North Korea. One commentator argues, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer lamented the lack of political involvement of Germany’s churches in opposing Hitler. Martin Luther King, Jr. rebuked the white clergymen who professed sympathy but would not get involved politically in abolishing segregation. Isn’t this Christianity today?” (“Monthly Editorial,” *Korean Christian Times*, August 24, 2004.)

²⁶ Reverend Shin, “The Church in the Home, Part 2,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 14 September, 2003 (my translation).

the “children’s service” by members of both EM and KM, who distinguished the KM as the “adult service.” The commonplace age-based organization in Korean social contexts is compounded by the “generational age”—the first-generation, immigrant Koreans will perpetually be the “parents,” while the second-generation, U.S.-born Korean Americans will likely be “children,” regardless of how old they actually are. Pastor Yuk, a thirty-something Korean American man who directs the EM, did express a degree of frustration with the marginalization of the EM in the overall KEC structure, but even so, he likened it to a struggle in the family. He said, “Just because one disagrees with his parents, it doesn’t mean that he should just pack up and move out.”

Spatiality of the “Ethnic Enclave”

The “Ethnic Enclave”

Week after week during the field work, I found that KEC’s institutional arrangements went far beyond reinforcing existing social relations among the congregation members or “maintaining ethnicity” by “preserving their cultural and ethnic identity” (Min 2002b, 16). Rather, every joint and limb of its institutional structure embodied the rhetoric of cultivation and growth, and reproduction and propagation—for the singular purpose of evangelism. Contrary to the dominant literature on immigrant congregations as a space for local *gathering*, I found that KEC was just as concerned with *sending*.²⁷ For instance, Reverend Shin of KEC said in his sermon:

Everyone knows about the reservists in the military, right? I was in the reserves myself in Korea. We would meet up for roll call, and if you took a look at us, you’d see that we were just pathetic. You wouldn’t see a group of well-disciplined soldiers, but a bunch of guys pretending like they’re

²⁷ In fact the Latin origin of the word “mission” is *missio*, or “to send.” South Korea has become a missionary “sending country,” having once been a “receiving country” of Western missionaries.

real soldiers. One minute a soldier, the next minute when the uniform's off, then nothing. As Christians, we can't be like those reservists that gather and then disperse like nothing happened. We need to go out there in the world and make some changes!²⁸

My discussion of the “cell church” problematizes the conventional treatment of the Korean immigrant church as an “ethnic enclave” that meets people’s needs. A common theme in the dominant literature is that the church eases anxieties about being uprooted and displaced, and that it meets practical social needs of immigrants. The Korean immigrant church is typically presented in the existing literature as a microcosm of social relations, i.e. as a religious version of an “ethnic enclave” (Portes 1980, 1993; Waldinger 2001). In this portrait, generational transition is emphasized, and the passing of each generation is supposed to result in the loss of ethnic cohesion—what Ceri Peach (2001) characterizes as the “three generational model.” Like ethnic enclaves, ethnic churches are depicted in most studies as geographically distinct, territorialized configurations, *necessarily* facilitating adjustment and *positively* helping the maintenance of ethnic identity and tradition. Their institutional arrangements are seen as restoring social status lost in the process of immigration, while helping immigrants cope with the traumas of being uprooted and racist oppression. Members of the congregation are depicted as struggling to negotiate their ethnic, Christian, and gender identities, ultimately finding ways to celebrate “old” identities or creating new hybrid ones.

Karen J. Chai (1998) outlines four ways in which ethnic Korean churches meet these types of needs: opportunity for fellowship, maintenance of cultural tradition, provision of social services, and rewards from social structures. Another sociologist Kyeyoung Park (1989) argues that the church satisfies the needs for social status, prestige, and recognition within the immigrant community, providing a “hierarchical structure which can serve as a ladder of

²⁸ Reverend Shin, “The Church in the Home, Part 3,” sermon at KEC. Sunday, 21 September, 2003 (my translation).

achievement for church members” (74). A prominent Asian American theologian Fumitaka Matsuoka (1995) asserts that Christian churches have historically sustained immigrants, and that “churches continue to serve as a locus of Korean American community life” (28).

I do not question that the church meets people’s needs, whether they stem from dire material circumstances or desires for social status. However, I believe that the method of congregational ethnography, coupled with inadequately theorized notions of “community,” has produced a body of literature based on problematic ideas of a bounded “ethnic enclave” and the church as a social institution that arises *naturally* in response to the perceived “needs” of immigrants. The conceptualization of the “ethnic church” seems to be influenced by enclave studies originally developed by the Chicago School of sociology, which asserted that there is a direct relationship between the social processes of assimilation and the spatial patterns of dispersal (Massey 1984, Park 1975, Peach 1975). Enclaves have emerged as an enduring phenomenon, geographically distinct territorial configurations, consisting of elaborate social networks that provide resources and support for members in need (Portes and Kenneth 1980, Portes and Rumbaut 1996, Portes and Stepick 1993, Waldinger 2001).

Like “ethnic enclaves,” the Korean immigrant church is typically seen to utilize ethnic resources to mobilize capital and a sense of belonging, and thus, the promotion of ethnic solidarity is essential to its function. The Korean immigrant church is presented as a microcosm of social relations, a geographically distinct territorial organization, and an elaborate set of networks. Consider, for example, the interest in dynamics of “ethnic confinement” and “adhesive adaptation” (Hurh and Kim 1984), the role of ethnicity in transition and assimilation (Kim and Kim 2001), “maintaining Korean culture and enhancing co-ethnic social networks”

(Min 2002b, 17), and identity formation of second-generation, or U.S.-born, Korean American Christians as part of a generational process (Chai 2001, 1998, Chong 1998, Park 1989).

If we instead examine critically the spatiality of the cell church, we may re-conceptualize the church as not only a space that gathers or congregates, but as a space that mobilizes dynamic and outward trajectories. My research suggests that the Korean church functions very much as what the geographer Doreen Massey (1994) calls an “extroverted space,” with an intensely “global sense of place”:

Instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, [places] can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself... [This] allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local (154-155).

Rethinking the Space of the Enclave

In terms of human geography, an “enclave” is a piece of land that is totally enclosed within a foreign territory. The “ethnic enclave” thus denotes a space that is territorially bound as a partial *section* of the mainstream. This is precisely where critical geography offers a strategy for intervention in the study of Korean immigrant churches—by stressing that “the spatial” is constituted by the “interlocking of ‘stretched-out’ social relations” (Massey 1994, 22). I contend that congregational religious life is vitally connected to its immediate and broader social relations, and the institutional and rhetorical production of the Evangelical church—as a community pitted against the crisis-ridden world—reveals the complex web of interlocking social relations at work.

Certainly, many ethnographic studies consider the demographic and social structure of a particular congregation (Chai 2001, 1998, Chong 1998, Kim 1997, Park 1989), and many excellent works based on quantitative data describe the regional or national characteristics and

patterns of church density, immigration and (re)settlement, and church participation (Kim and Kim 2001).²⁹ Still, most scholarship on Korean immigrant churches does not take as analytical units the neighborhood—or the *world*—in which the churches are located. Therefore, they shed little light on the nature of the multi-congregational, multi-denominational, and transnational religious life of Korean evangelical Christianity.

Put differently, we have little insight into how Korean immigrant churches fit into broader religious ecologies that include, for instance, the local economic conditions or the changing world order (Skreslet 1997), or the impact of “God’s foreign policy” on overseas missionary enterprise (Green 2001). The existing literature tells us little about how churches actively reconfigure their social and physical environment—sometimes by simply *being* there. Rather, because the sense of “community” is taken for granted, as an altogether positive and coalescing space based on shared ethnic identity, the church is seen merely as the point of arrival, not the originating point of departure.

Furthermore, beyond re-conceptualizing the local congregation as a point of “origin,” I also see it as located at a particular convergence of “multiple trajectories,” to borrow Gillian Hart’s term (2002). My discussion of the spatiality of the Korean evangelical Church—going beyond the depiction of the congregation as a community “bounded” by a sense of common history, ethnic identity, and divine destiny—is influenced by geographers like Hart (2002), Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Steven Gregory (1998). In examining political culture and activism in an African American neighborhood in New York City, Gregory (1998) writes:

Community describes not a static, place-based social collective but a power-laden field of social relations whose meanings, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms (11).

²⁹ Interestingly, most ethnographic studies of immigrant Korean congregations seem to be conducted by women, while men seem to dominate the macro-level and quantitative studies.

Similarly, Hart uses “trajectories” to “convey the ongoing processes through which sets of power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life at different spatial scales constantly rework places and identities” (13). In other words, the local “community” space of the KEC is (socially) produced by “interconnected trajectories of socio-spatial change taking shape in the context of intensified global integration” (Hart 2002, 13). This paper builds upon the Lefebvrian insistence on a “relational understanding of space as actively produced through everyday practices that are simultaneously material and metaphorical” —thus the production of the local congregational space “implies the production of meanings, concepts, and consciousness about space (or space-time) that are inseparably linked to its physical production through situated practices (Hart 2002, 34).

Conclusion: Missionary Destinations and Diasporic Destiny

This paper has shown that KEC’s cell church promotes aggressive church growth through the rhetoric of local propagation and world evangelism, and has highlighted a particular worldview called the “10/40 Window” as a world stage on which Koreans emerge as the leading actors. Korean evangelicals emerge as leading *subjects* in Christendom in this picture, precisely because they inherit the colonial geography with the *object* of missions still intact. I have discussed a wide range of spatial strategies, across several geographical scales, that are employed to this end—the disciplined body in the family-flock, the reproduction of cells in the congregational body, and the missionary church in the desire for Christendom.

Korean evangelicals often describe themselves as the model missionary, imbued with a sense of destiny to succeed—or even outdo—white American missionaries whose whiteness has become a liability, whose mobility has been severely compromised by stains of imperialism and

threats of terrorism throughout the world. This perception resembles a Cold War-era commentary by a conservative Korean theologian, except that in today's global context, Communism has been replaced by Islam and terrorism.

If the Western church is too guilt-ridden about the history of pillage, plunder, and exploitation, and can not continue its missionary activities in Africa, southeast Asia, and South America, then our Korean church must realize that it is our urgent duty to dispatch missionaries, with pride, precisely to those locations... Communism is selling its ideology to the people of undeveloped nations by taking advantage of the wounds caused by White people and exploiting the spiritual void. Communism is the enemy against which the Christian church must fight for the occupation of missionary terrains. The challenge of communism is the stimulant that best exemplifies the urgency of world missions (Kim 1970, 78, my translation).

Rather than viewing KEC and other similar Korean churches as self-enclosing enclaves or passive reflections of global social relations, I argued that the local also constructs and reconstructs the global. KEC, with its dual imperative for institutional reproduction on a cell-scale and the construction of the new Christendom on a global scale, is both the *product* and the *condition* of the social and political process of place-making (Lefebvre 1991). By conceptualizing the enclave as not only a point of arrival, but also a point of departure, we gain an understanding of evangelical destinations and diasporic destinies through the local congregation over *here*, missionary practices out *there*, and all the movements between here and there.

These movements converge at the portal of the cell church in the metropolis. Embodying the interconnected relationship between the country-colony (as a mission field) and the city-metropolis (as the base church), KEC calls our attention to the unequal power relations between them. The church is not only a point of arrival for (im)migrants, but also an outbound space of the metropole, city of the empire. In this paper I have set the horizon line far beyond the enclave, toward “a global sense of the local, a global sense of place,” thus situating the

immigrant Korean church as a locus in a constellation of social relations—each full of internal structures of domination and subordination, increasingly stretched out over space.

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