

Lee, You Jae: *Koloniale Zivilgemeinschaft. Alltag und Lebensweise der Christen in Korea (1894–1954)*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 2017. ISBN: 978-3-593-50672-2; 323 S.

Rezensiert von: Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus, Department for History and Cultural Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

The body of scholarship on the history of colonial Korea (1910–1945) has been constantly growing over the last decade.¹ Similarly, the historiography of Christianity in Korea has developed into a thriving field of research during recent years, including a plethora of transnational studies which predominantly acknowledge the pivotal role of foreign missionaries for the development of education before the establishment of colonial rule.² Yet, few authors have attempted to link the history of Christianity with the history of colonialism in Korea, despite the leading role assumed by Protestants in the March First Independence Movement of 1919.³ Moreover, mission history often confines itself to top-down approaches, ignoring the agency of the proselytized.

Taking up these considerations, You Jae Lee sets out to bridge this gap in scholarship by elucidating the intricate links between Christianity, colonialism and modernity between 1894 and 1954. With an emphasis on northern Korea, a stronghold of Christian mission, the study provides a profound analysis of the interaction between Korean Catholics and German Benedictine missionaries. Combining the methodologies of global history and the history of everyday life, Lee focuses on „examining the reciprocity and interaction of global and local actors in order to explore how claims to universality took shape in a local context“ (p. 12). As Christianity advocated universal values, it represented an imagined global community. This community was at times opposed to, at other times complementary to national and imperial forms of community, creating an „alternative sphere to the non-existing civil society as well as to colonial political society“ (p. 12). The colonial identity of Korean Christians, Lee argues, emanated from their exposure to the simultaneous hegemony of both Japanese imperialism

and the cultural imperialism of Western missionaries. This enabled Christians to successfully link the modern image of Christianity with specific forms of community that could satisfy the everyday needs of Korean converts (p. 14).

Lee addresses these issues in nine chapters which are loosely organized into two main parts, a shorter one on Protestantism and a longer one on the Benedictine mission in Korea. After briefly delineating the combination of global and domestic upheaval facing Korea at the turn of the twentieth century, the book's first part delves into the everyday life of Korean Protestants in order to narrate the history of Protestantism in Korea from below. Lee begins by examining the civilizing mission of Western missionaries in order to explore the material and ideological foundations of Protestantism in Korea. Discussing the introduction of new sociopolitical concepts like society (*Gesellschaft*, *sahoe*) and religion (*chonggyo*), Lee argues that the perceived equivalence between Christianity and modern Western values and civilization contributed to positive attitudes towards the Christian religion in Korea. This idea was further reinforced by the missionaries' early emphasis on medical and educational work. The colonized were able to separate the spiritual from the material world, which allowed them to save the 'divine soul' of the Korean nation against the Japanese colonizers. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Christianity was therefore deemed to be the prototype of religion in Korea and coalesced with older forms of social interaction and communal organization (p. 52).

Building upon these findings, Lee goes on to examine the adoption of Protestantism by Korean converts which, under the conditions of Japanese assimilation policy, created dis-

¹ A comprehensive overview on the state of scholarship is provided by Michael Kim, *The Japanese Empire's Colonial Project. New Approaches to the Colonization of Korea*, in: *Sai* 18 (2015), pp. 223–253.

² See e.g. Klaus Dittrich and Yoonmi Lee (eds.), *Themed Issue: Transnationalising the History of Education in Modern Korea*, in: *Paedagogica Historica. International Journal of the History of Education* 52 (2016), 6.

³ For a notable exception see Albert L. Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth. Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea*, Honolulu 2015.

tinctive forms of Christian community. By focusing on narratives of conversion and the formulation of a new sense of community among Korean Protestants, Lee emphasizes the importance of their (collective) agency vis-à-vis the Japanese colonizers and Western missionaries, which also laid the foundations for democracy in Korea (p. 84). The following chapter calls into question the theory of Western-style secularization and the resulting privatization of religion by exploring the everyday life of the Korean Protestants. Analyzing the latter's work ethic and visions of the apocalypse, Lee shows that Protestant communities in Korea experienced a high degree of politicization in everyday life. Despite the Western missionaries' attempt at depoliticizing the religious public sphere due to pressure of colonial authorities, Korean Protestants emphasized virtue and the strive for national independence, thereby increasingly presenting Protestantism as an alternative to the colonial state (p. 85–89).

The second part of the book turns its attention to German Catholic missionaries in Korea. The first of several case studies examines the representation of Korea in the book „Im Lande der Morgenstille“ („In the Land of the Morning Calm“) written by archabbot Norbert Weber, his movie of the same name,⁴ and the exhibits at the mission museum of St Ottilien monastery, which were also largely collected by Weber. In contrast to Protestant missionaries, Weber saw himself as a stranger in a foreign land. This prevented him from conflating Christianization with Westernization, enabling him to overcome the „salvage paradigm“ and to partly reverse the orientalist perception (p. 142). Lee then focuses on the regular social interaction between Koreans and the Benedictine missionaries in churches, schools and at mission stations. Such interaction helped to generate new forms of social cohesion and everyday life, thus expediting the break-up of the traditional class system. After analyzing the situation of women in the Catholic mission and their central role in the conversion process, Lee discusses the relationship between the Catholic Church and the nationalist movement. While the (mostly Western) authorities of the Church in Korea proactively discouraged political activities of

its congregants and condoned Japanese colonial rule, a few Catholic laypeople such as An Chunggun, who assassinated Ito Hirobumi in 1909, sought to connect the Catholic faith and anti-Japanese nationalism. The final chapter turns to the internment of the remaining German missionaries in North Korea after 1949. This marked the end of the missionaries' position of power; in fact, Lee suggests that one might call this experience „going native in the most radical fashion“ (p. 264).

„Koloniale Zivilgemeinschaft“ is an important contribution to our understanding of the contingencies of the history of Christianity in colonial Korea. By positioning the experience of the colonized at the center of the narrative, the book effectively emphasizes the complex agency of Korean Christians. It thus successfully avoids a top-down approach to colonial history. Rather than reading the dissemination of Christianity in Korea as a mere diffusion and adoption of modern Western values, Lee convincingly demonstrates how the presence of Western missionaries disrupted the binary of rulers and ruled, enabling Korean Christians to adapt the foreign religion on the basis of indigenous traditions and to expand their space of action in the colonial setting. The book therefore underscores that missionaries were not the sole agents in the diffusion of western cultural values, education and modernity, but that strategies and processes of adaptation on the part of the local population were equally important. Hence, the book makes a strong case for overcoming Eurocentric interpretations of the past of non-European regions. „Koloniale Zivilgemeinschaft“ is thus a valuable contribution to the history of Korea and a highly recommended reading which will appeal to scholars and students of East Asian history alike.

HistLit 2017-4-115 / Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus über Lee, You Jae: *Koloniale Zivilgemeinschaft. Alltag und Lebensweise der Christen in Korea (1894–1954)*. Frankfurt am Main 2017, in: H-Soz-Kult 24.11.2017.

⁴ The movie is available on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRF0EaBtAss> (27.09.2017).