

# NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONARIES' UNDERSTANDING OF THE *TAN'GUN* AND *KIJA* MYTHS OF KOREA, 1884-1934

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The purpose of this study is to examine North American missionaries' interpretations of two founding fathers of ancient Korea, *Tan'gun* (檀君) and *Kija* (箕子). Its main thesis is that they understood *Tan'gun* as the third person of the Korean Trinity and the first Shaman-king who worshipped the original monotheistic god *Hananim*, and *Kija* as both a cultural reformer and adaptor who conformed higher civilization to the Korean context. These two approaches—indigenization of western Christianity and reformation of Korean culture—coexisted among the early missionaries without much conflict.

The significance of this case study lies in its new interpretation of the theology of non-Christian religions of the early Korean Church. It will challenge the generally accepted image of the North American missionaries as cultural imperialists. Most scholarship has insisted that among them religious triumphalism dominated and that conservative fundamentalism prevailed in the early Korean Church. This study will revise such a stereotypical interpretation by revealing missionaries' theology of indigenization in their understanding of *Tan'gun* and *Kija*. It will argue that moderate evangelical mission theology appreciated the Korean religious and cultural heritage, and attempted to preserve its national identity against Japanese imperialism. This revision will challenge contemporary Korean fundamentalists who consider themselves to be inheritors of early missionaries' conservative orthodoxy and spirit of crusade against Korean traditions.

## I. ENCOUNTER OF TWO TRADITIONS

In the missionary study of *Tan'gun* and *Kija*, late nineteenth-century evangelical mission theology of non-Christian religions encountered the Neo-Confucian understanding of *Tan'gun* and *Kija* of the Chosŏn dynasty.

### LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICAL MISSION THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

From Max Müller to Louis H. Jordan, late nineteenth-century comparative religion was concerned with the relative superiority or inferiority of religions based on the criteria provided by the

Darwinian-Spencerian theory of evolution. Yet many North American evangelical mission scholars advocated the theory of degradation, which maintained that primitive monotheism had deteriorated to polytheism or pantheism through sinful human history. They defended the theory of degeneration in arguing for the supremacy and uniqueness of Christianity. They asserted that only Christianity, especially Protestantism, had preserved fully and completely the original divine revelation and biblical monotheism, whereas other forms of faith had been corrupted from it.

In 1891 F. F. Ellinwood, senior secretary of the Board of Foreign Mission of the PCUSA, in his lecture on “The Traces of a Primitive Monotheism,” attacked evolutionism, relying partly on S. H. Kellogg’s view: “We cannot believe that fetishism and idolatry have been God’s kindergarten method of training the human race for the higher and more spiritual service of His kingdom.” He accepted the claims of missionary scholars in China who argued that the ancient Chinese were monotheists, and “Shangti” was the personal Supreme Deity. Ellinwood asserted that every nation had some notions of God, but that evidences showed their degeneration to polytheism. Most early Protestant missionaries to Korea were under the influence of the theory of degradation.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, liberal Christian scholars were in favor of Darwinian evolutionism in their explanation of the origin of world religions and their development. However, they were also convinced of the superiority of Christianity. James F. Clarke said that Christianity was “the religion of the most civilized and the only progressive nations of the world.” He argued that Christianity and Christendom alone were in a state of steady development and progress. “Every country which professes the Christian faith is advancing, all others relatively stagnant. ... Christendom is a confederation of mighty nations.” The language of Christian “civilization” and “progress” replaced that of conservative “biblical” superiority.<sup>2</sup> Some Methodist missionaries in Korea accepted this evolutionism. The above two attitudes justified the destruction of idolatrous “heathen” religions. The replacement of “superstitious” and “false” religions by Christianity was the only alternative for them.

From the 1850s on, some theologians in England and Scotland and “progressive conservative” or “liberal evangelical” missionaries in India and China advocated “fulfillment theory,” a new apologetic or a new attitude toward other faiths. They argued that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the fragmental truths of other religions and all other religions had prepared for the Christian gospel by their defects. The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 adopted the theory as its official theology of non-Christian religions. Its Commission IV sent a questionnaire to a large number of missionaries and received nearly two hundred sets of answers, publishing them in a report—*The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*. In the answer to Question 5—“What attitude should the Christian preacher take toward the religion of the people among whom he labors?”—most respondents wrote that a missionary should have an open-minded, courteous, respectful, conciliatory, and thoroughly friendly and appreciative attitude

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Ellinwood, *Oriental Religions and Christianity* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1892; 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1911), 224, 239-45, and 262. He supervised the Northern Presbyterian Mission in Korea from 1884 to 1902. Cf. S. H. Kellogg, *The Genesis and Development of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 181-201.

<sup>2</sup> James F. Clarke, *Ten Great Religions Part II* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1883), 354-6.

and study other faiths deeply. In answer to Question 6 of the enquiry—"What are the elements in the said religion or religions which present the points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it?"—most replies enumerated various points of contact. Some leading progressive theologians led the Commission with a clear missiological intention to advocate the fulfillment theory. The majority of the respondents testified to its validity with their seasoned experiences in the fields.<sup>3</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, North American mission scholars, both conservative and liberal, argued for the superiority of Christianity over heathen religions. This view dominated American missions to Korea, initiated in 1884. The above three different streams of mission theology toward Asian culture and religions—the theory of degradation, the Christian civilization theory, and the fulfillment theory—influenced those scholars' understanding of *Tan'gun* and *Kija*.

### CONFUCIAN UNDERSTANDING OF *TAN'GUN* AND *KIJA* IN THE CHOSŎN DYNASTY

For their investigation into the ancient Korean myths and history, missionaries depended on the existing Korean historiography produced in the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). Those books had three major different understandings of *Tan'gun*—as a political, a cultural, or a religious figure. In the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, they focused on his role as the founder of the Korean race as a national community and the first king of heavenly mandate in order to establish the historical legitimacy of the dynasty. The *Tongguk t'onggam* (東國通鑑, 1485), the first official overall history of Korea from *Tan'gun* through the end of the Koryŏ dynasty, inherited the theory of the three Chosŏns (*Tan'gun* Chosŏn—*Kija* Chosŏn—*Wiman* Chosŏn) of the previous histories. It interpreted the ancient myths through the perspective of Confucian rationalism and morality.

In the sixteenth century when the Confucian ideology was established, the mainline historical consciousness emphasized *Kija* as the father of Confucian morality. Thus *Tan'gun* was subordinated to *Kija*. Yet minority scholars stressed the role of *Tan'gun* in the origin of the Korean people. O Un, a *Namin*, wrote the *Tongsa ch'anyo* (東史纂要, 1608), and Cho Chŏng, a *Pukin*, wrote the *Tongsa poyu* (東史補遺, ca 1630). The latter elevated the history of Korea to a time period as ancient as that of China by quoting the text of the *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事), written by the Buddhist monk Irŏn (1206-89). In the eighteenth century, *Tan'gun* began to be worshipped as a god by Shamanistic and Taoist groups. A minority of scholars understood *Tan'gun* as the foundation of Korean Confucian cultural identity distinguished from the Chinese. Yi Chong-whui's *Tongsa* (東史, 1780) placed *Tan'gun* Chosŏn at the same level with China. It emphasized *Tan'gun*'s cultural teachings. He maintained that *Whan'ung* (桓雄) established a religion of spirits.

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<sup>3</sup> *World Missionary Conference, 1910; Report of Commission IV, The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Revell, 1910). For a detailed study on the responses, see K. Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love* (London: Epworth Press, 1995). Cf. Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfill: The Contribution of J. N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1965).

Chang Tong's *Tongsa kangyo* (東史綱要, 1884) accepted the text of *Tan'gun* of the *Samguk yusa*.<sup>4</sup> The early twentieth-century governmental textbooks portrayed *Kija* as the foundation of the enlightenment movement of modern Korea.<sup>5</sup>

## II. TAN'GUN AND "HANĀNIM"

North American missionaries began to publish their studies on the myths and history of Korea in 1895. The discussion of the Korean term, *Hanānim* (하느님 Heavenly Lord) for "God" stimulated their probe into the *Tan'gun* myth.

### FIRST TRANSLATIONS OF GALE, APPENZELLER, JONES, AND HULBERT IN 1895

Four early missionary scholars in Korean studies—J. S. Gale (1863-1937), H. G. Appenzeller (1858-1902), G. H. Jones (1865-1918), and H. B. Hulbert (1863-1949)—participated in introducing the ancient history of Korea to the world in 1895. As their researches were just begun, the historical sources on which they depended determined their perspectives on *Tan'gun*. Or, one could say that the sources that they chose represented their understandings of the origin of the Korean people.

Gale depended on the *Tongguk t'onggam*, to which most Western diplomats and missionaries referred in the 1890s. He followed the mainstream historical understanding of the Chosŏn dynasty and accepted its emphasis on *Kija*. As a result, Gale's translations contained less mythical elements in the story of *Tan'gun* than those of Hulbert who used more varied histories including the *Tongsa kangyo*. Gale began to translate the *Tongguk t'onggam* in 1895.

"In B. C. 2332 a spirit being alighted under a sandal-wood tree on Tābāk mountain, Yung-pyun, P'yung-an province. The people of the country gathered round, made him their chief and proclaimed him Tan-goon, king of Chosun. He built his capital at P'ing-yang in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the Yo Emperor of China, again he built another capital at Pāk-mountain, and in the year B. C. 1324 he ascended into heaven from the Adal hills, Kang-dong District." Notwithstanding his miraculous ascension, he has had several graves built to him. One is in Choong-hwa and was repaired as late as 1890 by the governor of

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<sup>4</sup> The *Tongsa kangyo* (7 volumes) was a résumé of the five great histories—the *Tongguk t'onggam*, the *Tongsa ch'anyo*, the *Wirye ch'amrok*, the *Tongsa poyu*, and the *Tongsa boegang*. (C. N. Weems, *Hulbert's History of Korea*, Vol. I (New York: Hillary House, 1962), "Editors Introduction," 74-5; Maurice Courant, *Bibliographie coréenne*, vol. II, 336-8.) It differs from the *Tongsa kangmok* (東史綱目, 1778, by An Chŏng-bok). At present the British Museum has the only known copy of *Tongsa kangyo*.

<sup>5</sup> Pak Kwang-yong, "Tan'gun insik ūi yŏksajŏk pyŏnch'ŏn," *Tan'gun kŭ ibae wa charyo* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1992), 158-81

P'yung-an Province. There twice every year the nation offers a sacrifice of raw meat and uncooked food to Old Sandalwood (Tangoon), and prayers for the occasion are printed and sent from Seoul by the Minister of Ceremonies.<sup>6</sup>

Gale omitted the commentary of the *Tongguk t'onggam* and inserted his own, which emphasized the worship of *Tan'gun* as the national founder.<sup>7</sup>

H. G. Appenzeller introduced *Tan'gun* based on the *Tongguk t'onggam* and the *Tongmong sŏnsŭp* (童蒙先習, 1541, The Youth's Primer). He understood *Tan'gun* as a cultural figure as well as a political one. G. H. Jones also translated a part of the *Tongmong sŏnsŭp*, which emphasized the same beginning for both Korea and China.<sup>8</sup>

Gale and Appenzeller acknowledged the structure of the myth: descent-from-heaven—incarnation-on-earth—and ascent-to-heaven of the divine spirit. Both also agreed with the same beginning for both Korea and China. Gale paid more attention to the political meaning of the contemporary religious worship of *Tan'gun*, Appenzeller to his cultural role, and Jones to his political role. So they inherited three different understandings of *Tan'gun* from the Chosŏn dynasty. Yet they did not mention a “Bear-Woman,” because they followed the Confucian-biased texts.

In contrast, H. B. Hulbert referred to varied histories and those of the minority groups. One of his sources was the *Tongsa poyu*, which contained the text of the *Samguk yusa*. Moreover he thought that the natural sources such as myths and legends and related studies were important in the investigation of the origin of any race. Thus he used them more positively than other missionaries. He understood the legend of *Tan'gun* in terms of the origin of the Korean race.

The first ray, which pierces the darkness of Korean antiquity, is the legend of the Tan Gun. A bear was transformed into a woman who, being pregnant by a divine being, brought forth a child who in later years was found seated under a tree, on Tã Pãk San, by the people of the nine wild tribes then inhabiting northern Korea. ... They were presumably a branch of the great Turanian family which spread over northern Asia, eastward to the Pacific and westward as far as Lapland if not further.<sup>9</sup>

Hulbert focused on delineating an independent identity of the northern Korean race from the Chinese. He emphasized the role of the lady-bear who became the mother of *Tan'gun*. When Protestant missionaries began their studies on Korean history in the 1890s, Korea was suffering a national crisis, caused by the imperialistic world powers. Hence, in order to enhance historical sense of the people, turn-of-the-century Korean historiography emphasized the traditions of political independence and the cultural identity of ancient Korea. Hulbert embraced such nationalistic consciousness of Korean leaders.

<sup>6</sup> J. S. Gale, “Korean History,” *The Korean Repository* [hereafter *KR*] (September 1895), 321.

<sup>7</sup> Gifford backed Gale's opinion. D. L. Gifford, *Everyday Life in Korea* (New York: Revell, 1898), 24.

<sup>8</sup> G. H. Jones, “Historical Résumé of the Youth's Primer,” *KR* (April 1895), 138.

<sup>9</sup> H. B. Hulbert, “The Origin of the Korean People,” *KR* (June 1895), 220. See H. B. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (New York: Doubleday Page, 1906), 27-9.

In 1895, after a decade of preparation, the earliest *Tan'gun* scholarship of the Korean missions was initiated by leading missionaries. They understood *Tan'gun* as the progenitor of the Korean race and its first king. Gale and Jones paid more attention to *Tan'gun's* political aspect, Appenzeller to his cultural initiation, and Hulbert to the distinctive racial origin of Korea.

#### CONTROVERSY BETWEEN GALE AND HULBERT IN 1900

Hulbert understood the *Tan'gun* myth as the foundation of the distinctive cultural and political beginning of Korea. Gale did not believe in the historical *Tan'gun* and traced the Chinese influence since the arrival of *Kija*. Gale followed the mainstream historians' understanding of *Tan'gun* of the Taehan Empire, which portrayed *Kija* as the foundation of enlightened civilization and modernization. Hulbert followed the perspectives of the minority historians and that of the Independence Club. Most missionaries and Gale believed in the policy of separation of religion and state. Yet Hulbert and Appenzeller defended the inevitability of political participation. Their different perspectives on Korean ancient history and contemporary politics collided in 1900.

At the first general meeting of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society held in November 1900, Gale read a paper, "The Influence of China upon Korea." He argued that Korea was "under a mesmeric spell at the hands of the Great Middle Kingdom" since the arrival of *Kija* in 1122 B. C. Gale emphasized the political and cultural influence of China upon the Korean mind and thought. He concluded his argument by a quotation from the close of the *Tongmong sŏnsŭp*: "Our ceremonies, our enjoyments, our laws, our usages, our dress, our literature, our goods have all followed the models of China. ... so that Chinese themselves praise us saying 'Korea is little China.'" Gale's paper left the impression that Korean life was an exact replica of the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

One month later Hulbert read a paper, "Korean Survivals," to disprove Gale's version. Hulbert argued that Korea was a nation of over twelve million people who had preserved a "distinct national life" for more than two thousand years. He investigated the remains that were distinctive of Korea and differentiated her from China. He traced Korean history from *Tan'gun*.

Korean tradition tells us that the first civilizer of Korea was the Tan-gun, a purely native character, born on the slopes of Tă-băk Mountain. The wild tribes made him their king. He taught them the relations of king and subject; he instituted the rite of marriage;... he taught them to bind up the hair by tying a cloth about the head. This tradition is universally accepted among Koreans as true. They believe his reign to have begun a thousand years before the coming of Keui-ja. We place no confidence in the historical value of the legend, but the Koreans do.<sup>11</sup>

Hulbert emphasized the cultural role of *Tan'gun*. He maintained that the folklores of the origin of Korea's heroes, such as *Hyŏkkŏse*, *Sŏkt'albae*, and *Chumong*, were strikingly non-Chinese.

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<sup>10</sup> J. S. Gale, "The Influence of China upon Korea," *The Transaction of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* [hereafter TKB], vol. I (1900), 1-24.

<sup>11</sup> H. B. Hulbert, "Korean Survivals," TKB, vol. I (1900), 25-6.

In the discussion, regarding *Tan'gun*, Gale denied the historicity of *Tan'gun* and emphasized *Kija's* most powerful influence upon Korea. Jones mediated the two conflicting opinions. He admitted Hulbert's correctness in contending that there were many customs and institutions that were purely Korean and did not belong to the category of Chinese influence. Jones agreed with Gale that Chinese influence had gradually spread over Korean society since *Kija* Chosŏn. Yet Jones's point was that Shamanism was one of the chief Korean survivals.

Tan-gun, the first worthy mentioned, claimed descent from Ché-sük, one of the chief Shaman demons. The early kings of Silla took the Shaman title of seers or exorcists for the royal designation. As far as we know this has always been the Korean's religion ... it existed from pre-Keui-ja days and has persisted to the present time.<sup>12</sup>

Jones interpreted *Chesŏke* (帝釋) as a chief Shaman, and *Tan'gun* as his descendent. He did not accept Irŏn's interpretation of *Whanin* (桓因) or *Chesŏke* as a Buddhist god of East, *Sakra-Devanam Indra*. Instead Jones emphasized the connection of *Tan'gun* with Shamanism.

#### HULBERT'S TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE *TAN'GUN* MYTH IN 1901

In 1901 Gale and Hulbert exchanged their opinions on *Tan'gun* in the mission magazines that they edited. Hulbert began to publish *The History of Korea* in *The Korea Review* of January 1901. In the first introductory note, he presumed that the persistent traditions of *Tan'gun* and *Kija* were "founded on facts." As there were so many monuments that corroborated them, he was forced to believe in their historical existence. In the first part of Chapter I, Hulbert dealt with the *Tan'gun* myth with a free translation of the text of the *Samguk yusa* and the *Tongsa kangyo*.

In the primeval ages, so the story runs, there was a divine being named Whan-in, or Che-sŏk, "Creator." His son, Whan-ung, being affected by celestial *ennui*, obtained permission to descend to earth and found a mundane kingdom. ... A tiger and a bear ... They ate and retired into the recesses of a cave ... the bear ... stepped forth, a perfect woman. The first wish of her heart was maternity, and she cried, "Give me a son." Whan-ung, the Spirit King, passing on the wind, beheld her sitting there beside the stream. He circled round her, breathed upon her, and her cry was answered. She cradled her babe in moss beneath that same *pak-tal* tree ... This was the Tan'gun, "The Lord of the Pak-tal Tree." He is also, but less widely, known as Wang-gŭm. ... At Mun-wha there is a shrine to the Korean trinity, Whan-in, Whan-ung and Tan-gun.<sup>13</sup>

Hulbert adopted the Christian idea of the Trinity in his translation. He paraphrased *Whanin* (桓因) as "Creator," *Whan'ung* (桓雄) as "the Spirit," and *Tan'gun* as the incarnated "Lord." Hulbert described that *Tan'gun* was conceived by the Spirit—the wind—, and born from a perfect

<sup>12</sup> "Discussion," *TKB*, vol. I (1900), 48-9.

<sup>13</sup> H. B. Hulbert, "Part I Ancient Korea Chapter I," *The Korea Review* (January 1901), 33-5.

woman as in the case of Jesus. He implied that *Tan'gun* was a god-man as well as a king-teacher-priest like Jesus. Hulbert's acceptance of the motifs of the Korean trinity was a significant turning point in the development of *Tan'gun* studies among the missionaries.<sup>14</sup>

Yet Gale totally refuted the historical *Tan'gun* and his divine origin. He published some articles on ancient Korea, translated from the *Tonggyuk t'onggam*, in *Kirisudo sinmun*. In his first article on *Tan'gun* and *Kija*, Gale noted that *Tan'gun* did not come from heaven, but that people had called a man from another country "a spirit being" and made him a king. Gale criticized the mythical elements as false and unreliable.<sup>15</sup>

The controversy between Gale and Hulbert in 1900 and 1901 presented a serious topic of *Tan'gun* to the missionary scholars in understanding distinctive Korean culture and Shamanism as well as ancient Korean history. Hulbert suggested that the *Tan'gun* myth could be interpreted in the Christian idea of Trinity, and *Whanin* of the myth was "Creator," which was the Heavenly Father, *Hananim*, to the Koreans. This issue was developed and investigated in the controversy over the "term question" that tried to find the suitable Korean name for "God."

#### THE "TERM QUESTION" AND THE AUTHORIZATION OF *HANANIM* BETWEEN 1904 AND 1906

The "term question" concerning the rendering of the word "God" into a vernacular name coincided with missionaries' research into the ancient Korean myths. Although the Chinese missions suffered long controversies over the terms, the Korea missions came to an earlier consensus of *Hananim* (하느님) within only two decades. The history of the term question will reveal early missionaries' theology of non-Christian religions and their attitudes toward the primitive monotheism of Korean shamanism. It will focus on the development of a new indigenous Christian term, *Hananim*, in relation to the concept of heaven and oneness.<sup>16</sup>

After John Ross of Manchuria introduced *Hananim* (하느님) in 1882 and its variation *Hananim* (하나님) in 1883, most North American missionaries in Korea preferred its standard

<sup>14</sup> In 1963 Yun Söng-bömm interpreted the *Tan'gun* myth in terms of Christian Trinity, quoting Hulbert's translation. Yun argued that the myth was formed under the influence of Nestorianism. (Yun Söng-bömm, "Whanin, Whanung, Wangömm ün kot 'Hananim' ida," *Sasanggye*, May 1963.) Palmer admitted Yun's thesis had some reasonable basis for drawing analogies between old Korean concepts and biblical ideas of God. (S. J. Palmer, *Korea and Christianity* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 1967), 15.) Ra Kyöng-su argues that such a Christian and male-centered interpretation provided an improper place for the earth god, the Bear-Woman, who initiated the conception of the Son. (Ra Kyöng-su, *Han'guk üi simha yöngu* (Seoul: Kyomunsa, 1993), 154-63.) Ch'oi So-young asserts that the Bear-Woman should be understood as a god of preservation of life and creation, a priestess mediating incarnation, and a self-reliant human being. (Ch'oi So-young, "The Role of the Lady-Bear in the *Tan'gun* Myth," *Segye-üi sinhak* 7, Summer, 1990.)

<sup>15</sup> "Tan'gun Chyosyön," *Kirisudo sinmun*, Sept. 12, 1901; "Koguryö," Oct. 17, 1901.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of the term question in Korea, see Oak Sung-deuk, "Kaesingyo chönraegi Hananim yong'ö munje," *Kidokkegyo sasang* (Oct. 1993); Oak Sung-deuk and Yi Mahn-yol, *Taehan söngsö gonghoesa* vol. II (Seoul: The Korean Bible Society, 1994), 104-18.



form *Hananim* (하느님). They commonly understood that their etymology was *hanal* (heaven). In the process of debating the term question, however, some missionaries found that *Hananim* had “oneness” and “greatness” besides “heavenliness” as its primary meaning. In the authorization of *Hananim* as the Korean term for God between 1904 and 1906, its three meanings (“One”-“Great”-“Heaven”) coexisted in creative tension among the missionaries.<sup>17</sup>

The term question was initiated in 1893 when H. G. Underwood introduced *Yöbowa* (Jehovah) in his hymnbook. Because the use of a “name” of gods of a culture was connected with other gods, he argued, a universal “term,” which could reject other ordinary heathen gods, should be chosen for the identity of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> He preferred *T'yön-jyu* or *Shyang-jyu*. The Church of England Mission used the former. For a decade from 1894 to 1903, the Protestant missions used two kinds of Scriptures—the *T'yön-jyu* edition and the *Hananim* edition.

Around 1900 most North American missionaries turned to *Hananim*. They asserted: “The Koreans understand the word of *Hananim*. They have already worshipped *Hananim*. It is our job to teach them that *Hananim* is only one and the only God, to tell all His nature. Then all will become easy.”<sup>19</sup> They stressed the uniqueness and exclusiveness of *Hananim*. Yet, their adoption of an indigenous name, *Hananim*, the chief god of Korean shamanism, was related to the debate over the myth of *Tan'gun*, who was understood as a descendent of *Hananim*. Thus the adoption of *Hananim* was a meaningful step of accommodating Western Christianity to Korean culture.

But Underwood criticized this easy solution as syncretism. He used *Shyang-jyu*, a combination of *Shyang-dye* and *T'yön-jyu*, in his weekly *Kürisüdo sinmun* from 1897 to April 1901. His insistence on *Shyang-jyu* vexed other missionaries and caused serious friction among them. The *Hananim* party asserted that as *Hananim* was the equivalent of *T'yön-jyu*, it would not be necessary to use the Chinese term *T'yön-jyu*.<sup>20</sup> The most important issue, however, was whether *Hananim* was a monotheistic god or an ethnic chief god of the polytheistic heathen system. Underwood, R. A. Hardy, and D. L. Gifford understood *Hananim* as the latter. They argued that the Korean *Hananim* was similar to the Chinese *Shangti*, and that *Hananim* sat on the top of the hierarchy of Korean gods along with *Buddha* and *San-shin* (a mountain god).<sup>21</sup>

Although the majority usage was against Underwood, until he found the theological ground for accepting *Hananim*, he did not compromise with it. After the death of Gifford in 1900, Underwood was the only missionary apart from the Roman Catholics and the Church of England Mission, who used the term *T'yön-jyu* until 1903. All his colleagues used the term *Hananim*.

<sup>17</sup> In this paper, *Hananim* represents 하느님, and its variations *Hananim* 하느님 and *Hananim* 하나님. The Chinese *Shang-ti* (上帝), *T'ien-chu* (天主), and *Shen* (神) were equivalent to the Korean *Shyang-dye* (상대), *T'yön-jyu* (툰쥬), and *Shin* (신) respectively.

<sup>18</sup> L. H. Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Topknots* (New York: American Tract Society, 1904), 104.

<sup>19</sup> L. H. Underwood, *Underwood of Korea* (New York: Revell, 1918), 123 & 135.

<sup>20</sup> R. Rutt, *A Biography of James Scarth Gale and a New Edition of his History of Korean People* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 1972), 26.

<sup>21</sup> D. L. Gifford, *Everyday Life in Korea* (New York: Revell, 1898), 88-9.

The theological development which led Underwood to accept *Hananim* was provided by Gale and Hulbert. In 1900 Gale introduced a new etymology of *Hananim*. Mr. Chu, a Korean scholar, preached to Gale about God and told him that Koreans knew of Him before the days of Christianity.

“Our God,” said Chu, “is the Great One, and is called by us *Hananim*, from the word *Hana*, meaning one, and *nim*, meaning lord, master, king. The one great Lord of Creation is *Hananim*. We associate him with the building of the universe, and also call him *Cho-wba-ong*, the ancient creator.”<sup>22</sup>

Mr. Chu continued, “God is eminently just and wholly impartial, that he is holy; He is the last court of appeal for us mortals.” Gale accepted Mr. Chu’s understanding of *Hananim* as “One Great One” and Creator. Therefore, around 1900 both Hulbert and Gale accepted *Hananim* as the monotheistic Creator. The difference was that Hulbert interpreted *Wbanin* of the *Tan’gun* myth as Creator; Gale interpreted the primary etymology of *Hananim* as “one” or unity.

Meanwhile, at the nineteenth annual meeting of Methodist Mission held in Seoul in May 1903, D. A. Bunker and G. H. Jones proposed that the term *Ch’ön-ju* in the Scriptures should be omitted and changed into *Hananim*. It was passed.<sup>23</sup> In 1904 a tentative version of the Korean New Testament was printed with only *Hananim*, and its authorized edition was published in 1906.

Hulbert’s argument on *Hananim* was further developed in 1906. He described that in the days of Abraham, *Tan’gun* built heaven-touching altar on the top of Mari Mountain on the Island of Kangwha, and worshipped God with burnt offerings. Hulbert asserted that the Koreans who had worshipped *Hananim* were strict monotheists. He argued that the Roman Catholics’ term *T’yön-ju* was used long before Christianity came, and might therefore be called the name of a heathen god. There were idols bearing the name of *T’ien-chu* in China, Hulbert asserted, yet people had never made any physical representation of *Hananim* in Korea.<sup>24</sup>

Gale affirmed his new interpretation of *Hananim* in 1909: “He is *Hananim*, the One Great One. His name in Chinese and also in Korean is made up of terms meaning “one” and “great.” So he is the Supreme Ruler for whom there is no image or likeness in heaven or earth or under the earth.”<sup>25</sup> When Gale’s understanding of *Hananim* as “the Great One” was conjoined to Hulbert’s assertion of Korean monotheistic belief in *Hananim*, the result was the transformation of *Hananim* as the Lord of Heaven into *Hananim* as “the Great One,” a new God.

#### UNDERWOOD’S ACCEPTANCE OF *TAN’GUN’S HANANIM* IN 1909-10

<sup>22</sup> J. S. Gale, “Korean Ideas of God,” *The Missionary Review of the World* (Sept. 1900), 697. It seems that Mr. Chu, mentioned by Gale, was Chu Si-gyöng, who became a renowned scholar of the Korean language.

<sup>23</sup> “Taehan mümi kamrikyohoe che sipkuch’a nyönwhanhoe hoerok,” *Sinhak wölbo* (June 1903), 250.

<sup>24</sup> H. B. Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (London: W. Heinemann, 1906), 288, 404; H. G. Underwood, *The Religions of Eastern Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 101.

<sup>25</sup> J. S. Gale, *Korea in Transition* (New York: Young People Missionary Movement, 1909), 78-9.

Underwood's second source in accepting *Hananim* was his study of the ancient myths of Korea. In the course of studying the ancient religions of Korea, according to Mrs. Underwood, he realized that the ancient Koreans of the kingdom of Koguryō worshipped the "Great One" God *Hananim*. Underwood thought that the contemporary Korean's corrupted idea of *Hananim* could be healed by the use of *Hananim* as *Hananim* that had a primitive monotheistic meaning. Thus he decided to use *Hananim*.<sup>26</sup> Actually the myth that Underwood related to the primitive pure monotheism of the ancient Koreans was the *Tan'gun* myth. In 1910 Underwood wrote:

In primeval ages there was one divine being named Whanin, who was the "Chai-so," the Creator. He had with him one other being who came from him, called Whanung, who asked and received permission to come down into this world. Finding *difficulty, however*, in governing the world *as a spirit*, he *desired incarnation*. Seeing a beautiful woman, who, because of self-denial, had been lifted by miraculous power from the condition of an animal to humanity, he breathed upon her, and she conceived and gave birth to Tangun, who became the first king of Korea.<sup>27</sup>

Underwood interpreted the translation of Hulbert in his own way. He stressed *Whan'ung's* desire for incarnation and the Bear-Woman's self-denial. He pointed out that *Tan'gun* worshipped his "Father God," *Whanin*. He affirmed that Korea had originally possessed "a pure monotheism." He concluded, "in the Korean concept of *Hananim* there is even less anthropomorphism than is seen in the Jewish ideas of Jehovah." He understood that Christian *Hananim* was adopted from Korean Shamanism. Yet he believed that this supremacy of *Hananim* was acknowledged by all Confucianists, Buddhists, and Shamanists alike in Korea.<sup>28</sup>

### THE KOREA MISSIONS AFFIRMS TAN'GUN'S *HANANIM* IN 1910-11

In 1910 when the Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated the Quarter-Centennial of the founding of the Korean Mission, Jones related *Hananim* to shamanism, and said that traces of "a primitive monotheism" could be found in the Korean people's original faith in *Hananim*.<sup>29</sup> The Shamanistic aspect of *Hananim* could explain the religious reason for the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea, and the mission policy that stressed the evangelization of the ordinary people, especially women, whose main religion was Shamanism.<sup>30</sup>

In 1910, North American missionaries believed that the Korean Church, whose adherents numbered over 250,000 in 25 years, had solved the term question:

<sup>26</sup> Lillias H. Underwood, *Underwood of Korea*, 126.

<sup>27</sup> H. G. Underwood, *The Religions of Eastern Asia*, 105-6. Underwood's lectures in New York University and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1909 developed into the book.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 110; L. H. Underwood, *op. cit.*, 216.

<sup>29</sup> G. H. Jones, *Korea Mission* (New York: The BFM of the MEC, 1910), 15-17.

<sup>30</sup> S. J. Palmer, *Korea and Christianity*, 17.

Twenty-five years ago, when missionary work began in Korea, there was no word in Korean language for the name of God. The missionaries at last agreed upon its nearest equivalent, and added to it a meaning it never had before.<sup>31</sup>

This remark shows that all the Korean Christians and the missionaries as well in Korea accepted a new monotheistic *Hananim*. Missionaries' theological works baptized an indigenous *Hananim* as *Hananim* (Heavenly Lord) to be born again as the monotheistic *Hananim* as *Hananim* (One Great One). Its historical source was the *Tan'gun* myth.

W. D. Reynolds, of the American Presbyterian Mission (South), the Secretary of the Board of Translators, on whom rested the main burden of the translation of the Old Testament into Korean, wrote an article on the Korean Bible in *The Union Seminary Magazine* in 1911. He related *Tan'gun*'s supernatural birth with the Bible stories.

There is a hoary tradition that 4,000 years ago a semi-mythical hero named Tangun, sprung from the union of a spirit with a virgin, was hailed by the barbarous people as king, taught them the topknot style of hair-dressing in vogue today, and gave his country the name "Cho-sun," morning freshness, which has been revived by the Japanese since their annexation of Korea. The story of his supernatural birth reads like a faint echo of Gen. vi. 2 or a vague prophecy of Matt. i. 23.<sup>32</sup>

Reynolds assumed that the *Tan'gun* myth reflected the narrative of Genesis 6:1-4, which said that the "sons of God" took the "daughters of men" and produced the giants and the mighty men before Noah's flood, or that it was a "vague prophecy" of the birth of the Messiah, Emmanuel, through a virgin. Reynolds' consistent support for the use of *Hananim*, therefore, was based on his positive understanding of a "semi-mythical hero," *Tan'gun*. His interpretation of the *Tan'gun* myth was Trinitarian—*Whanin* as God, *Whanung* as spirit, and *Tan'gun* as a messiah king.

In sum, the term question was solved by missionaries' research into the *Tan'gun* myth and their new understanding of *Hananim*. Gale's understanding of *Hananim* as *Hana-nim* and Hulbert's Trinitarian interpretation of the *Tan'gun* myth provided decisive clues to solve the issue. Finally Underwood and Reynolds accepted the Korean Trinity of the *Tan'gun* myth and its *Hananim*.<sup>33</sup>

#### **TAN'GUN AND HANANIM IN THE FULFILLMENT THEORY OF JONES AND GALE IN THE 1910S**

In 1915 G. H. Jones, editorial secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York, pointed out five "points of contact" of Korean religions with

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<sup>31</sup> "Korea—The Changes of Seven Years," *MRW* (Feb. 1911), 144.

<sup>32</sup> "Here and There," *The Bible in the World* (Oct. 1911), 318. Although Reynolds was a conservative Southern Presbyterian, his translation was "literary" rather than "literal."

<sup>33</sup> In the controversy the Chinese term *Shangti* had been dropped earlier, for it was used in the Chinese literature. The coexistence of the Korean *Hananim*, which came from Korean Shamanism, and the Chinese *Shangti* on the same level revealed that Korean religions had a distinctive identity.

Christianity—the Korean ideas of God, the moral responsibility of man, worship, prayer, and immortality. About *Hananim* he said:

The Korean ... is not an atheist, for over his polytheistic world he believes that there reigns a supreme God. This being he designates as Hananim, who is a spirit personality unconnected with Confucianism or Buddhism and standing aloof even from the Animistic nature worship of the masses. The word Hananim means literally “Master of Heaven.” Back of this etymology, however, is a more ancient one, which makes the word Hananim mean literally “The One Great One”... This idea of Hananim proved one of the first points of contact between Christianity and native religious conceptions, and was early utilized by the missionaries with large practical results.<sup>34</sup>

A common ground upon which missionaries and Koreans could meet each other was established. With this ancient term *Hananim* as its vehicle, Jones explained, Korean Christianity cured the idolatry of Buddhism, the agnosticism of Confucianism, and the polytheism of Shamanism. It has also expanded and enriched Korean thought life with a wealth of meaning revealed in Christ and recorded in the Bible. Yet Jones did not elucidate the relationship between *Tan'gun* and *Hananim*.

On the other hand, in 1911 when the completion of the first Korean Bible was celebrated, Gale declared with confidence that *Hananim* was Korea's first preparation for the Bible:

First: The Name of God—*Hananim*, meaning The One Great One, the Supreme and Absolute Being, suggesting the mysterious Hebrew appellation “I am that I am.” *Hana* meaning *One* and *Nim*, *Great*. ... The character *Cb'on* 天, *God* or *Heaven*, being an exact equivalent in Chinese of the Korean name *Hananim*, bring us accord with those who use *Cb'on-ju*, so that to-day we can claim union in our appreciation of the wonderful appellative by which Korea stood ready to welcome the tributes to the Bible.<sup>35</sup>

Gale accepted the fulfillment theory, which appreciated the preparations of the Gospel in indigenous culture and religions. He synthesized two different meanings of *Hananim*: “heaven” and “one.” He believed that the transformation of *Hananim* from a Shamanistic god to a new Christian God fulfilled the original meaning of the term and the aspirations of the Korean people.

In 1916 Gale reaffirmed his theory of fulfillment and the preexistence of God's revelation in the history of Korean spirituality.

As God was ever present to the true Hebrew and was spoken of and addressed by a wide variety of names, so it has been with the Korean. For as the Hebrew wrote *El*, *Elohim*, *Eloah*, *El-Shadday*, *Jehovah*, etc. expressive of His different attributes and relationships, and yet all pointing to the same God; so the

<sup>34</sup> G. H. Jones, *The Rise of the Church in Korea*, Ch. #5. typed script, Jones Papers (New York: Union Theological Seminary).

<sup>35</sup> J. S. Gale, “Korea's Preparation for the Bible,” *The Korea Mission Field* [hereafter KMF] (March 1912), 86. This article was chosen and published again by the same journal as one of the “Past Solutions of Initial Problems” in January 1914.

Korean has used many names that point to the same Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. Who, though He dwells out of sight of the eye, controls all the doings of the earth. Some of these names are *Hananim* and *Ch'un*—the One Great One, *Sang-je*—the Supreme Ruler, *Sin-myung*—the All Seeing God, *Tai-chu-jai*—the Master, *Ch'un-keon*—Divine King, *Ch'u-kong*—Celestial Artificer, *Ok-whang*—the Prince of Perfection, *Cho-wha-ong*—the Creator, and *Sin*—the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

Gale regarded all the divine names—even *Okhwang sangje*—that Korean seekers had used as acceptable names for God. With a list of true seekers after God in the history of Korea, Gale concluded the article: “Surely this preparation of the heart and understanding has had no little to do with the Korean’s ready acceptance of the fuller light of the Gospel.”<sup>37</sup> Gale, however, still hesitated to relate *Tan’gun* to *Hananim*. He said: “If we put aside the traditions of Tan-goon, not yet fully investigated, we find that Korea received her first revelation of God about the time of Samuel the prophet. It came from China.”<sup>38</sup> Gale reserved his final conclusion on *Tan’gun*. Nevertheless his attitude toward *Tan’gun* differed from that of 1901. Now it was not a total negation of *Tan’gun*’s relation to *Hananim*, but an ongoing investigation of the issue. In 1916 Gale was considering *Tan’gun* in the context of Korean monotheism.

In 1917 Gale issued a full account of his research on the texts related to *Tan’gun*. He presupposed that *Tan’gun* was “the most mysterious and the most interesting of all religious influences of Korea.” He regarded the contemporary attempt to revive *Tan’gun*’s religion as “a mere mechanical effort.” He translated some quotations related to *Tan’gun*, from various Korean and Chinese books. Although Gale did not attempt to draw any conclusion or express any opinion regarding *Tan’gun*, he arranged various texts under the categories of “the Triune Spirit—God,” “the Teaching of Tan-goon,” “Miraculous Proofs of Tan-goon’s Power,” “Places of Worship,” and “the Tan Song of T’ai-biak.”<sup>39</sup> His first quotation was from the *Kogŭmgi* (古今記).

Whan-in, Whan-oong, and Whan-gum are the Triune Spirit. Sometimes he is called Tan-in, Tan-oong and Tan’goon. In the year Kap-ja of Sang-wun (2333 B. C.) and the 10<sup>th</sup> moon and 3<sup>rd</sup> day Whan-gum changed from a Spirit into a man and came with his heavenly scepter and his three seals. He descended to the Tai-baik Mountains and stood beneath the sandalwood trees. There he made known the divine truth and taught the people. ... Whan-in is God (*Ch’un*);

<sup>36</sup> J. S. Gale, “The Korean’s View of God,” *KMF* (March 1916), 66-7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. Gale listed some true seekers after God in the history of Korea—a king of Koguryō, Paik-kyōl, Chu-wun, Ch’oi Sŭng-no, Im Wan, Yi Kyu-bo, Pak Ŭi-jung, Cho Chun, Kwon Pal, Kim Tōk-sōng, Son Si-yōl, Kang P’il-ho. In 1919 Gale said three Kings of Koryō prayed and offered sacrifice to the Most High God (昊天上帝) or God (天). (“God,” *The Korea Magazine* (April 1919), 158-9.)

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>39</sup> They were taken from various Korean and Chinese books such as 古今記, 漢書, 海東樂譜, 古記, 山海經, 東國闕里誌, 東史遺考, 成宗實錄, 東史, 修山集, 文獻備考, 春官通考 etc.

Whan-oong is the Spirit (*Sin*); and Tan-goon is the God-man (*Sin-in*). These three constitute the Triune Spirit (*Sam-sin*).<sup>40</sup>

Gale's choice of the text of the *Kogŭmgi*, which was not well known, and its subtitle of "The Triune Spirit—God" revealed his changed attitude toward *Tan'gun*. Now Gale began to consider *Tan'gun* in the system of the Korean Trinity.

Gale's new understanding of *Hananim* and *Tan'gun* influenced Mrs. R. Scott who visited Korea for three months during the independence movement in 1919. She met many Korean Christians and missionaries including Gale, who had changed his view on the Japanese government in Korea. She praised courageous Koreans in the fight against Japanese colonialism. She found that the foundation of spiritual power of the Koreans against the Japanese material power was their belief in *Hananim*.

The Japanese have had no understanding of one God in the sense of an unseen central creative power. The Koreans have always worshipped Hananim, a name which covers the idea of one supreme mind, one God. This God of the Koreans is similar to the God of the Jewish Old Testament. ... On this deep-seated monotheism the Christian missionary has built with amazing success.<sup>41</sup>

If a Korean had faith in such a *Hananim*, Scott said, he or she could not be satisfied with Japanese materialism. The Korean wanted to stay Korean, and cling to Korean history, language, and spirituality. The Christian faith in *Hananim* was connected with Korean nationalism and spiritualism against Japanese militarism and materialism.

#### GALE'S TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE TAN'GUNMYTH IN 1924

Finally Gale accepted a Trinitarian interpretation of the *Tan'gun* myth in 1924, when he began to publish his *History of the Korean People* in *The Korea Mission Field*. As the editor said, it was "the crowning piece of work by a life-long student of things Korean."<sup>42</sup> Gale opened the work with these sentences:

Korea takes its beginnings in the misty ages of the past that elude all attempts at close investigation... The first great father of Korea was a being called Tangoon. Be he myth or reality, he emerges from the shadowy pre-historic past and stands between Korea and Manchuria on the Ever White Mountains. Here he gives the simple-hearted people their first lessons in right living, and in return, they call him *shin-in* (神人) which translated, may mean *divine man, angel*,

<sup>40</sup> J. S. Gale, "Tan-goon," *The Korea Magazine* (September 1917), 404.

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Robertson Scott, "Warring Mentalities in the Far East," *Asia XX* (New York: August 1920), 699. She had been residing in Japan for years and was associate editor of *The New East*. Her thesis was that "the Korean problem cannot be solved until the Japanese understand the psychology of the Korean people." She compared the Japanese literal and material mind with the Korean metaphysical and spiritual mind.

<sup>42</sup> A. F. Decamp, "Dr. James S. Gale's 'History of the Korean people,'" *KMF* (July 1924), 132.

*spirit, or god.* ... A startling rumor comes down with him to say that he was the third person of a divine trinity. The *Ko-keum* Book (古今記) reads, “Whan-in (桓因) is God, Whan-oong (桓雄) is the spirit and Tangoon is the god-man. These three constitute a divine trinity.” ... Tangoon’s teaching was known as the Worship of God, and was observed by bowing before the Almighty and offering sacrifice. Quite apart from Confucius, Buddha, and the old Philosophers in his relation to the Great Unseen, he has been the guiding genius for Korean inspiration through all ages.<sup>43</sup>

Although Gale presupposed again the uncertainty of the historical *Tan’gun* and omitted the role of the Bear-Woman, he acknowledged the Trinity of the *Tan’gun* myth. With a quotation from the *Kogŭmgi*, Gale admitted *Tan’gun* as the third person of “a divine trinity” of Korea. This Trinitarian understanding was not limited to Gale.<sup>44</sup> Many Protestant missionaries in the 1920s embraced the trinitarianism of the *Tan’gun* myth. The Heavenly Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son were counterparts of *Whanin*, *Whan’ung*, and *Tan’gun*. They admired the primitive monotheism of the myth, which explained to them the Korean people’s genius for religion. *Tan’gun* was an incarnated god-man who taught the worship of *Hananim*.<sup>45</sup>

Gale’s understanding of *Tan’gun* as the third person of the Korean Trinity was his crowning piece of work in his life-long study of Korean culture. Not only his understanding of *Hananim* as “One Great One” fulfilled the Korean people’s idea of what a divinity should be, but also Gale’s Korean scholarship was fulfilled by the acceptance of the Trinitarian structure of the *Tan’gun* myth.

#### CLARK’S UNDERSTANDING OF *TAN’GUN* IN 1932

In 1932 Charles A. Clark reviewed the missionaries’ opinions on *Tan’gun* during the previous three decades. He accepted the translations and interpretations of Hulbert and Gale.

Many of the Christians in Korea first had their interest in the Christian Gospel aroused through their knowledge of Tangoon and his God, and they have

<sup>43</sup> J. S. Gale, “A History of the Korean People, Chapter I,” *KMF* (July 1924), 134. He exemplified Kim Saeng and Solgō, who were blessed to have a creative artistic gift by *Tan’gun* through visions.

<sup>44</sup> “Editorial,” *KMF* (July 1924), 133. The editor said; “Most missionaries in Korea have observed that the Koreans have a genius for religion which we were at a loss to explain; but Dr. Gale in this initial chapter shows us that they were ‘to the manor born.’ That in the misty realm of antiquity, B. C. 2333, there was a first great father of Korea called Tangoon, who taught the people right living and was regarded by his subjects as a divine-man. Strangest of all, rumor makes him the third person of a divine trinity. Tangoon not only served men with the truth during his life, but from time to time through the ages, in answer to longing prayers, appeared giving precious gifts to men, such as the power to write and to paint.”

<sup>45</sup> Thus Gale and others did not accept the structure of the myth as the combination of the *ch’ōnsinjok* (heavenly god group) and the *chisinjok* (earthly god group) to produce *Tan’gun*.



recognized that He is one and the same as the God of their Bible. May the day come when all Korea may be led to do likewise.<sup>46</sup>

Clark stressed that *Tan'gun* worshipped *Hananim*, and many early Korean Christians were interested in the Christian Gospel through the fact that the traditionally worshipped *Hananim* was the same as the Christian God. Clark had no doubt that early Korean Christians and missionaries recognized that *Whanin*, the Divine One, was Creator *Hananim*, who was the same as the biblical God. After the long search for God in Korea, Protestant missionaries in the 1930s considered *Tan'gun* as the first Shaman-king who worshipped *Hananim*.<sup>47</sup>

### III. *KIJA* AND CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

As we have noted above, missionaries believed the historicity of *Kija*, a Shang aristocrat and scholar, who reportedly left Zhou and arrived in Korea in 1122 B. C. And they stressed his powerful influence in forming the ancient Korean civilization.

#### *KIJA* AS CULTURAL REFORMER

The ideology of Confucian morality of the Chosŏn dynasty and the enlightened civilization of the Taehan Empire enhanced the role of *Kija* who had imported a higher foreign culture. Such a cultural perspective provided a point of contact with the late-nineteenth-century mission theory of Christian civilization, which attempted to transform a heathen society into a Christian one. The Presbyterian missions in Korea adopted the Nevius-Ross method for the establishment of indigenous churches, whereas the northern Methodist mission paid more attention to Christian civilization for the sanctification of the whole society. This holistic mission theory of the Methodists was allied with the enhancement of the medical, educational, and literary life of the men and women of Korea. But both Presbyterian and Methodists shared the theory of Christian civilization and believed in the superiority of western civilization.<sup>48</sup>

When Appenzeller and Jones became the editors of *The Korean Repository* in 1895, they expressed their concern for Christian civilization through the historical example of *Kija*. Appenzeller made the first full introduction of the *Kija* legend in 1895.

On the departure of *Dan Koun*, *Ki Tz'a* came from China as King of Chosŏn. He is the founder of the present social order and civilization and therefore worthy of study. ... At the age of fifty with five thousand followers he came to Chosŏn.

<sup>46</sup> C. A. Clark, *Religions of Old Korea* (New York: Revell, 1932), 143.

<sup>47</sup> Clark knew that there were the Shamanistic Trinity (*Samsin*), the Trinity of Chinese Taoism, many Buddhist Trinities, and the Trinity of the *Tan'gun* myth. (Ibid., 206)

<sup>48</sup> See Oak Sung-deuk, "Early Presbyterian Mission Method in Korea, 1884-1903," *Han'guk Kidokkyo wa yŏksa* (September 1998); Oak Sung-deuk, "F. Ohlinger and Evangelical Methodist Mission Theology in Korea, 1884-1893," *Han'guk Kidokkyo wa yŏksa* (September 1999).

... Among the followers of Ki Tza were representatives from all classes: doctors, scholars, mechanics, tradesmen, diviners and magicians. ... Ki Tza and his adherents found the people to whom they came destitute of manner, morals and religion. ...The sage instituted eight laws.<sup>49</sup>

Appenzeller continued: “The civilization introduced by Ki Tza was based on the Chinese Odes, History, Ceremonies and Music. The change wrought upon the natives was marvelous.” If *Tan’gun* was Abraham to the Koreans, *Kija* was Moses, a virtuous lawgiver and founder of a new civilization. *Kija* and his “first invasion” established a historical paradigm for Korean cultural renewal and advancement by accepting higher foreign civilization.

Appenzeller identified himself as a modern *Kija* in the sense of transferring higher civilization and reforming corrupted traditions. He intended to make a corner of Seoul “a little bit of America.” He advocated higher education for the young and education for women. He edited a religious paper and magazine, and managed a printing press and a bookstore. He also supported the Independence Club. He was “a champion of civilization.” He aimed to challenge heathenism, change old customs, recreate civilization, and finally “create a new nation.” He believed that “there would have been no new Japan, no re-civilized Korea, and no modernized China without Protestant missionaries.”<sup>50</sup>

Gale also emphasized the cultural reformation of *Kija*, who fixed the eight laws of the kingdom, and domesticated the violent people by introducing the wide-brimmed hat and planting willow trees, symbolizing a gentle nature. In 1900 Gale mentioned *Kija* as the great Chinese man who became the first and foremost father of Korea and introduced writings and customs to the barbarous Koreans. Gale emphasized the success of *Kija*’s moral government, which made P’yongyang a perfect civilized city where religion and righteousness abounded.<sup>51</sup> Protestant missionaries accepted *Kija*’s paradigm of cultural transformation or colonization by higher civilization.

### ***KIJA* AS CULTURAL ASSIMILATOR**

Hulbert agreed with Appenzeller, Jones, and Gale on the role of *Kija* as cultural reformer. Yet Hulbert had a different view of *Kija*’s role in founding Korean civilization in 1900.

When Keui-ja came in 1122 B. C., he brought with him a mass of Chinese material, but Keui-ja recognized the necessity of adapting himself and his followers to the language of the people among whom they had come. The Chinese language was not imposed upon the people. He determined to govern

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<sup>49</sup> H. G. Appenzeller, “Ki Tza,” *KR* (March 1895), 83-4.

<sup>50</sup> W. E. Griffis, *A Modern Pioneer in Korea—The Life Story of Henry G. Appenzeller* (New York: Revell, 1912), 101, 160-1, 225ff.

<sup>51</sup> J. S. Gale, “Korean History,” *KR* (September 1895), 321-2; J. S. Gale, “The Influence of China upon Korea,” *TKB* (1900), 1-3.

through magistrates chosen from the various districts and taught them the science of government.<sup>52</sup>

Hulbert's emphasis on *Kija's* accommodation of Chinese culture and language to the Korean context seemed to reflect American missionaries' attitude toward Korean culture and religions. They used the pure Korean language and characters in the Scriptures and tracts. Only a few exceptions from the Chinese-Korean mixed editions were published for the educated classes. They encouraged self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing churches. They prioritized evangelical spirituality over organization, so that native groups, not organized churches, rapidly proliferated under the leadership of local Christians with a minimum of supervision by missionaries. The native style of chapels (such as an "L"-shaped building), assimilated forms of worship and prayers (such as dawn prayer meetings, vocal prayer, mountain prayer with fasting, and all-night prayer meetings), and vernacular literature were some aspects of the indigenized Korean Churches.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Protestant missionaries studiously approached ancient Korean religious history to find vestiges of primitive monotheism or points of contact with Christianity. When they delved into the *Tan'gun* myth, they encountered the idea of the primitive monotheistic and the Shamanistic god *Hananim* (하느님). After a relatively short period of controversy over the terms, missionaries, initiated by the Korean Christians, adopted *Hananim* as the authorized term for God. They identified *Whanin*, the Divine One, of the *Tan'gun* myth with the biblical God, the Creator. They found a parallel between *Tan'gun* and Abraham and regarded *Kija* as a Korean Moses.

North American missionaries accepted *Hananim* with their own theological reflections. It fitted their evangelical theology of non-Christian religions. First, "the theory of degradation" led them to find the vestiges of primitive monotheism and primitive revelation in the *Tan'gun* myth and its *Hananim*. Although the term was contaminated by the Korean pantheistic system, it still had its distinctive original monotheistic nature. Thus, as Underwood expected, the adoption of *Hananim* as a Christian God by the Korean Church allowed the Koreans to recover the original monotheistic and Trinitarian meaning of the term. Second, "fulfillment theory" enabled them to find "the points of contact" in Korean religions and accept them as "preparation for the Gospel." They interpreted the *Tan'gun* myth in relation to *Hananim*, and believed in the fulfillment of fundamental Korean religious longings and aspirations by Christianity.

In the space of only a generation, the metamorphosis of *Tan'gun* from the first father and king of the Korean race, to the cultural hero, to the priest of Shamanism, to the third person of the Korean Trinity, and finally to the spiritual source of the Christian term *Hananim* took place. Although American fundamentalism began to influence the Korean Presbyterian Churches from

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<sup>52</sup> H. B. Hulbert, "Korean Survivals," 27.

the 1920s, fulfillment theory, established in the 1910s, flourished among them as well as within the Korean Methodists.

Many Korean Christians were interested in the Christian gospel through the fact that the traditionally worshipped *Hananim* of the *Tan'gun* myth was the same as the Christian God. They found a new God *Hananim* in the face of the national crisis between the Chinese-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese war. The Korean Church that believed in *Hananim*, as it was connected to the nationalistic belief in *Tan'gun*, had a nationalistic identity under the rule of Japanese colonialism. Korean Christians could not be satisfied with the material benefits brought by the Japanese imperial government. Because they believed in the one God and the life-loving Spirit, they could resist Japanese materialism, militarism, and Shintoism. The spiritual foundation of the Independence Movement of 1919 and the Shinto Shrine Resistance Movement in the late 1930s was the belief in *Hananim*. In other words, early Korean Christianity accepted *Tan'gun* nationalism and fought against Japanese colonialism to preserve national identity. Therefore, the argument of contemporary conservative Koreans, which claims that they are legitimate heirs of the early Korean Church's denunciation of superstitious and idolatrous myths, is historically unsupported.

The process of the adoption of *Hananim* of the *Tan'gun* myth as the Christian God revealed the first generation North American missionaries' continuous effort for the indigenization of Korean Christianity as well as Korean Christians' theological initiative and potentiality. Of course, late nineteenth-century evangelicalism disregarded Korean religions as "superstitious" heathenism and attempted to destroy "idolatry." They were Western evangelical missionaries whose final aim was to convert individual Koreans into Christians or Christianize the whole Korean society. Nevertheless, if we see the other side of their missiology and Korean studies, we will find that their essential attitude toward Korean religions was to seek points of contact and to fulfill them with Christianity. They revised their first negative impressions of Korean religions from the middle of the 1890s. They began to map the pluralistic situation of Korean religions and researched the ancient Korean myths, history, and the Korean mind to find points of contact with Christianity. North American missionaries' theology of indigenization and fulfillment theory transformed a Shamanistic god *Hananim* into the Christian God. This process of transformation illustrated that the leading missionaries were not exclusive imperialists unswervingly, but were changed into liberal evangelicals or inclusive pioneers of Korean theology. Some of them acknowledged the preexistence of the divine revelation in Korean religious history and accepted various divine names as the Christian terms for God. The authorized term for God, *Hananim*, was adopted both on the Triune character of the *Tan'gun* myth and on the historical basis of its original monotheism. The Korean term *Hananim* had a solid theological advantage in its compatibility with a pure monotheistic Trinity, compared with the Chinese term *Shangti* or *Shin* or the Japanese term *Kami*. The doctrine of the Trinity may provide the Korean Church with more potential for open dialogue with non-Christian religions that also have their own conception of the trinity.

The Christian term *Hananim*, however, has some shortcomings that have not been overcome in its formational history. *Hananim* has not been free from northwestern provincialism, Shamanistic syncretism, and the patriarchal image. Northwestern provincialism influenced the

change from *Hanānim* to *Hananim* until the 1930s. The adoption of *Hananim* relied on numbers rather than theological reflections to some extent. Shamanistic syncretism is still working among the believers. Their *Hanānim* is no more than a magical machine for material prosperity or a wonder drug for physical health. The patriarchal image of *Hanānim* came partly from the image of the grandfather *Tan'gun*, and partly from the Confucian conception of *Shangti*. The theological conservatism of the majority, Shamanistic syncretism, and the Confucian patriarchal structure, revealed in the history of the term *Hanānim*, are the theological challenges for Korean Christianity to face.

In a parallel development, some North American missionaries, who worked for the transformation of Korean society, identified themselves with *Kija*, whom they understood as the first civilizer and proper cultural reformer in the history of Korea. The late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century evangelical missions aimed at “evangelization” of the individual souls and the “civilization” or “Christianization” of the nation as well. The historical example of *Kija* justified missionaries’ introduction of “higher” Western “Christian civilization” to Korea for its betterment. Yet as they were concerned about establishing the indigenized Korean Church, missionaries emphasized the method of adaptation and conformation to the Korean context in the program of *Kija*’s cultural transmission. A rediscovery of the tradition of indigenization and nationalism in Korean history justified their irenic-polemic mission methods: the duality of conformation and reformation, or the combination of confrontation and reconciliation.

The first generation of North American missionaries gradually contextualized Western Christianity into indigenous Korean Christianity through the means of the moderate fulfillment theory. The pivotal figure in this process, J. S. Gale, was transformed from a fundamentalistic premillennialist to the best missionary scholar of Korean studies. Protestant missionaries deserve to be reevaluated as harbingers of indigenized Korean theology. When Korean Christianity discovers these missionaries’ legacy, its horizon of theology of non-Christian religions will be expanded, and its identity will become more relevant to the multiple religious context facing it in the new millennium.