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Introducing “Religious Thinkers of Modern Korea”

Who are the leading thinkers of Korean religions in the modern period? Who are the thinkers that have shaped public discourses on religion, society, and culture in modern Korea, thinkers who have helped Koreans to reinterpret and reaffirm their spiritual identities in the midst of the profound turmoil and transition that Korea has undergone over the past two hundred years?

In this series, “Religious Thinkers of Modern Korea,” we plan to introduce such thinkers to our readers—particularly those from Buddhist and Christian traditions. We focus on Christian and Buddhist thinkers partly because of our own scholarly interests, but more importantly because thinkers from these two religions have had preponderate influence in shaping modern Korean world-views—not a surprising fact given that according to the 2005 census 52 percent of South Koreans affirmed their identity as either Buddhist or Christian, this out of 53.1 percent of South Koreans who affirmed any kind of religious affiliation. Given the predominance of these two faiths in the Korean religious landscape, dialogue between them is crucial; and this series, we hope, will in some small way contribute to such a dialogue.

The series will feature five thinkers from each tradition. A tentative list of the figures consists of Han Yǒng-un, Paek Sǒnguk, Kim Iryöp, T’oeong Sǒngch’öl, and Yi Kiyǒng, from the Buddhist side; and Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, Suh Nam Dong, Ham Sok Hon, Chǒng Yakjong, and Han Kyung Chik from the Christian side. Each of these figures will be treated by a scholar who is an expert in him or her.

We are grateful to the *Journal of Korean Religions* for publishing this series, and to Pyong-Gwan Pak for leading it off, with an article on the late Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-hwan, an ecumenical religionist and public thinker whose thought and life still reverberate in Korea.

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