

Crossroads: The Meetings of Korea and the World Through Pilgrimage Routes

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Abstract The history of Catholicism in Korea is complex – it can be seen as connected negatively to Western imperialism or positively to modernity. This paper will explore how Korean Catholics have sought to build a positive image for their faith through Catholic holy sites in a large part by utilizing the legitimacy of international religious and secular authorities. In particular, it will examine the three international pilgrimage routes recognized by the Vatican after Pope Francis' 2014 visit to Korea. Haemi, the internationally recognized site famous for its large number of 'nameless martyrs'; Solmoe, the birthplace of the first Korean priest and UNESCO-sponsored events associated with it; and Puŏnggol, the site of a seminary led by French missionary priests.

Keywords Korean Catholic Church. Pilgrim sites. Vatican. Pope. UNESCO.

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1 Introduction

Father Han Kwang-Sŏk, in an interview about the history of the Haemi holy site, which he managed, explained that many martyrdoms that had occurred there were carried out in the aftermath of the 1868 Oppert Incident (Chŏnjugyo Taejŏn Kyogu 2021).¹ As part of that incident, a group of armed adventurers guided by a French priest and

1 For background on the Oppert Incident, see Cho 2017 and Rausch 2019a.

Korean Catholics sought to break into the tomb of the grandfather of Chosŏn's King Kojong (1852-1919) and steal his bones, which would then be used as a bargaining chip in an effort to pressure the kingdom into opening to trade and tolerating Catholicism. Such actions clearly implicate Catholicism in Western imperialism. Likewise, critics could argue that the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century, the period paralleling the time of persecution of Korean Catholics, was an enemy of modernity, particularly in terms of religious freedom and the free dissemination of knowledge (Weigel 2019). One important aspect of modernity, equality, particularly gender equality, is another area where criticism may be raised, with scholar of Korean Catholicism Song Jee-yeon showing how at least some Korean Catholic women see their church as patriarchal and in need of radical reform (Song 2022).

And yet, others present the history of Korean Catholicism in a way that challenges these views. For instance, The Research Foundation of Korean Church History's *Inside the Catholic Church of Korea* focuses on how the import of Catholicism into Korea was undertaken by Koreans living in a failing state and chaotic society who developed

an interest in Western science and learning [allowing a] new light [...] to appear in Joseon society despite severe restrictions and sanctions. (The Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2010, 13)

And some scholars have argued that had this Catholic access to Western science and technology been embraced rather than rejected, Korea could have modernized earlier under its own terms, thereby avoiding colonization (Han, Rausch 2017). Similarly, *Inside the Catholic Church of Korea* presents the persecution of Catholics and the consequent retreat to mountain villages largely out of the reach of the state led them to seek

to live in fraternal equality, repudiating class divisions, and seeking to live as friends in faith (*Kyou*), equal under God. They also sought to repudiate hierarchical relationships between men and women, husband and wife. (The Research Foundation of Korean Church History 2010, 38)

Similarly, though not going quite as far, a scholar of Korean Catholicism, Choi Seon-hye, asserts that Catholic beliefs about Jesus and Mary challenged the Neo-Confucian political order and "society's patriarchal family system" (Choi 2012, 110).

The history of Catholicism in Korea is therefore complicated by opposing tensions - the Catholic Church in Europe was in many ways anti-modern, while it had influences that could be viewed by later Ko-

reans as opening a path towards modernity. Similarly, the Catholic connection with imperialism and science and technology makes Catholicism, and the West, both a source of danger and of new ideas that can benefit Korean people. For Korean Catholics who are both patriotic and faithful, there is naturally a desire to resolve such historical issues and to find positive meaning in the history of their faith on the peninsula. This is particularly important for church officials who must find ways to build positive relationships with Korean society, the vast majority of whose members are not Catholic and are strongly influenced by nationalism. Catholic sites, as physical locations that can be highly visible, and events associated with those locations, can provide a useful window that allow us to see how this is done and how the aforementioned tensions are resolved or obscured. In this paper I will argue that Korean Catholics have sought to present a historical narrative that presents Catholicism as a positive force in Korean history, particularly in terms of modernity and progress, through historical sites associated with the faith and their recognition by international religious and secular authorities, while also at times avoiding or de-emphasizing parts of history that conflict with this story. Specifically, I will examine the Vatican-recognized Seoul international pilgrimage routes, the aforementioned Haemi, Solmoe – the birthplace of the first Korean Catholic priest, Father Andrew Kim Tae-Gŏn (1821-46) –, and Puŏnggol, the site of a lost Catholic seminary.

2 The Seoul International Pilgrimage Routes

In preparation for the beatification of 124 martyrs by Pope Francis in 2014, leaders from the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul, the Seoul Metropolitan Government, and other organizations, would work together to create pilgrimage routes based around important Catholic sites, which were officially unveiled in 2018.² Multiple routes were created to include Catholic as well as secular and non-Catholic religious locations. Together, these routes expose people to places of martyrdom for a ‘Western’ religion, churches that have enshrined relics of French priests, and museums that tell the story of martyrdom. At the same time, these sites that share a history of the violent rejection of Western influence in the form of Catholicism are placed within a narrative that celebrates the globalization of Korea, both culturally and religiously, in which the country stands, not so much as a representative of the ‘East’ but as an independent agent within an interconnected world.

² Announcements for the international pilgrimage routes can be found at the following sources: Baek 2014; CPBC 2018; National Geographic 2018.



Figure 1 Myŏngdong Cathedral. Namu Wiki. Munhwa chaech'ŏng Kukka munhwa Yusan P't'ŏl (Culture Heritage Administration). <https://shorturl.at/gpHOR>

Three different pilgrimage routes are presented on the official government Seoul Net website. The routes as they appear there are similar in that each takes approximately two-and-a-half hours to walk and most of the sites are closely connected to religion.³ For instance, the Seoul route is bookended by two churches. The first is Myŏngdong Cathedral [fig. 1], which is described on the site as the “first Gothic style” church in Korea and the “epicenter of the Korean democratization movement that started in the 1960s”, thus connecting Western architecture and the successful indigenization of a ‘Western’ form of government. Church grounds also reveal French influence in the form of an imitation of the Marian grotto at Lourdes [fig. 2]. The second is Yakh'yŏn Catholic Church [fig. 3], which is presented as the oldest Catholic Church in Korea and has a mixed Romanesque and Gothic style. Another church, Kahoe-dong Catholic Church, is also mentioned, with a focus on it being located in the area where Father Zhou Wenmo, explicitly identified as a Chinese Catholic priest, said his first Mass in Korea.

Along the Pukch'on Pilgrimage Route, Sŏkchŏng Porŭm Well is mentioned as where Father Zhou obtained water to perform baptisms. The history of martyrdom is also represented, as along the

3 The Seoul Net walking tours site that includes the pilgrimages can be found at the following link: https://english.visitseoul.net/walking-tour/Seoul-Pilgrimage-Route_/26225.



Figure 2 Lourdes Grotto, revealing French influence, at the foot of Myŏngdong Cathedral. Author's personal collection

same route the Sŏsomun Historical Park is included as a place of Catholic execution. Likewise, along the Hangang Pilgrimage route can be found the Chŏltusan Martyr's Shrine, where large numbers of Catholics were executed in the Pyŏngin Persecution, which began in 1866. A new Catholic site was even created, the Specialized Section of Hangang Pilgrimage Route, which contains four paths: dust, stone, forest, and flower. Pilgrims are encouraged to reflect on their own past

while walking along the paths that symbolize the progress of pilgrimage from toleration of hardships to blooming of flowers in the end.⁴

Non-Catholic religious sites are also included, such as the Anglican Cathedral, and Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery, which is a part of the Hangang Route, and is only a stone's throw away from Chŏltusan. The name as listed here is something of a misnomer as non-missionaries were also buried there. However, the site is managed by a Protestant church, and the tour provided by volunteer guides and the museum located there present Protestant Christianity as essential to Korea's modernization and present prosperity. This is echoed in the description provided on Seoul Net, which notes that

⁴ This might be a reference to the episcopal motto of Bishop Gustave Mutel (1854-1933), "Bloom flowers of the martyrs".



Figure 3 Yakyŏn Parish Church. Namu Wiki. Munhwa chaech'ŏng Kukka munhwa Yusan P't'ŏl (Culture Heritage Administration). <https://www.heritage.go.kr/heri/cul/imgHeritage.do?ccimId=6311502&ccbaKdcd=13&ccbaAsno=02580000&ccbaCtcd=11>

John Heron [an early Protestant medical missionary], the second director of Kwanghyewŏn, the first Western-style hospital in Korea⁵

is buried there (Underwood 2022). At the same time, it is also implied that Korea, having successfully developed, is no longer in need of Western assistance (Cha 2022). Even going further in an ecumenical direction, Chogyŏ Temple, the headquarters of the largest Buddhist sect in Korea, is also included in the Seoul route. Moreover, not all sites are religious in nature. For instance, the Seoul Museum of Art appears on the Seoul route, as does Insadong, an important area for souvenir shopping, and in the Hangang Route, Map'o Food Street is mentioned with a description of the types of food one can sample there. While spirituality and consumerism might be seen as contradictory, functionally speaking, it allows the Catholic Church to build friendly relations with governments and wider society as increased foot traffic would have a positive economic impact.

The companion app for the pilgrimage includes both more secular-oriented routes and openly Catholic ones. When the app, which has as its logo a heart made of a length of rope,⁶ opens, it first shows

⁵ Heron's death and the need for a place of burial is what led to the establishment of the cemetery in the first place.

⁶ The rope would seem to connect to the idea of Catholics being arrested and tied.

an image of the Sōsomun monument to the martyrs, focusing on the large image of Jesus at the center, which they surround, and with a caption noting that the pilgrimage is Vatican approved. Once open the words “The Journey of the Heart: the way of serenity and nobility” appear superimposed over an interior shot of Myōngdong Cathedral, an iconic Western-style church, with a single worshipper visible.⁷ While Seoul Net focuses on one set of pilgrimage routes, the app has two separate sections: “Pilgrimage” routes (a bishop’s miter serving as the button) and “Tourism” routes (with a button shaped like road signs). These routes are similar to each other and to the Seoul Net sites, particularly as the two routes within the app use the same descriptions for specific sites. However, some sites appear only in the “Tourism” section or in the “Pilgrimage” section.⁸

In comparison to Seoul Net, the app provides more detailed explanations of the meaning of the sites. For instance, when opened, the introduction to the “Tourism” section states that the

Seoul Pilgrimage Routes allow you to follow in the footsteps of martyrs who valued their faith above their own lives. While following those who sacrificed for their belief and value, reflect on what is you most value, and what makes your days happy and rewarding.

In addition to this theme of self-reflection encouraging self-understanding that marks the pilgrimage routes, there is also a presentation of Korean history. For instance, the Pukch’on Pilgrimage Route in the “Tourism” section states that

Since the old days, Bukchon [Pukch’on] has been a place displaying a distinctive tolerance, where a variety of different cultures do not collide with one another but melt to create a single new culture. Bukchon Pilgrimage Route incorporates historic sites of disparate religions including Catholicism. As visitors walk along the route, they can witness tragedies created by different views lying behind the outward appearance. Looking back on the pains of the history of persecutions of the Catholic Church, think about the importance of accepting and tolerating differences.

While Catholics could be quite intolerant of non-Catholic minorities in Europe, here, the emphasis is on the persecution Catholics in Ko-

⁷ It is the Author’s guess that this is a mean to encourage individual contemplation and prayer.

⁸ For instance, non-Catholic religious sites and secular sites do not appear on the Pilgrimage route, while Catholic sites that are connected to Joseon government buildings that are no longer there and only locatable through markers do not appear in the “Tourism” section.

rea suffered, without mention of the Catholic critique of other religions, such as that found in the earliest Korean-authored catechism, Augustine Chŏng Yak-Chong's *Chugyo yoji* (The Essentials of Catholicism; 2009). However, this focus on tolerance, in addition to presenting a modern message, also makes it narratively easier to bring in Joye Temple, the headquarters of the largest Buddhist order in Korea. In contrast to the Seoul Net site, there is a lengthy description that mentions its temple stay program and Buddha's birthday celebration. There is also room for the secular, with the inclusion of the Seoul Museum of Art, which is described as

a place where you can appreciate modern and contemporary art in various exhibitions including invitation exhibitions of artworks by legendary global artists including Chagall, Matisse and Picasso,

sending a message that a global Korea appreciates Western art.

Moreover, this introduction recognizes the anti-Catholic persecutions as historical occurrences that were the consequences of human action, the implication being that they were caused by a lack of tolerance. The Catholic-oriented "Pilgrimage" section expands on their causes. In the "Eternal Life" road, which roughly corresponds to Seoul Net's "Seoul" route (with added sites where Catholics were persecuted), it is noted that

The Chosŏn Dynasty, which was in power when Catholicism arrived in the Country, did not take kindly to the new religion and its teaching the word of God is more important than the King's order. Fearful of the destabilization of the social order, the new teaching was proscribed, and its followers were persecuted.

Thus, Catholicism is presented as a force of progress (particularly with its ideas of equality mentioned in the introduction) willing to question the authoritarian Joseon state and the rigidly hierarchical social system. After noting that the old buildings where Catholics were imprisoned, tortured, and killed no longer stand, the app states that

The Eternal Life Road offers pilgrims, as they stand on the land where so much blood has flowed, the opportunity to think about the history of the persecutions of Catholicism and the values which shaped the martyrs' decisions. Walking the Eternal Life Road and discovering the traces of those who valued their faith above their own lives, naturally challenges us to ponder: what we most value in life.

This narrative of national growth from a closed society governed by a state fearful of change to a more open society can be seen in the

introductory section of the “Pilgrimage” route, which offers a brief history of the Catholic Church in Korea, emphasizing its growth “into a major religion with over 5,000,000 believers”. The next paragraph shifts to the

magnificent City of Seoul, which has rapidly grown out of the ruins of war.

Thus, an implicit connection is drawn between the parallel development of Catholicism and a modern, cosmopolitan society, both presumably the result of a global Korea open to the West. Subsequently, the text raises the possibility that the pilgrim will “find a deeper sense that is refreshed and inspired by the serenity and nobility of those early believers”, and thus be called upon to mirror individually the openness of the nation.

Thus, Catholicism, a “Western” religion, is presented as a historical example of both the violence that arises from intolerance and of how openness is a positive good on both the national and individual levels, though as noted previously instances of Catholic intolerance are not mentioned. Likewise, other aspects of Catholic history, particularly its connection with the West, is elided. For instance, the fact that Catholicism was perceived, correctly to a certain degree, to be connected to forces of Western imperialism, particularly in the anti-Catholic violence of the 1860s and 1870s, is not mentioned, in part because it would likely conflict with the narrative of openness to the outside world as a positive good (Kim 1980). Likewise, nineteenth-century Catholic challenges to the state and society were primarily motivated by theological beliefs, thus making their movement rather different from modern ones calling for democracy and human rights, and the willingness of Catholics to die as martyrs arose from their faith in Jesus Christ, their desire to follow his example, and their refusal to renounce their faith in God (Rausch 2019b).

The West is at times mentioned explicitly. For instance, Kahoe-dong Catholic Church is described as having been

rebuilt in consideration of its unique historical and local characteristics, combining a traditional Korean building [...] and a Western-style church building.

However, the treatment of French missionaries, who made up the vast majority of Catholic priests in Korea during the nineteenth century and many of whom died as martyrs, focus almost exclusively on their deaths. For instance, while their names are occasionally given where appropriate, such as in a description of the Uigeumbu, where the three French martyr saints of the 1839 persecution were inter-

rogated, their actions other than martyrdom are not described, nor is their nationality explicitly mentioned.⁹ This stands in contrast to Father Zhou, who is mentioned multiple times and is clearly identified as Chinese. Moreover, Zhou is specifically linked to Saint Father Andrew Kim Tae-Gŏn through Porŭm Well, which they are both said to have drawn water from for sacramental purposes, implying a sort of transition from foreign missionary to Korean indigenous priesthood. Curiously, the close relationship that Father Andrew Kim had with the French missionaries who educated him for the priesthood is not mentioned, nor the French teachers in the Catholic University entry, despite the reference to the history of seminary education during the period of persecution (Rausch 2008).

The continued de-emphasis on French influence can be seen in the treatment of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul History Hall. Its description includes a brief reference to Bishop Gustave Mutel, an important Catholic leader in Korea from the 1890s until his death in 1933, as having blessed that building, as little else substantive is said of him. This is especially striking considering that it was Mutel who was behind the construction of Myŏngdong Cathedral, which is a key site in these pilgrimage routes and the symbolic center of Korean Catholicism. This might in part be owing to the fact that it was Mutel who denied Catholic nationalist Thomas An Chunggŭn access to a priest while he was awaiting execution for his killing of Itō Hirobumi (though one would disobey and visit him anyway) and would actively suppress pro-independence activities by Catholics during the Japanese colonial period (Rausch 2013).

The three French martyrs of 1839, in contrast to Mutel, are difficult to connect with imperialism or as pro-Japanese. However, when the app mentions that in an “underground cemetery” (a crypt) in the cathedral there are four martyrs and five “saint martyrs”, the nationalities of those three are not mentioned. The only Western person who receives much attention in connection to Myŏngdong Cathedral is Pope Francis, and he is treated as an honored guest, there to bear witness to Catholic success. In contrast, the pastoral activities of those Catholic Westerners who labored and died in Korea are hardly mentioned. In a sense then, Western influence, particularly aspects congenial to modernity, are welcome, while Western people are rendered largely invisible or are temporary guests.

The creators of the pilgrimage routes skillfully brought together both secular locations and sites from multiple religions, particularly Catholicism, in a way that could appeal to a diverse audience from a variety of worldviews, including both Catholics and non-Catholics.

⁹ These French martyrs were Father Pierre-Philibert Maubant (1803-39), Father Jacques Chastan (1803-39), and Bishop Laurence Imbert (1796-1839).

So what would a person who walked these Korean pilgrimage routes experience in terms of the relationship between the East and West? As we have seen, they would witness, through the diversity of these locations, the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of different religions and cultures, including ones from the West, and how such outside influences have had a positive impact on Korea. At the same time, the reality of anti-Catholic persecution shows that the necessary tolerance is not automatic, but rather must be developed, but when it does, it makes possible a modern, successful country, as seen in the parallels drawn between the development of Catholicism and Korea. The style of presentation means that both Koreans and non-Koreans, Catholics and non-Catholics, can admire and take pride in these accomplishments. The respect for diversity as part of modernity is further underlined by the encouragement of the individual to determine for themselves what this means for their own values. Thus, the individual is brought into conversation with history and encouraged to draw their own conclusions. However, those conclusions are guided in the direction that tolerance and openness to the outside world is a positive good.

In many ways this approach seems appropriate considering the Republic of Korea's place in the world, but at the same time, it elides historical issues that might conflict with this message. The very different values of nineteenth-century Catholics are not fully recognized, nor are the threats posed by Western imperialism or the positive contributions made by Western priests, particularly the French, to the development of the Catholic Church in Korea. This is particularly striking as historians of Catholicism in Korea do not shy away from dealing with these issues, for instance, by closely investigating the Oppert Incident and the role played by Catholics in it (Cho 2017). Perhaps this presentation of global influence in which Koreans are the primary movers and little is said of Western people is more palatable to Korean nationalism, but it seems to undercut the narrative's celebration of tolerance. However, if the pilgrimage route proves a success, perhaps as Korean society becomes more multicultural, it too will transform.

3 Haemi and Solmoe

In March 2021, the Vatican officially recognized the Haemi Catholic shrine complex as an international pilgrimage site. Haemi is located south of Taejŏn in west-central Korea. During the Joseon period, that area was near the coast and considered important enough for security that it was under military jurisdiction. That special status meant that rather than having to request permission to execute people from the king, those who were accused of crimes could be killed and their

deaths reported officially afterwards. This prevented the creation of the paper trail that would normally follow an execution, particularly as it would seem that the required reports were often not filed. Since Naepo, an area under this military jurisdiction, was an early center of Catholicism, large numbers of Catholics are believed to have been martyred in Haemi, with the shrine itself claiming more than 1,000. The persecutions of the late 1860s were particularly harsh, with the number to be executed being so great that many were simply buried alive in order to save time by combining execution and corpse disposal.¹⁰

The anonymity of many of the martyrs meant that Haemi would be largely overlooked as the Korean Catholic Church focused its efforts on the canonization of the 103 martyr saints, which occurred in 1984. Success led to further research into the lives of other martyrs who were not included in that list, as well as to other sites, such as Haemi. As described on the shrine's homepage, it received new attention for development in the 1980s, leading to the building of a chapel and enshrining of relics there in 2003. It would come to include a large gate complex, an open area with an outdoor stations of the cross and multiple monuments detailing the forms of torture and execution carried out there, a parish church, and a large tower that includes various statues of martyrs and provides a beautiful panoramic view of its surroundings [figs 4-5].¹¹

On August 17, 2014, two days after beatifying 124 martyrs, Pope Francis visited Haemi. There he prayed at the shrine and met with Asian bishops, and then traveled to a larger venue to address Asian youth. While there he unveiled a commemorative stone for three of the martyrs who he had beatified and who had died in Haemi, including Father Andrew Kim Tae-Gön's great-grandfather Pio Kim Chin-hu (1739-1814), and stated that by

following the example of the martyrs, we can become witnesses to the faith,

a quote featured in a Korean YouTube video (Catholic Holy Land Pilgrim in Korea 2019). This statement helped to reinforce one of the goals of the pope's visit, the holding up of the Korean Catholic Church as a model of growth and development in Asia. The pope's visit to Haemi is commemorated there by a plaque and a smiling statue of the pontiff [figs 6-7], which is prominently featured in YouTube videos about the site, such as the one mentioned above, as well as a display featuring pictures and quotes from his visit.

¹⁰ See the website of the Haemi International Sanctuary: <http://www.haemi.or.kr/>. www.haemi.or.kr.

¹¹ The author visited this site in November, 2018.



Figure 4 Entrance to Haemi Shrine, with the gate in the center and the observation tower on the right. Author's personal collection



Figure 5 View from the observation tower of the shrine and the city beyond it. Author's personal collection

The pope's connection with the shrine deepened with the Vatican's recognition of it as an international holy site. The Archdiocese of Taejŏn celebrated this event and released a video to its YouTube channel, mentioned in the introduction of this paper, that featured a visit by Father Kang Tae-Wŏn, who is in charge of public relations for the archdiocese, to the holy site to interview Father Han Kwang-Sŏk. After discussing the history of the shrine, as noted in the introduction of this paper, Kang asked Han what the significance of the site is. This question is particularly important as it not immediately clear why Haemi, which has no famous martyrs and is not as important as other sites for the historical development of Catholicism in Korea, should become an international holy site.



Figure 6
Pope Francis statue at the foot
of the observation tower.
Author's personal collection

Father Han responded to this question by noting that there are three types of holy sites, ones recognized by a bishop of a diocese, national ones recognized by a bishops' conference, and international sites recognized by the Vatican. International recognition by the Vatican meant that all Catholics throughout the world were encouraged to visit the site and the faith of the people connected to the site was a model for them to follow. Han recognized the validity of Kang's question, noting that Haemi was fundamentally different from other international holy sites. For instance, he noted that Jerusalem is important since Jesus died there, Rome was where Peter built up the church, many such sites were significant because of Marian apparitions, and Assisi was important because Saint Francis was active there. But what made Haemi different from these sites was precisely what made it special - the fact that the vast majority of the people who were killed there died without leaving behind their names and were from the lower classes. However, because of their faith, Han asserted that these people were known by God and thus had "bright, famous, and precious names". When interviewed in a secular KBS documentary, Han gave a slightly different but compatible answer when asked a similar question by the host Kim Yŏng-Jŏl, stating that people are equal and valuable, but during the Joseon period, human rights were not followed and terrible persecutions broke out (KBS Takyu 2021). Later, after the noting of the terrible suffering of the martyrs, Kim would observe that despite all that, they kept



Figure 7 Papal monument erected “in honor of the three Blessed Martyrs of Haemi”.
Author’s personal collection

their faith, and thus led great lives. Thus, the attention given to Haemi as an international holy site was used not only to exalt the martyrs, but to put forth Catholic values in a way that could also resonate with non-Catholics.

Later, in the Archdiocese of Taejŏn video, Han laughed off Kang’s question of whether he thought Haemi would become as significant of a holy site as Spain’s Santiago. However, Han did express his optimism in the site’s ability to attract pilgrims. Moreover, Han described his plans for further development. Not only did he express interest in further excavations for traces of martyrs outside the site’s current grounds, he hoped to develop links to Buddhist holy sites, which he believed would encourage good relations between the religions. Others shared Han’s plans, including the mayor of Sŏsan, Maeng Chŏng-Ho. Together, local government and Catholic officials expressed their hopes for creating linkages between Catholic, Buddhist, cultural, historical, and environmental sites, as well the necessary supporting traffic infrastructure. According to Maeng, this would help make the holy site into “a place of healing and reconciliation, life and peace, that can be enjoyed by all people in the world” (Pak 2021). And as part of these efforts, progress is being made in an effort to have Haemi declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thus, Catholicism, in partnership with Buddhism, is presenting itself as a positive partner in developing Korea, both economically and as a respected actor on the world stage.

Solmoe, one of the Catholic sites that is proposed to be linked to Haemi as part of a pilgrim route, is the birthplace of Saint Father Andrew Kim Tae-Gŏn, the first Korean Catholic priest. This constitutes part of an attempt to further connect Korean Catholicism and UNE-



Figure 8 Character models available from the official site at https://www.kimdaegeon.com/_ENG/node/?menu=n050101

SCO. Kim was born in 1821, and the 200th anniversary of Kim's birth was celebrated from 2020 to 2021. Organizers of events, including the Archdiocese of Taejŏn, obtained by UNESCO the recognition of Kim as a "universal patron" and thus were able to note their sponsorship when referring to events. For example, the logo of the official site includes the phrase "Celebrated in association with UNESCO".¹² The official website includes advertisements for concerts and other cultural performances, a Minecraft recreation of Solmoe, Kim Taegŏn apps and character models [fig. 8], and a downloadable *han'gŭl* font based on the first priest's own handwriting [fig. 9]. There is also a dedicated YouTube channel that includes a video of a young woman studying at a library about Kim Taegŏn who suddenly falls through the floor and is teleported to the gates of Solmoe (Kim 2021). She meets a man there and together they tour Solmoe, visiting the statue of Pope Francis praying in front of the reconstruction of Kim's home (there are at least three different statues of Pope Francis at Solmoe) and one of Kim's statue, with the announcer proclaiming UNESCO's recognition of the priest. In this way, secular and religious authorities are knitted together to recognize the virtues of Korea through its first priest.

¹² See the website: https://www.kimdaegeon.com/_ENG/node/?menu=n010100 (this site is no longer safe).

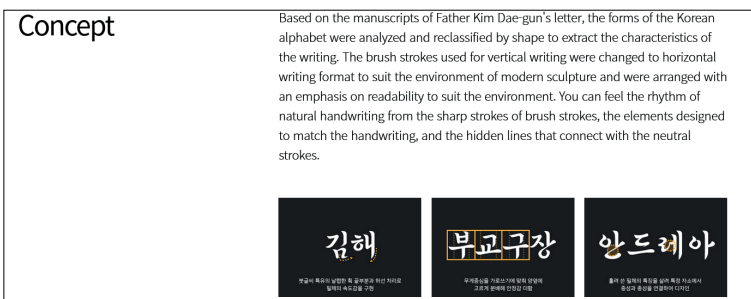


Figure 9 Father Kim font available on the official site at https://www.kimdaegeon.com/_ENG/node/?menu=n050500

The official site for the first Korean priest also includes a “Kim Dae Geon Webtoon” in which two children and their parents visit Solmoe.¹³ Through the journey begun at Kim’s birthplace, the webtoon crafts a narrative in which Kim’s international connections are emphasized. The series, divided into twenty-one episodes, presents Kim as an intelligent, studious, and caring child who questions why his neighbors beat their slaves. His own family’s slave responds that while he is treated well by the Kim family, “worthless lower class [people] like us get hit no matter what we do”. When Kim asks his mother why upper class people act in this ways, she explains that all human beings are part of a human family created by God. Kim then announces his desire to take care of the poor in the future. Later, after a neighbor’s slave is punished for attempting to spread “strange western studies”, a seven-year-old Kim intervenes to save him.¹⁴ When his parents decide that they must now move to escape the repression his actions will certainly bring, Kim asks his parents why Catholics are persecuted by the government. His father’s response is that they are greedy for power and seek to destroy anything that threatens it, which Catholicism does because of its emphasis on equality between classes and genders. Contrasting with this emphasis on equality, we have thus far seen in the pilgrimage routes that male members of the clergy are the focus, undercutting this message to a degree.

Thus forced to flee Solmoe, Kim will grow up deep in the mountains, but eventually his reputation for faith and studiousness will lead to a visit by Father Pierre Maubant (1803-39), an MEP (Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris) missionary, to visit him and ask him to go to Macao as a seminary student. Kim agrees after a night

¹³ See the website: https://www.kimdaegeon.com/develop/m_board_eng/?tb_nm=webtoon_eng&l_mode=eng.

¹⁴ This appears to be a literary invention.

spent in prayer and his family's assurances that they will be fine even with him abroad. This allows Kim to interact with other Western people, including Catholic clergy and the captain of a French warship. In this way, Kim learns foreign languages and takes part in the talks ending the First Opium War (1838-42). While critical of the treaty as unequal, the webtoon notes that Kim's participation is an example of a person from Joseon playing a critical part in world history. Likewise, Kim also creates a map of Korea for Bishop Ferreol (1808-53), which is presented as teaching Westerners about the country (and is noted to have included Dokdo, presenting Kim as a knowledgeable nationalist). In the end though, Kim is arrested, but because of his knowledge, is promised that if he gives up his faith, he will be given a lucrative government position and can use what he knows to benefit the country. However, Kim refuses to apostatize and is executed. It should be noted that this story is based on pious tradition rather than historical fact.

While Western people and knowledge are presented in a generally positive light in the webtoon, typically appearing as handsome, smiling, and friendly figures who praise Kim, it should be noted that the failure of the French warship captain to take him back to Joseon as promised is presented as something of a betrayal. In contrast, the last episode reports that Pope Francis visited the shrine in 2014 and prayed there and notes that now the Korean "shrine of Solmoe"¹⁵ has become famous throughout the world. Thus, sites like Haemi and Solmoe have become nodes within an interlocking network of Catholic and non-Catholic sites in which the authority of global religious and secular authorities are utilized to celebrate Korean Catholicism on an international stage and to present Catholic values in a way palatable to non-Catholics, thus presenting Catholicism as a positive force in Korea and in the world.

4 Puõnggol

The sites we have examined thus far stand at an intersection between Catholic and non-Catholic audiences. To better understand how Catholics speak to themselves in terms of the meeting of Korea and the West, a brief examination of the activities of the leading organization dedicated to the study of Korean Catholic history, the Han'guk kyohoesa yõ'guso (The Research Foundation of Korean Church History), would be helpful. Though legally independent, it is closely connected to the archdiocese of Seoul and thus while generally adhering to the practices of secular historians in its academic journal *Kyohoesa*

¹⁵ For the official site of the shrine see <http://www.solmoe.or.kr/?ckattemp=1>.

yŏn'gu (Studies on church history), it also produces theological-historical materials for Catholics. For instance, it routinely hosts 'open university' lectures aimed at a general Catholic audience. During its 2022 spring semester (March to June 2022), those lectures were entitled "Pilgrimage, awakening the soul" and included lectures not only on Catholic pilgrimages to places like Jerusalem and Santiago, but also Buddhist and Islamic pilgrimage practices as well. These lectures concluded with one given by Father Cho Cho Han-Gŏn, the head of the Institute, that focused on the three international pilgrimage routes mentioned above (Han'guk kyohoesa yŏn'guso 2022a).

Before Father Han's lecture, the improving situation regarding COVID-19 allowed for a busload of students (most of whom were middle-aged or older) from the open university to take a field trip to Puŏnggol, an isolated spot where was established in 1885 the equivalent of a small minor seminary devoted to teaching Latin, Korean writing, and Literary Sinitic to help Korean students prepare for the priesthood. During the YouTube video of the pilgrimage, the section dedicated to Puŏnggol simply shows the pilgrims being lectured to in a section of woods (Han'guk kyohoesa yŏn'guso 2022b). This is because while some structures, such as a well, that are believed to have been connected to the seminary have been discovered, the exact spot and the remains of the main building itself have yet to be found (Ch'ŏn 2022e).

The lecture series and the pilgrimage coincided with a series of 2022 articles on Puŏnggol written by Ch'ŏn Kang-U, a Catholic journalist, and published between January and May in *Kyohoe wa yŏksa* (The Church and History). That particular journal is also published by the Institute, but like the open university, is aimed at a general Catholic audience interested in history and therefore also includes theological reflections. In his articles Ch'ŏn explains how little is actually known of the Sacred Heart Seminary established at Puŏnggol, which was only in existence for a year and five months, but then gathers together what materials there are on the subject and explicates them ably for a lay audience. Ch'ŏn's articles celebrate Korean Catholics in ways we have seen previously, for instance, praising them for establishing communities during the time of persecution in which they lived lives of love and unity in accordance with the "Catholic tradition of 2,000 years" that had been handed down by the apostles (Ch'ŏn 2022d).

What differentiates Ch'ŏn from what we have seen thus far is that he allows foreign missionaries, particularly those of the MEP, to share center stage with Korean Catholics. Ch'ŏn does this primarily through theology, particularly the concept of the priesthood, which he declares to be a "treasure of Catholicism" (Ch'ŏn 2022a) whose members "act as intermediaries between man and God who embody the good news and are witnesses of the 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'" (Ch'ŏn 2022e). However, to have priests, an education, and thus sem-

inaries, are necessary. And in Ch'ŏn's telling of history, the French MEP (Ch'ŏn, 2022e) missionary priests played a central role in their establishment. In one of his articles, Ch'ŏn celebrates their bravery and willingness to give up everything to serve the people of Korea recalling that "once they had departed, they were not able to even think of coming home" (Ch'ŏn 2022e). It was those priests who would help establish the first Korean seminary at Baeron in 1855, and even after the persecution of 1866 led to the deaths of all but three of those priests in Korea, who were forced into exile, they would begin to return in the 1870s as Korea began to become more open to the outside world, or, to put it in Ch'ŏn's poetic words, in the "aftermath and darkness of cruel persecution, the MEP did not give up the dream of an education for priests" (Ch'ŏn 2022e).

And as they helped rebuild the Korean Catholic Church, they would, working with Korean Catholics, establish the Puŏnggol Sacred Heart seminary in 1885, that location chosen because of its relative isolation, protecting it from possible government persecution. It was the French-Korea treaty of 1886 and the relative religious freedom it brought that allowed for the seminary to be transferred to the more accessible Yongsan. And that seminary would eventually transform into the theological school at Catholic University in Seoul. Thus, despite its small size and short time in existence, Ch'ŏn argued that the seminary at Puŏnggol served as an important link in the chain of priestly education (Ch'ŏn 2022e). Ch'ŏn therefore continued on to urge his readers to pray for and support renewed efforts to find the actual site and in this way, through

prayer and sweat [...] Puŏnggol Sacred Heart Seminary, the incubator of faith amidst persecution, would become a glorious pilgrimage site. (Ch'ŏn 2022e)

And from Ch'ŏn's retelling of its history, French missionaries would be an important focus of such a site. Thus, it seems that in telling the story of Korean Catholicism, Korean Catholics are more comfortable emphasizing the importance of French influence when talking amongst themselves, while playing it down when appealing to a religiously heterogeneous audience.

5 Conclusion

This paper's exploration of a sample of Korean Catholic holy sites and their associated pilgrim routes reveals how Korean Catholics have sought to portray their history and present, including in terms of Korea's meeting with the world, particularly the West, in a way that is palatable to modern Koreans, both Catholic and non-Catholic. These sites and routes generally present a narrative that play down negative aspects of Catholic history. For instance, the criticism of modern ideas and practices leveled throughout much of the nineteenth century by Catholic leaders in Europe is overshadowed by the Korean Catholic openness to outside knowledge and ideas of greater equality. In fact, Catholic calls for greater equality and the resulting challenge to problematic social structures and the people who profit from them are presented as the primary cause of persecution, without significant attention to Catholic connections to imperialism. To return to the interview with Father Han Kwang-Sök at the beginning of this paper, he did not so much as grapple with the meaning of Catholic connections to the Oppert Incident, but instead focused on the martyrs, the men and women whose anonymity allows them to be presented as equal. In such ways, the more difficult parts of this Catholic past are relegated to the margins, allowing for the production of a narrative that celebrates Catholicism in Korea as a force for modernity.

At the same time, with the exception of Ch'ön's articles on Puõnggol, which were aimed primarily at a Catholic audience, connections with Western people in the form of French missionaries were largely limited, at best appearing as bit players who praised Korean people. And while Pope Francis could take center stage, it was as a guest who had come to pay his respects to Korea and leave, rather than as someone who would make Korea his home, unlike those nineteenth-century French missionaries who planned on living out their lives on the peninsula. Thus, while an openness to the West and the wider world is celebrated in these sites and routes, it is directed more towards ideas, such as democracy, than to Western people themselves.

Together, the pope and UNESCO provided international recognition and prestige to Korea through the Catholic holy sites and related pilgrimage routes and personages, and local partnerships between Catholic and government leaders promised to benefit the economy and even help other religions (whose sites were even included in pilgrim routes), allowing the Korean Catholic Church to position itself as a positive part of Korean society, benefitting the country at home and abroad. Such a narrative is potentially powerful, and seems to be popular with the Korean Catholic Church, which is willing to place considerable resources behind it. The outbreak of COVID-19 has naturally restricted the number of people who can visit holy sites and

go on pilgrimages, but in the near future, the relative popularity of those sites can serve as an indicator for the reception and acceptance of these narratives.

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