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to engage with some of these questions might easily discover there is less distance than they think between Christianity and the New Age.

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Communicating the Concept of God in Korean Culture

Bong Rin Ro

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The terminology used for 'God' in any culture always has profound significance for theological understanding and for the practice of evangelism and church growth. Dr Bong Ro shows the importance of this understanding in communicating the concept of God to the people of Korea in the plurality of their religious cultures.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

How can one communicate the God of the Bible to Koreans with totally different concepts of God due to their traditional cultures and religions? How does a Christian interpret the religious experience of prayerful contemplation of a Buddhist in comparison with his own prayer to God? In the rural communities many farmers believe in Shamanism and the power of spirits that control their lives. Are there some common grounds between Christians and non-Christians where they can have religious dialogue?

It is very important for us to gain a proper understanding of the Korean concept of God and how to effectively communicate the gospel to Asians, especially Koreans. In order to achieve this objective the author deals with two principal areas: first, how do we analyse the complex Korean concepts of the deity; and secondly, how do we apply scriptural principles for the purpose of communicating the God of the Bible to Koreans in the context of the 21st century?

KOREAN CONCEPTS OF GOD

Dr. Yong-Bok Rha in his Th.D. thesis at Boston University in 1977, *An Analysis of the Terms used for God in Korea in the Context of Indigenization*, provides useful information on the concepts of God in Korea and lists thirteen different terms for God which this present author divides into three categories. The first category of gods is definitely influenced by Chinese concepts. The second category of gods is related to Korean indigenous shamanism, and the third category has to do with the mythological story of the foremost ancestor of the Korean race, Tangoon.

I Names of God Related to Chinese Concept of Heavenly Rulers

1. *Chun* (Heaven), *Sang Che* (Heavenly Ruler), and *Shen* (God)

A number of names of God in Korea are related to the ruler(s) of the heavens, because the Koreans believed in the heavenly rulers just as the Chinese did. The Chinese used three terms to name their God: *Shang Ti* (Heavenly Ruler, called *Sang Che* in Korean), *T'ien* (Heaven, *Chun* in Korean), and *Shen* (God, *Shin* in Korean). During the Golden Age of China in the twenty-third century B.C., according to the Book of History, Emperor Shun offered sacrifice to Shang Ti to celebrate his accession to the throne, and offered at Tai Shan other sacrifices to the hills and streams, and a burnt offering to T'ien. Shang Ti is a personal God, the supreme ruler of all the rulers of the earth, while T'ien represents an impersonal heaven or providence. Shen is used as a technical term for God, often conveying the meaning of spirits or good spirits in contrast to evil spirits called *Kwei*.

Koreans still use the words Chun (T'ien), Sang Che (Shang Ti), and Shin (Shun), which came from the Chinese characters, when they refer to God. Chun was mainly used by Korean Confucianists, while Sang Che was used by the first Protestant missionaries in their Bible translation until the Korean Christians and the first missionaries decided to drop it and use rather the Korean colloquial language for God. We have to understand that many Korean words derived from Chinese characters, but most other vocabulary came directly from the Korean language without any connection with the Chinese language.

Therefore, Koreans commonly used the words, *Ha Nul Nim* (하늘님), or *Han Ool Nim* (하느님), or *Ha Nu Nim* (한울님) for God. Chun Do Kyo (Heavenly Way Religion) which is an indigenous religion founded by Jae-Woo Choe in 1860, who tried to combine western Christianity with eastern learning, used Sang Che for a time but does not use it any longer.

2. *Chun Chu* (Lord of Heaven), *Chun Shin* (Gods of heaven), and *Ok Hwang Che* (The Supreme Emperor or the King of Kings). When Mateo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary to China (1581–1610), began to work on the book, *T'ien-Hsueh-Shih-I* (The True Doctrine of T'ien's Teachings), in 1591, he chose the word, T'ien Chu (Chun Chu), for God. After that, the Roman Catholic Church both in China and Korea used this word until 1971 when the Korean Bible Society decided to produce a joint New Testament translation for Roman Catholics and Protestants, using the word for God, Ha Nu Nim, instead.

Chun Shin means 'gods in heavens' signifying personified heaven and representing some nature gods as well as spirits in Shamanism in Korea. Since the Confucianists believe in heavenly powers, Chun Shin represents natural powers that control wind, rain, storm, mountain, river etc. For Shamanists, Chun Shin means gods of spirits that control all aspects of human life, particularly related to rural and agricultural settings.

Ok Hwang Che, which means the Supreme Emperor among the rulers, is the name of the deity for the Taoists in Korea. There is a hierarchical structure among the heavenly celestial beings, and this concept of gods conveys a thought of the Supreme One among many powerful rulers of the universe. Since Taoism deals with harmony with nature, it has many superstitious practices to communicate with gods and spirits in this world.

3. *Bu Chu Nim* (Buddha) in Buddhism. When Gautama (ca. 560–480 B.C.) lived in northeast India, his main concern was with human suffering (*dukha*) and how to extinguish suffering by attaining to the status of nirvana rather than the existence of god(s); therefore, some Buddhist scholars consider Buddhism as atheistic or agnostic. Theravada Buddhism does not consider Gautama Buddha as deity, but in Mahayana Buddhism which is prevalent in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam Gautama has been deified as the Absolute and the eternal Buddha essence.

Koreans worship Buddha as deity and revere Bodhisattvas (whose statues stand in the temples). These Bodhisattvas supposedly could reach the status of nirvana but

abdicated the privilege in order to help others. There are hundreds of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues in Buddhist temples to whom the Buddhists pay their tributes. Korean Buddhism is very polytheistic as are other Mahayana Buddhists in Asia.

4. *Ha Nul Nim*, *Han Ool Nim*, and *Ha Nu Nim* Associated with Heavenly Lord. The most common words used to describe deity in Korea were associated with the Heavenly Lord or the One who rules heavens (Ha Nul in Korean). *Ha Nul Nim* (하늘님) means Heavenly Lord. Ha Nul is the Korean translation of the Chinese character, Chun, which means heaven, and Nim means Lord; therefore, the Korean concept of God has been very closely associated with the One who rules heaven. Confucianists and Shamanists have used this word for God.

Han Ool Nim (한울님) is the term used for God by the Chun Do Kyo (Heavenly Way Religion). There is a difference of opinion among Korean scholars on the origin of this term, Han Ool Nim. One view is that Han (한) means great and Ool is an abbreviated word of 'Oori' (우리) meaning *great we*, therefore, Han Ool Nim means Our Great God. Another view is that this term of God comes from the word, Ha Nul, (하늘) which means heaven; therefore, Han Ool Nim has the same meaning as Ha Nul Nim, Heavenly Lord. *Ha Nu Nim* (하느님) is the most commonly used traditional term for God. The etymology of the word Ha Nu (하느) is the same as of Ha Nul (하늘); the meaning of these terms has the same meaning of Heavenly Lord. The Roman Catholic Church has adopted the word Ha Nu Nim for God.

II the Names of God Related to Shamanism

The majority of Koreans before the coming of western missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century had little education or were illiterate under the feudalistic society. The farmers and rural people were very much affected by shamanistic animism and worshipped many gods and spirits. Besides the *Chun Shin* (Heavenly Spirits) mentioned above, which are associated with nature gods in Shamanism and Confucianism, there are two other main terms used for God by the rural people.

1. *Shin Ryung* (신령, Gods and Spirits). Korean Shamanists believe in pantheism and polydemonism—that the spirits or gods are living in natural objects such as trees, rocks, hills, waters, houses as well as in living and dead persons. The fear of evil spirits plays an important role in a person's life, so that he or she has to offer sacrifices to the spirits in order to appease them; otherwise, the power of the evil spirits will bring misfortune, sickness and death to him and to his family. Therefore, the exorcists such as *Mudangs* or *Paksus* are brought into the family to appease the spirits. Shin Ryung is still popular among the people not only in rural areas but also in cities.

2. *Ha Na Nim* (하나님, One Great God). One very significant fact which we have to recognize in Korean Shamanism is the recognition of one Supreme God above other gods and spirits. They used to utilize the word Ha Na Nim (하나님) in which Ha Na means one and Nim means Lord or God.

The Korean spelling of Na (나) was used in the olden days, but the Korean grammar has changed the Na from the old spelling (나) to the new one (너). The hierarchical structure of gods and spirits in Korean Shamanism has placed One Supreme God or Spirit as the head which leads to the concept of monotheism. C.A. Clark, a renowned American

missionary in Korea, states that Ha Na Nim is unique. There is scarcely a question that he goes far back into the dim ages of Korean history long before any of the foreign religions came into the country. In the earliest history of Shamanism, we note how Ye Kook people worshipped Ha Na Nim. It was Ha Na Nim whom Tangoon worshipped on his high altar on Kang Hwa.

In contextualizing the biblical concept of the Trinitarian God, Korean Protestant Christians adopted this term Ha Na Nim for God. This is quite different from the Chinese concepts of polytheism in Buddhism and of the impersonal Lord of Heaven, T'ien, of Confucianism. Furthermore, Koreans have one unified culture and language among 70 million people both in North and South Korea. This is one of the important reasons why Koreans have readily accepted the monotheistic God of the Bible; consequently, the churches have grown very rapidly among the Korean people.

III Tangoon Mythological Concept of God ("trinitarian God"):

Han Ul Nim (한울님, One Great Spirit) and *Sam Shin* (삼신, Trinitarian God). Each nation usually has its own mythological story of the beginning of their race. The Korean people also have their mythology known as Tangoon Mythology. An indigenous religion of Tangoon Kyo (단군교) was established from this mythology and its name was changed to Tai Chong Kyo (태종교) in October 1904 by Mr. Bong-I Paik, who claimed to receive special revelation at Mt. Paiktoo. The Tai Chong Kyo has a membership of over a half million people.

According to the Tangoon mythological story, *Hwan In* (Father the Creator) lived with *Hwan Woong* (Teacher, Leader) and *Hwan Kum* (King, Governor) in heaven. The Hwan Woong wanted to establish an earthly kingdom and received permission from his father Hwan In. He descended upon Mt. Tae Paik near Pyungyang with 3,000 spirits and proclaimed himself the 'King of the Universe' under an ancient 'paktal' tree. He governed the universe through three vice-regents, the 'Wind General', the 'Rain Governor', and the 'Cloud Teacher'. Since he wanted to become a human being, he heard a dialogue between a tiger and a bear about becoming human beings. These two animals heard a voice coming out of the Void saying that if each would eat twenty pieces of garlic and a piece of artemisia and retire in a cave for twenty-one days, they would become man. The active tiger could not remain in the cave for 21 days, but the patient bear stayed there for 21 days and become a woman and her first wish was to have a son. Hwan Woong, the Spirit King, saw her sitting beside the stream, circled around her and breathed upon her. She finally conceived and bore a son whose name was Tangoon or Hwan Kum, the foremost ancestor of the Korean race in 2,333 B.C.

Dr. Rha points out three important points in Tai Chong Kyo:

1. It conveys the monotheistic concept in Han Ul Nim, One Great Spirit, and Hwan In, Hwan Woong and Hwan Kum are three functions of Han Ul Nim.
2. Han Ul Nim became incarnated in Tangoon or Hwan Kum and lived in this world (Korea) and ruled the people.
3. A Trinitarian theology based on Tangoon Mythology was developed in Korea in 1963 by Dr. Sung-Bum Yun, professor of theology at the Korean Methodist Seminary in Seoul.

In conclusion, Koreans like many other Asians have worshipped many gods and spirits. Nevertheless, the monotheistic concept of God can be discovered even in the traditional religions of Korea. The similarity of words such as Ha Nu Nim (하느님,

Heavenly Lord) and Ha Na Nim (**하나님** , One Great Spirit) of Shamanism, and the Christian usage of Ha Na Nim (**하나님**) for the God of the Bible has certainly helped Korean Christians to witness to non-Christians about the gospel.

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Christian Responses to the Challenge of Native Spiritualities in Central America

Guillermo Cook

Evangelical theology calls for dialogue between the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God, Jesus Christ as unique and universal and the responses of communities of people, each with their own experience of God and of spiritual reality. In this article Dr Cook clearly empathizes with the Maya people of Central America in their past and present search to know God as expressed through rich images and symbols some of which reflect the glory of biblical imagery. The author explores the ways Catholic and Protestant indigenous Christians search for bridges to communicate the fullness of Jesus Christ while acknowledging that his uniqueness is a stumbling block to Maya spirituality. The insights of a team of Maya Presbyterian village pastors from Yucaton, Mexico in formulating their own confession of faith is particularly illuminating. For the Maya people to be unashamedly Christian and unashamedly Maya is a challenge to Christians in every culture.

Even before 1992 and the quincentenary of Columbus' 'discovery' of the 'Americas',¹ the ancient religiosity of the indigenous inhabitants had begun to reappear. It had been hidden for centuries in mountain caves, isolated jungles and under a thin veneer of popular Catholicism. This reawakening coincides with the resurgence of the indigenous populations. A century and a half after the European invasion, the indigenous population in the 'New World' was reduced to barely 10% of its original population of an estimated 100 million people. Today the indigenous population stands at about 50 million and is growing.²

All over the Americas there has been a revival of interest in indigenous culture and spirituality. Informal meetings of indigenous priests and leaders have been held in

¹ The whole incident of the conquest of the 'New World' by European powers is full of ironies and misnomers. Columbus thought he had arrived in the East Indies, the Spice Islands and called the inhabitants 'indians'. Their ancestors were the real discoverers of this new land, when they crossed the Bering land-bridge from Siberia thousand of years before. When Columbus' exploits were forgotten, the new lands came to be named after another Italian explorer, Americo Vespucci, with a greater ability to spin a yarn.

² *500 YEARS Quito*, Latin American Council of Churches, No 3, Nov. 1991, p. 9.