



The Educational Ministry of early Korean Colporteurs

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Abstract

The study of the history of Korean colporteurs is relevant to recreate their important role in the spread of education in Korea and their impact on the present, as well as to understand the intercultural influence and innovative approaches to education. The purpose of the article is to identify the educational activities of Korean colporteurs. In the course of the study, a number of methods of theoretical cognition were used, such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, specification and generalisation. As a result of the study, the following conclusions were reached: the colporteurs were the first to translate the Bible into Korean and played an important role in spreading Christian teaching and educational activities in Korea.

Colporteurs played a key role in training and supporting local colporteurs and new believers, providing them with education and training to become spiritual and educational leaders in an environment where the majority of the population rejected Christianity. Acting as intermediaries between foreign missionaries and Korean women, biblical women expanded the church's influence and, with special training, were prepared to preach the Gospel and distribute the Bible to non-Christians, introducing new perspectives on the role of women in a society where Confucian tradition had limited their activities. Colporteurs also contributed to the preservation of the Korean language and culture in the face of Japanese colonisation by promoting and maintaining the Korean Hangeul writing system and facilitating the creation of a standard Korean language. This article will be useful for historians studying missionary activity in general, as well as for scholars studying the history of 19th-century Korea.

Keywords: missionary, Protestantism, Confucianism, cultural preservation, Hangeul writing system.

Introduction

The relevance of this study is underscored by its contribution to the reconstruction of the pivotal role played by Korean colporteurs in the dissemination of education and culture within Korea. This research serves as a means to enrich Korea's national heritage by shedding light on the profound influence these colporteurs had on the modern Korean educational system. Moreover, the educational endeavors of Korean colporteurs intersected with Western missionaries, introducing fresh ideas and methodologies to education in Korea, thus fostering a deeper understanding of intercultural influence and collaborative educational efforts. The historical tapestry of Korea bears witnesses to the profound impact of various social and cultural transformations, but few narratives reveal the intricate interplay between faith, education, and cultural preservation as vividly as the story of Korean colporteurs (Tiwen, 2023; Molotkina and Tarapon, 2022). Derived from the term "colporteur," meaning a peddler or



distributor of goods and religious texts, these individuals played a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape and cultural identity of Korea.

Korea's encounter with Christianity, brought by Western missionaries in the late 19th century, marked a significant turning point in its history. The introduction of Christian teachings coincided with the dominance of Confucianism as the prevailing ideological framework. This juxtaposition set the stage for a dynamic intercultural exchange that would not only reshape religious beliefs but also revolutionize educational practices, language, and gender roles in Korean society. At the heart of this transformative era were the colporteurs—dedicated individuals who ventured across regions, carrying with them not only religious texts but also the seeds of educational innovation. Their mission was multifaceted: to spread Christian teachings, facilitate education, and promote cultural preservation. The pivotal moment came with the translation of the Bible into Korean, allowing many Koreans to engage with Christian doctrine in their native tongue.

The study of educational innovation is exhaustive in its scope, and it unravels the multifaceted dimensions of colporteur activities. Presently, research related to missionary activities is flourishing, as this phenomenon has left an indelible mark on the culture and development of numerous countries worldwide. While the historiography of missionaries in Korea is fairly comprehensive, scant attention has been paid to their contributions in the realm of education, with only peripheral considerations of this topic. Consequently, this study faced the challenge of exploring interconnected subjects to address the broader issue of educational activities. One such aspect includes the translation and printing of the Bible in Korean, which, while not directly related to the sphere of education, played a pivotal role in involving a larger segment of the Korean population in the study of the Christian faith.

Notably, a study by A. Santiago-Vendrell and M. Im (2023) delves into the relationship between the development of feminism within the context of missionary movements. Their research posits that during the 19th century, amidst the expansion of missionary activities in Korea, feminist ideas were relatively unknown and not actively propagated within the country. Consequently, these ideas were not a focal point of discussion or contention among missionaries or Korean society. It is important to consider that feminism was less prevalent during that era, and societal roles and norms were heavily influenced by Confucian traditions.

Many scientists have studied this topic from different points of view. In particular, K. Kim and J.K. Chung (2023) in their scientific article investigated the role of early Korean Protestants in society. The author managed to fully describe the main aspects of their activity. However, it should be understood that this study is general, so it did not describe in detail the educational activities of colporteurs. Another important study is the article by Y. Park et al. (2022), which examines the development of Korean culture as a whole. The author pays considerable attention to the topic of the influence of Protestant activity in the field of education on the development of Korean culture and cites several important facts that confirm this thesis. The author gives a general overview of the development of Korean culture without a detailed study of the influence of missionaries on this process. It should be understood that missionary activity in Korea is closely connected with individual figures who had a significant influence on its development.

J.O. Seok et al. (2020) studied the activities of several famous missionaries, who were able to describe as accurately as possible the contribution of each of these figures to the spread of Protestantism. The researchers examine the issue of educational activity only tangentially, focusing on the biography and general activity of individual figures. In his work, J. Oxley (2023) explored the major topic of the influence of missionary efforts in Korea in the nineteenth century on modernity. As a result of the research, the author was able to determine that various aspects of the modern education system in Korea originate from the activities of Protestant



missionaries. It should be understood that Christianity was foreign to Korea, and there was a strong level of rejection of this idea by the native population. This issue was forcefully illustrated in his research by E. Bouwers (2023), who was able to demonstrate the attitude of Koreans towards missionaries in several circumstances.

Although the author described in detail how the local population did not perceive the missionaries, he did not explore the question of public support. The purpose of this study is to investigate the activities of Korean colporteurs in the context of education and to determine the impact of these processes on the present.

This research makes a distinctive and invaluable contribution to comprehending the educational role of colporteurs in Korean history and culture. It unveils the multifaceted dimensions of their contributions to education, religious diffusion, and cultural preservation, shedding light on their pivotal role in shaping Korea's modern educational landscape. Additionally, the study hints at unexplored areas of research, such as the influence of Christianity on the evolution of women's rights movements in Korea and the in-depth exploration of the biographies and activities of early missionaries, offering promising avenues for further scholarly inquiry.

Materials and Methods

In the course of this research, several methods of theoretical knowledge were used. One of the leading methods was analysis. Given that there is a large amount of information about the activities of Christian missionaries in Korea, it was necessary to select and analyze in detail certain elements that are directly related to the topic of this study, namely, the educational activities of Korean colporteurs. For example, it was important to study in detail how Christian ideas were spread by involving a large number of people in the study of official doctrine. Also, one of the key aspects of this study was the analysis of the activities of women missionaries and their knowledge of Christian doctrine.

Another important method was synthesis. Through the use of this method of theoretical knowledge, it became possible to combine the various elements of this study into general results. In particular, the consideration of the history of the translation of the Bible into Korean was important for understanding the educational activities of colporteurs in the future. Thus, by studying the individual elements of this topic and combining them through the use of the synthesis method, it became possible to achieve a more holistic and in-depth understanding of this issue. The next method used in this study was comparison. It is important to understand that for a significant part of its history, Korea developed as a separate state based on the principles of Confucianism. Thus, Christianity was a new and completely alien doctrine for the majority of Korean society, so it was important to compare these worldviews to better understand the goals of missionary activity in Korea. In particular, an important aspect of the topic of this study was the comparison of the role of women in Confucian society and Protestantism.

It should also be noted that this study involves the consideration of worldview systems, in particular, as noted, in Christianity and Confucianism. Given this, it was necessary to be guided by the principle of abstraction in conducting the study. This ensures that the results are as accurate and unbiased as possible. Another method used in this study was concretization. In the course of studying the topic of this article, a large amount of information related to various aspects was considered, so it was necessary to focus on the key ones. In particular, this method was used when considering the spread of the Korean Hangeul script and emphasizing the role played by Korean missionaries in this process.



Generalization was also an important method. The use of this method became necessary at the stage of summarising the results to identify the main aspects of the research and formulate them into general conclusions.

Results

The term “colporteur” is derived from the word “peddler”, which refers to a person who carries goods with a load on his or her neck or shoulders and often sells religious texts such as the Bible or evangelistic pamphlets, actively recommending their reading. In Korea, the emergence of colporteurs can be traced back to the activities of the United Presbyterian Church in Scotland (UPCS) and the Bible Society of England, which initiated Protestant missions in China. In 1862, they established missions in Yingkou and Wujiang (Manchuria), while sending missionaries to China. John MacIntyre (1837-1905), sent from the UPCS, arrived in China in 1871, and John Ross (1841-1915) arrived in China in 1872 to take part in missionary work in Manchuria. The translation of the Bible into Korean became urgent after John Ross heard the story of Robert Thomas (1839-1866), a missionary from Wales who was martyred in Pyongyang, Korea, during his missionary work. This story moved Ross, and he felt a strong calling to do missionary work in Korea. Since Ross could not enter the Korean peninsula due to the Korean government’s isolation policy, he decided to use Korean merchants who came to Manchuria from Korea to trade to create a Korean translation of the Bible. Ross hired Korean merchants who were familiar with Chinese characters for this task (Kim and Chung, 2023; Ross, 1890).

However, due to Korea’s isolation policy, Ross was unable to get to the Korean peninsula. Therefore, he decided that the distribution of the Bible in Korea was possible through Korean colporteurs who would carry and promote the Bible among Koreans. Ross and his team began translating the Bible into Korean, using Chinese characters and the Korean language, and recruited Korean merchants to help with the work. Ross decided that the translation of the Bible should be done using the Chinese and English Bibles as the main texts and the Greek New Testament for verification.

Thus, the translators initially worked on the translation using Korean and idioms that Korean readers would understand. For example, they translated the word “God” as “Hanim”, which was familiar to Koreans and in line with their religious culture (Spytska, 2023). After completing the first draft of the translation, Ross and his team revised it and founded the Munkwang Seowon (Publishing House) to distribute the Bible. In 1882, Ross published the first 3,000 copies of the Korean translation of the Bible, which included the Gospels of Luke and John, in Manchuria. These copies were also distributed to southern parts of Korea, such as Busan. In 1887, the complete Korean New Testament was published.

The work on the Korean translation of the Bible included the translation of the text as well as its adaptation to Korean cultural and religious specifics. As previously noted, Korean translators used the phrase “Hanim” for the word “God” since it was familiar and understood by the Korean reader and was consistent with Korean religious culture (Kim, 2021; Park, 2023). Thus, the Bible translation became more accessible and understandable to Korean readers. Koreans who have become familiar with the biblical message after the translation have experienced incredible transformations in their lives. Kim Cheong-song, an ordinary Munkwang Seowon employee, for example, was moved by the Korean Bible and became a baptized member.

Ross describes Kim’s conversion as follows: Kim arrived at the mission house as a beggar and eagerly returned to labor. While changing the type, he attentively scrutinized the document in front of him. He became interested. By the time the gospel of Luke was printed, he had become a baptized follower (Ross, 1890). He became a colporteur, spreading the Gospel in



his hometown and other areas, leading to a massive conversion of Koreans in Manchuria (Kim, 2021). Baek Hong-jun (1848-1893), who lost his goods while crossing the Yalu River, also became a believer after meeting Ross. He became a colporteur and evangelized a Korean village in West Jiandao, Manchuria, spreading the Gospel of Luke and John and gaining the support of new believers. Another example is Seo Sang-Ryun, who was introduced to Protestant Christianity in Manchuria, where he recovered from typhoid fever thanks to the help of missionary MacIntyre. He was baptized by Ross and sent to Korea as the first official colporteur of the British Bible Society. This story also led to the conversion of many Koreans to Christianity (Seok et al., 2020). The Sorae Church in Korea is important because it was the first independent Protestant church in the country founded by Koreans. Official missionaries came to Korea later, but they understood that the seeds of faith had already been sown by local evangelists (Seo and Chung, 2021). It is important to note that Protestantism in Korea initially spread through colporteurs who distributed the Bible and the Gospel. This shows the great influence of local ambassadors of the Christian faith on the spread of Christianity in Korea.

It is also worth noting that the origins of Korean Catholicism can be traced back to before the advent of Catholic missionaries and can be attributed to the Koreans themselves. A group of Korean Confucian scholars in the 18th century believed that the “Heaven” mentioned in Confucianism and Catholicism were similar to each other. In particular, Lee Seung-hun (1756-1801 CE) traveled to Beijing to explain this doctrine with Jesuit missionaries. After conversations with these missionaries, he converted to Catholicism. However, on 26 February 1801, he was beheaded in Korea for allegedly spreading a false religion. Early Korean saints, both Catholics and Protestants, believed in the religion of their choice without fear of death. H.A. Rhodes (1934) explained their behavior with a religious emotion that is unique to Koreans: “Koreans are an emotional people, and the emotional element in Christianity appealed to them.” Rhodes’ interpretation is not inaccurate. However, it may not be entirely accurate to emphasize the religious feelings of Koreans as a consequence of their emotions. This is because early Korean Christians read, pondered, and researched Christian doctrine through their own reasoning, carefully analyzing books such as the Bible and the Truth of the Lord of Heaven (Kim and Chung, 2023).

In short, colporteurs in Korea played a key role in the spread of Christianity. Among them, they were divided into those hired and paid by foreign missionary societies and those who voluntarily worked without pay. Missionary societies and local churches in Korea hired colporteurs to work in Bible distribution centers and Christian bookstores. Unpaid colporteurs earned their living by selling Korean translations of the Bible. To ensure that those seeking the Bible clearly understood its importance and value, they always sold it at a certain price, even relying on the exchange system and accepting rice or barley from those with limited financial means.

Colporteurs, selected and supervised by missionaries, received at least six months of biblical education. The missionaries appointed them as colporteurs after carefully examining their religious beliefs and ability to serve, as they gradually became preachers, local church planters, and money managers. The missionaries continued to teach and train them to help them transform from Bible traders to spiritual and educational leaders responsible for the future of the Korean Church. In 1910, the Korean Church, rather than the missionary organizations, oversaw the colporteurs when Korean pastors were able to serve the majority of their local churches. Within the Presbyterian Church denomination, for example, the Department of Colporteurs was established so that Korean pastors could manage and monitor the Colporteurs.

So far, we have concentrated on male colporteurs and their evangelistic efforts in the early history of the Korean Protestant movement. However, it is vital to mention the function of



female colporteurs, also known as “Kwonseoin” (literally “colporteurs”), who were similar to their male counterparts. They were usually called “biblical women”. The emergence of biblical women was a missionary strategy. Western male missionaries had limited opportunities to communicate with Korean women in the traditional Confucian culture of Korea. Biblical women proved to be important intermediaries who filled this need. They began to help foreign missionaries by participating in Korean missionary work, especially in women’s ministry (Roh, 2022).

One missionary testified: “Finding it impossible to do any work alone from house to house here where the strangers are so strange, I was very glad to take Mary as a Bible woman to do the city work” (Morris, 1906). Bible women received stipends and received training in biblical and other aspects of missionary work that lasted at least three months. For about five months of the year, they traveled with the missionaries to the Korean mission field. Bible women achieved significant results by preaching the Gospel to women who had limited opportunities to participate in public events. They spread the Gospel based on the biblical knowledge that had been passed on to them by missionaries (Strawn, 2012).

In 1894, the Korean government of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910) initiated and implemented the “Gapo Reform,” which led to the abolition of the caste system that had underpinned the kingdom’s feudal structure for centuries. This class system promoted Confucian intellectuals to the highest level and translators and medical staff to the next level in society. Farmers, artisans, and dealers were assigned to the third level, while the Cheongmin (lower class) remained at the bottom of society. However, even after the abolition of this system, lower-class people continued to experience severe social discrimination.

Those involved in industry and trade also had fewer privileges than peasants. This can be explained by the ruling ideology of the Yi Dynasty, which was deeply rooted in Korean society and emphasized agriculture as the basis of the country’s governance (Seo et al., 2022). Weavers and butchers (those who slaughter animals for meat) in particular created an entirely different society from the rest of the population. These Cheongmin were considered social outcasts and marginalized people (Seth, 2019). Protestantism in Korea responded to this system of social discrimination, and as shown above, the first translators of the Korean Bible were merchants.

Among them, Seo Kyung-jo became a pastor, and Seo Sang-Ryun and Baek Hong-jun were appointed elders in the Saemunan Church, founded by Underwood in September 1887. They acted as enlightening leaders in early Korean Protestantism. The movement to abolish the status system continued, and in 1911, a butcher named Park Seong-Chun was appointed an elder at Gondangol Church in Seoul on the same day as Lee Jae-hyun, a member of the royal family. This church was founded by Samuel F. Moore (1860-1906) in June 1893. This church expanded its influence to all classes of Korean society and played an important role in promoting the idea of human dignity and worth that Protestantism was based on (Park et al., 2022).

When Protestantism first came to Korea in the late 19th century, the traditional patriarchal system of Confucianism had a profound impact on women’s lives. In particular, Table 1 demonstrates key differences between the perception of women’s roles in Confucian and Protestant societies.



Table 1. Comparing the role of women in Confucian and Protestant societies

	Confucianism	Protestantism
Family role	In Confucian societies, women are often seen as wives and mothers who are expected to serve their husbands and families by being housewives and raising children.	In many Protestant communities, women's roles in the family may be more egalitarian, and they may share responsibility for the home and child-rearing with men.
Subordination	The Confucian tradition upholds the idea of women being subordinate to men, as expressed in the theory of the Three Obediences and in the family hierarchy.	Protestantism tends to be more inclined towards the idea of equality before God, and religious views on women's subordination may be less restrictive.
Service in the church	Confucianism does not provide for active church service for women, and women do not usually hold important positions in the Confucian world.	In some Protestant denominations, women may serve as priests or hold important positions in the church, which is different from the Confucian approach.
Education and career	Traditionally, Confucian societies may have limited educational and career opportunities for women.	Protestant cultures tend to place more emphasis on education and career opportunities for women.

Sources: compiled by the authors based on J.S. Rosker (2021), A. Domenech (2019).

The work of Korean women like Dorcas opened the door for other Korean women to look beyond their homes to society at large. Initially, these women began studying the Bible in women's Bible studies or churches in the evening to avoid attention. Over time, they showed great courage in meeting with missionaries during the daytime. The missionaries organized Bible classes to provide them with more education on Christian topics such as biblical geography and a summary of the Old and New Testaments (Strawn, 2012). These women became literacy pioneers and taught the Korean language using the Korean Bible. They became hands-on educators who initiated a cultural transformation that enlightened Korean women. They now saw clearly the repressive Korean social structure that had completely marginalized them. Through their rebirth as individuals, these women were finally able to step outside their families and participate in the debates of contemporary Korean society (Cawley, 2023).

The Korean script known as Hangeul has gained recognition and support from numerous observers and scholars. This script, pronounced "Hangeul", has been attributed to King Sejong the Great (1397-1450), a prominent monarch of the Joseon Dynasty in the 15th century. However, there was another phenomenon: the Confucian scholars who controlled the society at the time rejected the Korean language and used complex Chinese characters instead. This practice continued until the 19th century when Western missionaries arrived in Korea. Despite being a native language, Korean Hangeul was reluctant to be used. This changed thanks to missionary Ross, who translated the Bible into Korean and began spreading the Korean language through colporteurs. This step helped to preserve the Korean language and culture (Shiraishi, 2022). Korea became a Japanese colony in 1910, but thanks to Hangeul, the Korean people kept the idea of national restoration alive. The Korean translation of the Bible made by missionary Ross was not perfect, but it became an educational tool for Koreans, helping to improve their moral life. In addition, this translation created the basis for the standard Korean language, and future missionaries were able to create new Korean Bible translations on this basis (Seo et al., 2022).

In general, it should be said that the colporteurs played an important role in the spread of Protestantism in the early history of Korea. They adopted this religion and distributed the Bible even before the arrival of Western missionaries. They also contributed to the cultural revolution by spreading the Korean language and encouraging Koreans to use Hangeul. Their efforts helped to make Protestantism the religion of choice for many South Koreans and improved Korean society. The colporteurs left a significant spiritual legacy by helping to include



marginalized people in public life. Many of them went from being ordinary people to church leaders and active citizens. Women also found their voices and names through this movement. It is important for the Korean Protestant Church today to embrace the concept of public theology for marginalized groups in society. First and foremost, the church should work to unite and reconcile diverse Christian denominations to promote Korean unity. In addition, the Church can take a leading role in addressing various social issues such as suicide, rural displacement, and social welfare.

Discussion

The question of the influence of Christian missionaries on the formation of the modern worldview system of Korea is quite common in historiography. In particular, P.H. Lee et al. (1996), in the monograph, examined the sources of Korean traditions. In the course of the study, they paid considerable attention to the activities of the colporteurs, who made a significant contribution to the development and spread of Christianity on the Korean peninsula. Thus, the writers stressed that it was through the efforts of Protestant missionaries that Christianity was able to establish itself as one of modern Korea's worldviews. This viewpoint should be agreed upon, and it is worthwhile to do so. In particular, it should be emphasized that, as already noted in the results of this study, it was thanks to the spread of Protestantism in the 19th century that Christianity gained a significant number of adherents and was able to gain a foothold in modern Korea.

K. Park (2023) in the study examined the topic of the educational activities of Buddhists in Korea. As a result of studying this topic, the author noted that many Buddhist monasteries served as educational centers where monks and nuns studied not only the doctrines of Buddhism but also various branches of science and art. These monastic schools played an important role in preserving and disseminating knowledge. In addition, Buddhists actively influenced social development and education, promoting moral and ethical values among the population (Musabekova et al., 2014). They promoted the importance of compassion, peacefulness, and other Buddhist principles. Thus, the researcher concludes that only Buddhist schools and monasteries conducted educational activities in the 19th century in Korea. However, it cannot be agreed with these results. In this article, several examples of educational activities by Western missionaries and Korean colporteurs have been considered. In a comparative context, Protestant actions appeared to be smaller than those of Buddhists, yet the reality of their positive results should never be ignored. The fact that a tiny handful of Protestant Christians in the March First Movement of Korea in 1919 ignited the enthusiasm of many Korean people and established the Korean independence movement exemplifies Christianity's contribution clearly (Doszhan, 2023; Kim et al., 2023).

C. Yun-Shik and S.H. Lee (2017) examine the wide range of impacts of colporteurs, including their role in spreading Christianity, promoting literacy, introducing Western knowledge, and promoting social reform. The authors argue that colporteurs played an important role in the spread of Christianity in Korea because they were able to communicate with a wide range of people, including those who lived in rural areas and did not have access to educational institutions. Colporteurs also contributed to the spread of literacy, as they often taught people to read and write so that they could read the Bible and other Christian texts. In addition, colporteurs introduced Western knowledge, particularly about science, technology, and politics. This helped to raise the awareness of Koreans about the world outside their country and contributed to social reforms.

K.R. Ross et al. (2022) examine how these networks were used to spread Christianity and establish churches. The authors argue that the colporteurs were effective in spreading Christianity because they could communicate with people from different social classes and



cultures. They were also familiar with local languages and culture, which allowed them to communicate effectively with potential Christians (Akhmetova et al., 2019).

K. Dittrich & and D.A. Neuhaus (2023) explore the role of educational institutions founded by Protestant missionaries in the formation of modern Korean education. The authors examine the curriculum, teaching methods, and the impact of these institutions on the Korean educational system. The authors argue that the educational institutions founded by Protestant missionaries played an important role in the formation of modern Korean education as they introduced Western educational standards and teaching methods. These institutions also contributed to the improvement of literacy and education in Korea, which led to social change.

Another important question is what impact the activities of Protestant missionaries in the 19th century had on the modern development of education in Korea. This aspect was studied in detail by J. Oxley (2023). Using descriptive methods and contemporary data, the study found a consistent positive relationship between identification as a Protestant and years of education in two different samples of South Koreans of different age groups. This relationship holds even after controlling for the highly centralized education system in South Korea, with average years of education doubling across age cohorts in the sample. In addition to seeking higher levels of education, the study also found that Korean Protestants are more likely to hold important positions or engage in professional activities, but this is not always accompanied by an increase in family income. The study also draws attention to the perseverance of Korean Protestants, pointing to the cultural connection between them and missionary aid based on national origin, which Korean Protestants consider closest. Much of the economic relationship can also be explained through participation in religious worship. However, it is worth noting that the cultural connection to missionary aid seems to be driven by Protestant affiliation. In general, it should be agreed with these opinions, since the educational activities of missionaries were special and had a significant impact on the present.

Another important issue is the perception of and opposition to Christian missionaries by Koreans, and this topic was addressed in a study by E. Bouwers (2023). Based on two cases, the author demonstrated that in 1801, anti-Christian persecution broke out in Korea, which was the first of its kind in this country. It was motivated by the desire to protect Korean Confucian civilization from what was perceived as the moral danger posed by Catholicism, as well as the desire to punish political opponents. The persecution included the murder of the only priest in the country, which prompted one local Catholic to write a letter to Pope Pius VII asking him to send an army to Korea to intimidate the kingdom and even force him to tolerate Catholicism. This persecution continued until the late 1870s when a treaty between Korea and France recognized missionaries as protected foreigners with extraterritorial status. It is worth noting that Catholic expansion on Jeju Island and its financial impact on the collection of increased taxes to finance modernization led to a popular uprising and armed conflict, which ended in mass repression and the massacre of hundreds of Catholics in 1901. In this context, two case studies are used to illustrate the complexity of “Catholic violence” in 19th-century Korea, showing how different actors can use the same religious brand but take different actions. This allows the study to critique essentialist understandings of the relationship between religion, politics, and violence. One should agree with these theses, as Christians were indeed alien to Koreans, and provoked resistance among many locals (Yeboah et al., 2022; Doszhan, 2023).

The missionary movements in Korea during the 19th century were mainly aimed at spreading Christianity and introducing Christian values, as well as at implementing humanitarian and educational initiatives. Missionaries cooperated with Korean authorities and influential people to establish a Christian church in Korea and open schools and hospitals. Feminist ideas began to gain importance in Korea much later in the 20th century, especially in the context of modernization and industrialization. Together with other ideas such as nationalism and human



rights, the feminist movement became an important aspect of the development of Korean society in the second half of the 20th century and in the decades that followed. One should disagree with these opinions because although feminist movements were not widespread in that period, as already mentioned in the results of this study, the ideas of Protestantism were revolutionary in the context of the role of women in Korean society.

In general, it should be said that the activities of the colporteurs played a significant role in the history of Korea. It was largely to them that Christianity was able to establish itself in this country, as well as contribute to the advancement of education and the propagation of feminist ideas.

Conclusions

The term “colporteur” is derived from the word “peddler” and refers to a person who carries goods and religious texts for sale and distribution in different regions. The emergence of colporteurs in Korea is connected with the missionary activities of Protestants. The first step in the context of educational activities was the translation of the Bible into Korean, which allowed many Koreans to get acquainted with Christian teachings and accept them. At the same time, churches began to be founded, which had not only religious significance but also educational value, since it was in these places that Koreans could learn about Christian doctrine in detail.

During the initial stages of Christianity's spread in Korea, Confucianism held a dominant position in the country's ideological landscape. The coexistence of these two belief systems led to attempts to find common ground between Christian teachings and Confucian values. However, over time, these efforts gave way to antagonism, as the majority of the Korean population rejected Christianity. In this context, foreign missionaries played a crucial role in educating and supporting local colporteurs and new converts to Christianity. They provided extensive education and training to empower colporteurs to become not only spiritual leaders but also educational figures within their communities. These colporteurs served as intermediaries between foreign missionaries and Korean women, particularly in women's ministry.

Female colporteurs, often referred to as "biblical women," assumed a significant role in missionary work, especially in contexts where traditional Confucian norms severely restricted the role of women in society. They received scholarships and comprehensive training in various aspects of missionary work, including biblical studies. This thorough preparation enabled them to effectively preach the Gospel and distribute the Bible to non-Christians. One of the most remarkable aspects of their work was challenging and reshaping traditional gender roles in Korean society. Through their efforts in spreading Christian teachings and education, these colporteurs provided Korean women with new perspectives on their roles, contributing to the evolving dynamics of gender equality and women's empowerment. This transformation was particularly significant within the constraints of Confucian tradition, which had traditionally limited women's societal participation.

In essence, the work of colporteurs and, in particular, female colporteurs played a pivotal role not only in spreading Christian doctrine but also in shaping the evolving roles and perceptions of women in Korean society during a period of significant ideological transition.

Colporteurs also played an important role in the development of writing. Since the 15th century, Korea had a simplified writing system called Hangeul, but Confucian scholars rejected it in favor of traditional Chinese characters. Instead, Korean missionaries invested considerable effort in supporting the new type of writing and spreading it throughout society. In the same context, missionaries and colporteurs contributed significantly to the preservation



of the Korean language and culture under Japanese colonization by improving the Korean translation of the Bible and contributing to the creation of a standard Korean language.

An important area of further research is the study of the influence of Christianity on the development of women's rights movements in Korea. In addition, the issue of the biography and activities of the early missionaries is important. While this study touches upon the role of female colporteurs, known as "biblical women," in challenging traditional gender roles, future research could delve deeper into the influence of Christianity on the development of women's rights movements in Korea. Investigating how the experiences and perspectives of these women contributed to broader social changes and gender equality movements in Korean society would be a compelling avenue of exploration.

Future research can focus on the biographies and activities of these early missionaries, shedding light on their motivations, challenges, and the specific strategies they employed to promote education and Christianity. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the collaborative efforts between foreign missionaries and local colporteurs.

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