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Christian Publishing in Korea

Introduction

Religious publishing in Korea has a vibrant history, which mirrors a dynamic Korean history. In order to understand this industry, we will first outline the history of printing in Korea. Then we will look at Christianity in Korea, paying particular attention to how the church used Hangeul, the Korean writing system, in its outreach and early publishing. Also we will analyze Korean publishing in general, looking at its aims and ambitions. After examining Christian publishing, some of the prominent publishers will be listed with information about each one.

Early Printing in Korea

Similar to the preservation and copying of texts in Europe by Christian monks, early Korean Buddhist monks actively collected and copied religious texts. Copying was done by hand, but slowly this started to be done by a stamping process. One of the oldest printed manuscripts in the world, a Buddhist sutra dated from the early 700s using block printing, has been found in Korea, although scholars debate where it was printed. During the next few hundred years, first clay, and then wooden type printing spread throughout Korea, as well as neighboring China and Japan.

While its proximity to the countries of China and Japan led Korea, sharing a writing system with China and linguistic ties with Japan, to become a rich cultural crossroads and center of Buddhism and Confucianism. The kingdom of Korea was also frequently attacked, which impacted publishing. During 1021, the *Goryeo* dynasty of Korea was attacked by Mongolia. In response, Koreans carved wooden printing blocks of Buddhist scripture, believing that Buddha would in turn help repel the invaders. This opened up the printing industry such that in 1035, the local government started to print books. Unfortunately the Mongols invaded again during the early 1200's, and the wooden printing blocks of Buddhist scriptures were burned.

Hoping for help from Buddha again, King *Gojong* ordered that new wooden printing blocks be made, except this time they were more ambitious. It took 16 years to produce approximately 80,000 woodblocks for the *Tripitaka Korean*, considered to be the finest example of woodblocks in the world. Although the *Goryeo* Dynasty of Korea eventually signed a treaty with the Mongols, temporarily making Korea a vassal state, the woodblocks have survived and are a national treasure of Korea.¹

Important advances in printing happened on the Korean peninsula during subsequent years. The Chinese had invented clay movable type during the 1000's. By the mid-1200's, however, Korea had invented movable bronze type. During the next few centuries, the *Joseon* dynasty overthrew the *Goryeo* dynasty. Printing remained in the possession of the nobility, who alone could memorize the thousands of classic Chinese characters needed to read and write, and which were quite different linguistically from spoken Korean.

The monopoly on literacy started to change when, during the 1400's, Sejong the Great became king of the *Joseon* Dynasty. In 1443 the King commissioned court scholars to invent a unique lettering system that would symbolize the spoken language of his people and improve literacy among commoners. A Korean lettering system, now known as *Hangeul* and a national treasure of Korea, was born. *Hangeul* became especially popular among the common people and among women. However, subsequent leaders tended to discourage its use or ignore it, until the late 1700's, when the vernacular script saw a resurgence with the publication of poetry and novels.²

Christianity comes to Korea

Simultaneously during the late 1700's, Catholicism made inroads into Korea. Many Korean elites held to Neo-Confucianism, which tended to be formalistic and metaphysical. A scholarly reaction against this brand of Confucianism, called *Silbak*, tended to be progressive and for social reform. In order to learn more about the West and its religion, a group of *Silbak* scholars became interested in Christianity through a Catholic book by Matteo Ricci, which had been brought over from China. Through this study, some of the Koreans converted to Christianity.³ During the next hundred years, Catholics were persecuted or at best ignored by the *Joseon* government. Thousands of Catholics were martyred.⁴

In spite of this, the early Catholic Church translated sections of the Bible and religious works into *Hangeul* in an effort to reach the common people.⁵ The arrival of Western printing presses were introduced to Korea in 1883. In the late 1880's, a French missionary, Father Coste, created the first movable Hangeul type for a Western style printing press.

A year after the arrival of the first Western printing presses, Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries started using them.⁶ Previously some of this religious printing was done in Japan.⁷ Early on, Protestants suffered from persecution just like the Catholics. Because proselytizing resulted in persecution, some focused their energy on medical work and on education. However, others were directly involved in publications, like Horace Grant Underwood, who started the forerunner of today's *Christian Literature of Korean Society* as well as a newspaper called *Christ Shinmun*,⁸ and Henry Gerhard Appenzeller, who established a print shop in a school known as

Baejae Hakdang,⁹ Early publications emphasized democracy and enlightenment, but around 1890, started to focus more on evangelism.¹⁰

Protestant missionaries, like their Catholic forebears, also chose to use *Hangeul* in publication, rather than the Chinese script preferred by government publications.¹¹ For example, J.S. Gale, who helped translate the Bible and a hymnbook into the simple-to-read script, chose *Hangeul* in order that women and children, not just men, would be able to access God's word.¹² Soon Nim Lee, scholar at the University of Wollongong, theorizes that these missionaries' choice of *Hangeul* had a profound effect on the revitalization and preservation of the script, as well as the proliferation of Christian publications throughout the twentieth century, providing the theological strength that would sustain the Korean people and language through Japanese occupation.¹³

Additionally, many important universities in Korea today were founded by these Protestant missionaries, and the universities would eventually impact the publishing world through university presses. For example, Methodist missionary Mary F. Scranton founded a school for women in 1886, which later became Ewha Womans University.¹⁴ Ewha Womans University Press would be started in 1949.¹⁵ Yonsei University, founded from a union between a medical school started by Presbyterian missionary Horace Newton Allen in 1885 and Chosun Christian College started by Horace Grant Underwood in 1915,¹⁶ is home to Yonsei University Press, with roots in publications as early as 1929.¹⁷

Korea is annexed by Japan

Joseon Korea had engaged in persecution of missionaries because of instincts toward self-preservation born from its precarious location at the crossroads of China and Japan and to resist Western nations bent on trade. During the late 1800's because of military attacks and diplomatic maneuvering, *Joseon* Korea, nicknamed the Hermit Kingdom, had been forced to open its doors to other nations, paving the way for the Protestant missionary immigration and the introduction of the Western presses into Korea.

At this time, however, Japan was also stealthily increasing its dominion, with an eye on colonial expansion in Korea. Japan officially annexed Korea in 1910, ending the *Joseon* Dynasty and instituting colonial rule. In order to control the population, the Japanese forced Koreans to use the Japanese language, give up their own names for Japanese names, severely limited access to food and basic freedoms. Inspection and censorship of religious publications became oppressive.¹⁸ The Japanese government confiscated Christian newspapers like *The Christian Messenger*¹⁹ and denominational infighting started plaguing other publications.²⁰ Some Christian publications even capitulated to spread Japanese propaganda.²¹ By the end of the

occupation, there were only six printing presses in Korea.²² However, in spite of these difficulties, Christians remained prominent in the resistant movement during the Japanese occupation.²³

Publishing in Korea

After the defeat of the Japanese, Korea was divided in half along the 38th parallel. The United States administered south of the parallel, and the Soviet Union administered north. This division was meant to be temporary, and despite a devastating war in the 1950's meant to unify Korea, the country is still divided. Before the division Pyongyang, which is now the capital of North Korea, was one of the main centers of Christianity in Korea, but most Christians fled during the early days of the North Korean government. Today, North Korea strictly controls what is published and what can be read. Because of this strict control, in 2010 the organization Reporters Without Borders ranked the freedom of press in North Korea as being the second lowest in the world. Most of the literature published is very pro-North Korean and portrays the importance of the virtue of duty. North Korea's presses are government controlled, including the Foreign Languages Publishing House that translates Korean works into other languages.²⁴

South Korea, like North Korea, was devastated from the war. Many mission and humanitarian organizations came in to help rebuild the South. Exiled Christian leaders returned and revitalized the South's publication industry.²⁵ Initially, South Korea was controlled by a succession of several autocratic governments, which exercised strong control over publishers. For example, from 1948 to 1960 the government of Syngman Rhee outlawed leftist newspapers and censored and even arrested some journalists and publishers. Subsequent administrations continued strong control over the media and censorship of materials thought to be in opposition to the current government. Despite this censorship, many publishing houses were founded during this time. By the 1960's there were 400 publishing houses publishing about 2,000 books per year with about 150 of them being religious.²⁶

Also challenging the publication of new and autonomous works was copyright issues. Although the Copyright Act of Korea was first enacted in 1957, copyright in South Korea was still a foreign concept. Numerous works were pirated. Pirated works translated from Japanese and English suffered from poor quality control.²⁷

However, starting in the 1980s, termed "The Economic Miracle," South Korea started to turn from being one of Asia's poorest nations into a hi-tech, modern, wealthy democracy. During this decade, people became dissatisfied with government censorship. Through much public protest, by 1987 the Korean government realized the importance of having a free press.

Also, in addition to increase internal freedom for publishers, the government became more sensitive to international cooperation. For instance, in 1987 it finally subscribed to the Universal Copyright Convention. Administration, however, was poor in the 1990's, allowing for many pirated works. Even in the late 2000's, pirated movies were very easy to acquire, however, this has improved most recently. Copyright law was further strengthened and brought more in line with US policy through the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement, which was signed at the end of the decade. Despite the protests of Korean publishers, this agreement increased the retaining of copyright of an author's works by 20 years.

At the early turn of this century, the South Korean publishing industry was thriving and had a highly visible Internet presence. Koreans had eagerly accepted the Internet and cell phones and were heavy users of both. The publishing industry started to push ebooks in 2000 to try to tap into a highly connected and mobile market.²⁸ By the end of the decade, several publishers joined together to begin an ebook firm. Even with this push ebooks are not popular;²⁹ numbers have dramatically increased because of publishers efforts, but sales have only slightly increased.

Even though ebooks have not taken off, online book sales have done extremely well. By 2010 online book sales were about one third of total book sales in Korea. In total, 420,000 books were published in 2010.³⁰

The worldwide economic downturn in 2008 effected Korea in a similar fashion to other countries. The downturn led to a decrease in the total publications of books. During times of uncertainty people tend to turn to religion, and this time was no exception. Publications of religious books increased during 2008.³¹

The main taboo subject in South Korea is pro-North Korean material. Although no one in South Korea believes North Korean propaganda, the South Korean government inflicts heavy penalties on anyone who publishes such materials. Other issues of censorship include online gambling, online pornography, and pro-suicide websites.

Although free speech is a right, there have also been several legal cases involving the spreading of false information via telecommunication devices. This issue concerning free speech has recently been resolved by the high court. During the time of the economic downturn a blogger with the username Minerva blogged about economic matters. The government claimed that some of his assertions about the government's financial decisions were false and lead people into a financial panic eventually resulting in a government bailout. The government took legal action against Minerva using a law stating that false information cannot be spread via the Internet for the purpose of harm. This case went all the way to the Korean

Constitutional Court, which ruled that the law was unconstitutional because of its unclear definitions.

Contemporary Christian Publishing

The main organization for Christian publishers is the Korean Christian Publishers Association (KCPA). It was founded in 1975. The membership of the association includes 150 publishers. During the last decade they have increasingly promoted e-books. In 2009, there were 1,100 new titles published, of which more than one third were translations. Publishing of most new books, and the books with the most sales, tend to be concentrated within the top ten companies.³² Currently, around 1,000 Christian periodicals are in print in South Korea, subject to certification by a publication Audit Bureau.³³

In order for more translated books to be published, Kyung-Chul Park, the president of KCPA, recommends foreign firms to give Korean publishers “reductions in royalty advances, extensions of the translation and publishing periods, and more variations in licensing methods.”³⁴ The KCPA’s website is <<http://kcpa.or.kr/>>. An English version of the site is currently inoperable at time of print. The Korean version of the website is full of information on its member publishers, its history, Christian books stores, along with various forums.

While she celebrates that approximately 30% of South Korea’s population is Christian,³⁵ in her recently published thesis Soo Nim Lee outlines some of her concerns for the Christian publishing industry, which she believes is slowing Korean church growth. She claims a shortage of formally trained Christian journalists, insufficient operational funds in the hands of individual or church publishers, and presses devoted to church politics rather than worthwhile Christian messages are contributing to unprofessional publications.³⁶

However, the scholar points to church communication programs like those employed by *Onnuri* Church, a major organization that employs a multitude of media to disciple its congregation and evangelize the unreached, as a model for the 21st Century in Korea.³⁷ *Onnuri*, which started in 1984 with three families, has grown to a multi-campused congregation of more than 55,000 people. *Onnuri* has skillfully implemented media in order to achieve this growth. At key points in its ministry, the church developed textbooks to interpret the Bible, published multiple periodicals and newspapers for lay people, launched journals for ministers, were early adopters of computer use in electronic publications and church bookstores, spearheaded one of the first internet shopping malls, established a radio and TV broadcast, and organized all their ministry materials and publications with a database.³⁸

The publishing environment in Korea has seen immense technological and cultural changes since the first block presses. Though citizens still live who can remember a South Korea devastated by war and famine, the Asian country now surpasses the US in technological access due to concentrated government support. Ubiquitous smartphone access and free wifi, ebook devices, and even the emergence of wireless TV and laptop/ipad schools have transformed the publishing landscape beyond the wildest dreams of South Koreans even fifteen years ago. Christian publishers in South Korea will need to adapt and anticipate technological advances in order to reach young Korean digital natives adrift in a cacophony of secular media.

Specific Publishers

Following are several more of the many publishers in Korea, and some of the most accessible to primarily English speakers.

Agape Publishing Co., <www.iagape.co.kr>, was founded in 1975. They are publishing more than 600 monographs, especially study bibles and hymns. Agape links to an English translation of their website.

Catholic University of Korea Press, <press.catholic.ac.kr/>, was founded in 1987. They are publishing 160 books on various academic topics, including religion. They also publish the following theological journals: Y and I.

The Korean Christian Literature Press, <www.kclp.co.kr/>, was founded in 1955. It publishes Bible dictionaries, commentaries, theological works and books on Christian life. KCLP includes some English to categorize offerings on their website.

Concordia Publishing, <www.concordia.co.kr>, was founded in 1959. It has published over 400 books and specializes in Lutheranism.

Daesung Co., <www.daesungbook.com>, was founded in 2002. Two of their imprints, JCR and JCR Kids, publishes books dealing with Christian life. Daesung has an extensive part of their website in English. They also publish Korean books translated into English.

Hongsungso, <hongsungsa.com>, was founded in 1974. Since 1981 they have published more than 450 books on Christian life.

Jordan Press, <www.jordanpress.com>, was founded in 1973. They have published more than 500 monographs dealing with theology, Christian education, and Christian life.

Korean Anabaptist Press, <<http://www.kapbooks.com/>>, is part of the Korean Anabaptist Center (KAC), founded in 2001. They publish works in the Anabaptist and peace traditions, translating them into Korean. While the press website is in Korean, KAC leadership are fluent in English.

Korean Publishing House, <www.sijos.com>, was founded in 1909. They have published around 1,000 works.

Living With Scripture Publishers, <www.liwibi.com>, was founded in 1973. They publish more than 150 books dealing with Catholicism. Part of their website is in English.

Publishing House of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, <www.pckbook.co.kr>, was founded in 1951. This publisher publishes many books in the Presbyterian tradition.

Qumran Publishing House, <www.qumran.co.kr>, was founded in 1987. They publish about 100 books annually. They print about 2,600 books dealing with the ministry and Christian life.

Theological Journals

The Institute for Korean Theological Information Network Service (IKTINOS), <iktinos.org>, indexes most Korean theological journals in its database (DB). They also publish the journal, *Canon and culture: a journal of Biblical Interpretation in context*.

Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, <www.ttgst.ac.kr>, was founded in 1995 in association with Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois. Torch Trinity publishes two English theological journals. Articles from both *Torch Trinity Journal* and *Scripture and Interpretation* can be accessed on their comprehensive English website. *Scripture and Interpretation* is a peer-reviewed journal focusing on biblical exegesis and interpretation across Christian denominations.

Chongshin University Press, <www.chongshin.ac.kr/>, was founded in 1976. They have published more than 150 academic books especially dealing with the theology of the Korean Reformed Church. They publish some Korean materials translated into English, including the *Chongshin Review* and the *Chongshin Theological Journal*. Part of their website is in English.

The Institute for the Study of Religion at Sogang University, <isr.sogang.ac.kr>, was founded in 1997. They publish several books on Korean religions and the study of religion. They are just starting to publish the *Journal of Korean Religions*, which is a peer-reviewed English journal published biannually.

Ewha University Press, <www.ewhappress.com>, was founded in 1949. They publish books and journals in English and Korean on a number of academic topics, including a few on religion. *The Ewha Journal of Feminist Theology* is an English journal published annually. Ewha University Press has a comprehensive English website.

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Endnotes

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