
The Journal of CESNUR



Volume 6, Issue 1
January–February 2022

⊗ The Journal of CESNUR ⊗

Director-in-Charge | Direttore responsabile

Marco Respinti

Editor-in-Chief | Direttore

Massimo Introvigne

Center for Studies on New Religions, Turin, Italy

Associate Editor | Vicedirettore

PierLuigi Zoccatelli

Pontifical Salesian University, Turin, Italy

Editorial Board / International Consultants

Milda Ališauskienė

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

Eileen Barker

London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom

Luigi Berzano

University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Antoine Faivre (†)

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France

Holly Folk

Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington, USA

Liselotte Frisk (†)

Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden

J. Gordon Melton

Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA

Susan Palmer

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Stefania Palmisano

University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard

Université Bordeaux Montaigne, Bordeaux, France

Instructions for Authors and submission guidelines can be found on our website at www.cesnur.net.

ISSN: 2532-2990

The Journal of CESNUR is published bi-monthly by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions),
Via Confienza 19, 10121 Torino, Italy.

Volume 6, Issue 1, January–February 2022

Contents

Articles

- 3 Providence Church and the Festinger Syndrome
Massimo Introvigne
- 27 The Christian Gospel Mission (Providence) Church in Taiwan
Tsai Chih-Che and Peng Ten-Lung
- 78 The Charitable Works of Vietnamese Caodaism
Nguyễn Tuấn Em

Providence Church and the Festinger Syndrome

Massimo Introvigne

CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)

maxintrovigne@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: When President Jung Myung-seok, the founder of the Korean Christian new religious movement Providence (also known as Christian Gospel Mission) was sentenced to ten years in jail, opponents believed the group would disappear. In fact, not only did it survive but actually grew during and after Jung’s detention. The article presents the history and theology of Providence and related controversies. It argues that not only “when prophecy fails” but also “when the leader is convicted” the prediction that a movement would collapse may in several cases be wrong.

KEYWORDS: Providence, Christian Gospel Mission, Jung Myung-seok, New Religious Movements in South Korea, New Religious Movements and Sexual Abuse.

Introduction

On February 18, 2018, President Jung Myung-seok, as followers of its South Korean Christian new religious movement Providence called him, was released from jail, where he had spent ten years for sexual abuse. In 2009, when the Supreme Court of South Korea confirmed the verdict, Korean anti-cultists, for which Providence had been for years a main target, believed that the movement would soon disappear. To their astonishment, during the decade in which Jung remained in detention, Providence not only did not collapse, it actually grew, both in South Korea and in other countries such as Taiwan.

While sociologists might have warned anti-cultists that it should never be taken for granted that, when a leader is jailed and sentenced, a religious movement would disappear, opponents of Providence were understandably disappointed. After President Jung was released and resumed his role as leader of Providence,

they multiplied articles and TV shows against Providence and its leader, and members of the movement continued to be discriminated in various ways and abducted to be deprogrammed, a phenomenon that has targeted several new religious movements in South Korea and has never been seriously repressed by the authorities (Di Marzio 2020; Fautré 2020).

With the exception of a doctoral dissertation, a book, and some articles by French anthropologist Nathalie Luca (1994, 1997, 1998, 1999–2000), which were written some 25 years ago and reflect a different phase in the history of the movement, I am the only Western scholar who systematically studied Providence and interviewed President Jung at length after he was released from jail, in March and June 2019.

It was never my purpose to take a stand on whether President Jung was guilty or innocent of the crimes for which he spent ten years in jail. This is not the task of scholars, while it is part of their job to analyze how different narratives of the same events interact and create social effects.

It was, however, my purpose to do something those that focus only on President Jung's court case normally omit. It is impossible to understand both the controversies and the reason they failed to destroy Providence without analyzing the biography of President Jung and the history and theology of the movement. This article will explore these subjects in detail, but will start with a comment on the sociological dynamics that may be at work in the Providence case.

When Prophecy Does Not Fail

Opponents of groups they label as “cults” and the media they influence are always very much surprised that the movements they attack do not disappear. In several cases, however, as media slander increases, so does the number of members of the so-called “cult.” Even sentencing the leader and putting him in jail in democratic countries, as the case of Providence proves, does not necessarily “kill” a movement, and is compatible with its continuing growth.

This case is similar to the one whose sociological study was inaugurated in the 1950s by social psychologist Leon Festinger (1919–1989) and his colleagues (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956). He considered the fact that when a movement has announced a date for the end of the world, and obviously the world

had not ended on that date, it often happens that the group, rather than disappearing, in fact gains more members. “When prophecy fails,” Festinger argued, those who had believed in it do not abandon their faith, but proselytize with even more fervor, trying to solve the “cognitive dissonance” and to find in conversions by others a confirmation of their endangered beliefs. The “Festinger syndrome” theory was discussed in the last sixty years by leading sociologists including Joseph F. Zygmunt (1921–2008), J. Gordon Melton, Lorne L. Dawson, Diana Tumminia, William H. Swatos, Jr. (1946–2020), and several others (Zygmunt 1972; Melton 1985; Dawson 1999; Tumminia 2005; Tumminia and Swatos 2011).

They concluded that Festinger was right in arguing that religious movements may not be destroyed when an event they had predicted fails to occur, but wrong in explaining this through cognitive dissonance. In fact, the very title of Festinger’s and his colleagues’ acclaimed book, *When Prophecy Fails*, may be misleading. For the true believer, *prophecy never fails*. As Melton argued, most groups confronted with what the outside world sees as prophetic disconfirmation claim that the prophecy in fact did not fail but was fulfilled in ways visible only to the eyes of the believers (Melton 1985, 21).

As proved by the history of both the Millerite Adventists (whose larger branch later became the Seventh-day Adventists) after 1844 and the Bible Students (whose larger branch later became the Jehovah’s Witnesses) after 1914, movements reaffirm their beliefs by “spiritualizing” them, claiming that the predicted event really occurred, but was invisible to human eyes. Based on the calculations of William Miller (1782–1849), early Adventists expected the end of this world and the second coming of Jesus Christ for the year 1844. When this did not happen, the faction of the Millerite Adventists that eventually gathered around Ellen Gould White (1827–1915) “spiritualized” the prophecy into the Sanctuary Doctrine. They claimed that in 1844 Jesus Christ had entered the most holy place of the Heavenly Sanctuary and started the “investigative judgement” of all the living and the dead (Adams 1981). Millions eventually accepted their claims, giving rise to the very successful denomination of the Seventh-day Adventists.

Similarly, early Bible Students had expected the end of this world for the year 1914. After the predictions of their founder, Pastor Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916), failed to materialize, the date of 1914 was reinterpreted as the year in

which Jesus Christ was installed as God's Heavenly King, thus opening the way for those who are part of the 144,000 "anointed" to go to Heaven and reign with Jesus forever (Chryssides 2016, 223–244). The prophetic disappointments of 1844 and 1914 did not lead to the demise of the Adventists and the Bible Students, but opened the way to their metamorphosis into global movements such as the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses that gathered millions of members.

The case of a leader venerated by his (or her) followers as a prophet and a godly man (or woman) who is arrested, charged, sentenced, and jailed for common crimes—indeed, sexual abuse is in our days the most common accusation against leaders of groups labeled as "cults" by their opponents—is different from the case of a prediction about the end of the world that ostensibly fails to come true. Yet, there are similarities. Movements such as the Adventists in 1844 and the predecessors of the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1914 did not expect the end of this world to come invisibly and spiritually. They expected it to come visibly. Followers of Providence did not expect that the way their leader, President Jung, would fulfill his mission was through accusations of sexual abuse, a very public trial, and a long jail term. They expected him to be recognized by a growing number of followers as a good, compassionate, and reliable religious leader, as they fully believed he was.

Just as the fact that a prophetic date seems not to come true, the fact that a leader's career seems to take a different course than it was expected does not, in most cases, change the basic beliefs of the followers. If their faith is strong enough, if a leadership of committed devotees is able to guide them, if the leaders continue to "be with them" from prison, they may carry on and even grow. For the opponents, prophecies "fail" and leaders are "unmasked." For the believers, prophecies do not fail and leaders go through a course of suffering that is needed to fulfill their mission.

Within Christianity, of course, this is nothing new. The apostles fully expected that Jesus will triumph in Jerusalem and will make them dignitaries in his glorious kingdom. When he was arrested, tried, and executed, they had to re-adjust their beliefs, or to understand them in a different way. As we know, they succeeded in doing this admirably. Not only did Christianity not disappear, it grew to become the world's largest religion.

How survival and expansion happened, obviously on a much smaller scale, in Providence can only be explained through a survey of its history and theology.

Providence: A Short History

Jung Myung-seok (also transliterated as Jeong Myeong-seok) was born in Seokmak-ri, Jinsan-myun, Kumsan-gun, South Chungcheong (Chungnam) Province, South Korea on March 16, 1945. He was the third of seven children of a couple of impoverished farmers. His parents were only able to support his education in a primary school, after which he had to help with the family farm (Akimoto 2019; I also rely on two interviews with Jung conducted in Wolmyeongdong in March 19 and June 5, 2019).

At age six, he first encountered Christianity through missionaries in Seokmak. He reports that he became interested in the Bible and, despite his poor education, read it in its entirety several times, and re-read it more than 2,000 times in his life. After several mystical experiences, at age 20, in 1965, while attending a local Presbyterian Church where he also served as Sunday school teacher, Jung decided to devote its free time to street evangelism. He claims his work was non-denominational, as he urged those he evangelized to join whatever Protestant church might be convenient for them.

Jung's life changed dramatically on February 22, 1966, when he was drafted to serve in the South Korean 9th Infantry Division in the Vietnam War. He remained in Vietnam until August 26, 1967, and was called again there for a second tour of duty between February 18, 1968, and April 15, 1969. Critics do not dispute that he served with honor, earning several decorations, including an Order of Military Merit medal. Jung also claims that, during his two Vietnam campaigns, he managed to remain faithful to what he considered the Christian imperative not to kill anybody, not even enemies in war. This claim is supported by testimonies from some of Jung's comrades in Vietnam (Jeong 2020).

Upon his return from Vietnam, Jung resumed both his farming and evangelistic activities, and decided to devote a substantial part of his savings and time to rebuilding the Presbyterian church in Seokmak, which was in a destitute state. The new church was inaugurated on July 20, 1971. However, from several years he had harbored doubts on the Presbyterian teachings. He began asking friends

to draw diagrams representing his understanding of the Bible, which put him at odds with the Presbyterians, and for the best part of the decade of the 1970s visited several mainline and new religions, not only Christian, as they included Daesoon Jinrihoe and Won Buddhism (Christian Gospel Mission 2017, 95).

He explored both mainline Christian denominations, such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Roman Catholics, and new religious movements, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and Yongmunsan Kidowŏn, established by Na Un-mong (1914–2009). Na had a special influence on Jung, who later regarded it as a “major prophet” (Christian Gospel Mission 2017, 103–5). Na had been expelled from the Presbyterian Church for heresy in 1966, although after his death his son led his movement to merge with the Methodists (*Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* 2014).

In 1973 and 1974, Jung attended a Holiness church in Gwangju, which did not prevent him from exploring other religions and movements. He also read the works of independent Christian theologian Han Enoch (Han Jin-gyo, 1887–1963), whom Jung also came to regard as a prophet (Christian Gospel Mission 2017, 105–06).

In November 1974, Jung came into contact with the Unification Church. On March 20, 1975, he was registered as a member of the church founded by Reverend Moon Sun Myung (1920–2012). Jung's church is often presented as a “schism” of the Unification Church. Jung claims that it was quite easy to be registered as a “member” of Moon's church in the 1975—to inflate their numbers, they registered as members all those who attended their meetings. Jung, however, admits that he occasionally delivered speeches at Unification Church's events until 1978, and in an interview with me he compared Moon's relation with himself to John the Baptist's with Jesus.

Jung also reports that in 1978, he heard a voice from Heaven telling him, “Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal.” These are locations mentioned in the Bible, and Jung interpreted Bethel to mean the mainline Protestant churches, and Gilgal to mean the Unification Church.

On June 1, 1978, Jung moved to Seoul, determined to launch his own independent ministry. He claims he came to the capital with only the equivalent of US \$300, but he had his diagrams, and trusted they will attract interest. Through street evangelism, he gathered a handful of followers, who grew to a few hundreds

and then to a few thousands. In 1982, he established the MS Gospel Association, which was later called Christian Gospel Mission and popularly known as Providence.

Jung found some friends among the capital's Protestant ministers. Despite his limited education, they managed to have him accepted in the Methodist Wesley Theological Seminary, where he obtained a degree in 1983. Jung toured Korean universities, and gathered a sizeable following among college students. Some of them also went to preach abroad, which allowed Providence to establish its first church overseas in January 1987, in Los Angeles, and in January 1988 the first church in Taiwan, where the movement will grow rapidly, again, mostly among college students. Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are other countries where Providence expanded with some success. In 1989, Jung started realizing his dream of a "natural temple," i.e. a temple in the nature without walls but with statues and other sacred artifacts, Wolmyeongdong, built in Jung's hometown of Seokmak. His followers started calling him "President Jung."

In the 1990s, while Providence expanded in South Korea and throughout the world, reaching some 70 countries with tens of thousands of members, it was targeted by the highly active Protestant Korean anti-cult movement (on which see Kim 2007) as "heretic." The presence of thousands of young women (although there were young men too) also raised suspicions. Rumors of abuse of female followers by Jung started circulating in the late 1980s, and were regarded as believable by anthropologist Nathalie Luca in her 1994 doctoral dissertation (Luca 1994) and 1997 French book *Le Salut par le foot* (Salvation Through Football), following a participating observation in South Korea, although she reported she had not been personally molested (Luca 1997, 20–1). The few members I interviewed who remember Luca claim that it was not clear to them that she was conducting a participating observation, and indeed she was registered as a "member" of the church. Not unexpectedly, they also strongly disagree with the conclusions of her book.

While Luca's book had almost no impact in South Korea, a 1999 exposé by the TV network Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) put the sexual abuse allegations in the national spotlight. Jung left South Korea and preferred to conduct missionary activities abroad only, for the next seven years, while the media campaigns continued, until he was arrested in China in 2007, and had to go back to South Korea in 2008, where he was ultimately sentenced to a term of

ten years in jail. These events are discussed below, in my final paragraph that deals with the court case.

Remarkably, during the ten years when Jung was in jail, Providence continued to grow, to the astonishment of its critics. He continued to lead the movement from jail. Ms. Kim Ji-seon, who went under the name Jung Jo-eun, was appointed as the “representative disciple,” and delivered to the church the messages written by President Jung while he was abroad and, later, in jail. When he was released, on February 18, 2018, President Jung returned to Wolmyeongdong and was able again to preside on an expanding church. I attended functions in Wolmyeongdong, Seoul, and Taipei, and interviewed several members, as well as reporters and critics. All confirmed that the attendance at Providence’s gatherings has not diminished but, after an initial moment of confusion, had increased during and after Jung’s detention.

Life Within Providence

Providence does not release statistics, but acknowledges its membership is in the tens of thousands, and this is accepted even by critics.

The formal name of the church is Christian Gospel Mission. Like “Mormon” for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or “Quakers” for the Society of Friends, “Providence” was initially used mostly by critics, but is now a common designation of the movement. The church is, or was in its earlier years, sometimes also known as “Jesus Morning Star” (JMS). The same letters JMS are the full initials of President Jung (Jung Myung-seok).

Each country where Providence is present in significant numbers has an autonomously incorporated organization, although an international missionary center at the South Korean headquarters coordinate all of them. The two largest foreign organizations, in Japan and Taiwan, enjoy considerable autonomy. Local churches are led by one or more pastors, who can be male or female. There are seminars preparing pastors in different countries, including South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

Some members decided to remain celibate, to be able to devote more time to the church. They are called “stars of faith,” and appears to be at the origin of the media scandalous rumors about a female-only group allegedly called

“Evergreen.” According to Providence, the claim is totally fantastic, the nickname “Evergreen” was never officially used for celibate members, and the “stars of faith” are both male and female.

Among the ancillary activities, Providence has a sport department. It does organize soccer events, including the National Peace Tournament in 2017, but it also promotes baseball, softball, volleyball, and basketball. The insistence is on team sports, as they teach team spirit and are seen as a metaphor of Christian cooperative life.

An Arts Group includes departments devoted to the visual arts, music, dance, design, and fashion. President Jung himself is an accomplished painter, and exhibitions of his work took place in various countries, including during his detention. Taiwan’s Peace Symphony Orchestra, established in 2013, has performed in several countries and is regarded as the most professional outcome of the movement’s love for music.

The Christian Gospel Mission Volunteer Group performs public services, such as the ecological cleaning of mountains and beaches, and assists the poor and the elderly (not only if they belong to Providence). Given the number of high school and college students in the movement, the Volunteer Group also offers services of school and career orientation.

As other observers have noted since the early days of the movement (Luca 1997, 28), the worship services of Providence are rich but somewhat unconventional. College students and others attend Bible studies or clubs, where they read Jung’s messages, study the lessons, and discuss lively between themselves. Services (some of which I attended) featuring President Jung in Wolmyeongdong include a sermon by him, speeches by other ministers, and a significant amount of music.

Providence recommends that members intermarry with other members and organizes “networking events” where male and female members, including from different regions or countries, can meet each other and eventually decide to date and marry. Providence reports that the divorce rate in these endogamous marriages is less than 1%.

In her 1997 book, whose title translates as “Salvation Through Soccer,” Luca insisted on the ritual nature of the soccer games played within Providence. The French anthropologist was very much fascinated by these games. She explained

that Jung's team "were supposed to always win, but narrowly," and that matches were often interrupted by philosophical commentaries on the games by Jung himself. "These comments were built in a way similar to the Thirty Lessons, where new members are encouraged to reexamine their lives. Slowly, as matches continue one after the other, and the founder continues to speak, the gaze directed on the game changes, and the ball becomes a symbol of the human being. His destiny depends both on the moves of the players and on the audience that influences the game" (Luca 1997, 25). The emphasis on the audience as part of the game allowed to include in the experience female members as well, since, at least at the time of Luca's observation, only males played the games (as it was common in the 1990s, when female soccer was under-developed or even unknown outside of the United States and some countries of Northern Europe).

Evaluating Luca's comments (see also Luca 1998, 1999–2000) more than thirty years after she published her book is difficult. Jung told me he still plays soccer at age 75, and the central part of the Natural Temple in Wolmyeongdong can be adapted and serve as a soccer field. On the other hand, I saw other sports, such as baseball, volleyball, and basketball, practiced and emphasized not less than soccer in contemporary Providence. The few members who have read Luca's book (published in French only) disagree not only with her general approach, but with what they believe is an excessive emphasis on soccer, which never had such a central role.

On the other hand, Luca's participant observation dates back to 1990 (Luca 1997, 9). She mentions the special climate created in South Korea by the Seoul Olympics in 1988, as well as the public financial support available for sport clubs in these years (as South Korea had also been selected to host in 2002 the World Cup of soccer, together with Japan). Providence appears to operate, like other new religious movements, through a revolving doors system: members leave, and new members come. Only a handful of those I were able to interview (including, of course, Jung himself) were there in the early 1990s. At any rate, the role of soccer in the 21st century, perhaps also because of the long detention and the aging of Jung, seems to be different from the one described by Luca.

Providence's Theology

As usual with religious movements, members are not interested in comparative studies of their doctrine or discussions about its origins. For their emic point of view, all comes from divine revelation, and Jung reports daily conversations with the Holy Trinity that accompanied most of his adult life. From the etic perspective of scholars, questions about sources are not irrelevant, nor do they deny the importance of the founders' own mystical experiences.

Critics maintain that Jung's core teachings (the so-called "Thirty Lessons") are remarkably similar to the *Divine Principle* of the Unification Church. The relationship has been constructed as plagiarism, or at least as "a sort of updating of the Unification Church" (Luca 1997, 31). Local Korean critics have also accused Jung of "plagiarizing" Na Un-mong and Han Enoch. Jung would say that Moon, Na, and Han had all their own prophetic missions announcing his own, although Moon betrayed his mission under the influence of his wife.

Although there are similarities, I disagree with the general assessment that Jung "plagiarized" Moon or simply "updated" the *Divine Principle*. A careful reading of the "Thirty Lessons" shows both similarities and important differences.

The "Thirty Lessons" are based on the idea that Christianity should conform to reason and science and, when miracles and other events in the Bible appear to violate the laws of nature, they should be interpreted symbolically. Biblical interpretation in Providence is based on four principles: analogy ("the Bible interprets itself"); historical context; double interpretation from the respective points of view of "spirit" and "flesh;" and numerology.

President Jung teaches that human beings consist of three components, body, soul, and spirit (a teaching he claims to derive from *1 Thessalonians* 5:23), in the image of the Trinity. The mind is not a component of the human being, but is part of the body. There are different soul levels: the physical soul is related to physical body, while the spiritual soul allows connections with spiritual beings and the spiritual world. Animals have a body and a physical soul, but not a spiritual soul nor a spirit, which according to Jung shows that the theory of evolution is false, since spiritual soul and spirit cannot evolve from body. The universe progresses through a law of nature designed by God.

The soul acts as a mediator between body and spirit. When we see ourselves in dreams, we see our “soul body.” There are other spiritual techniques to access the “soul world” outside of our dreams, an exercise that is useful, as in the soul world we can discern in a better way our own and other people’s thoughts and, to some extent, predict the future.

At death, the body dies but the soul, which includes all the memories, survives, just “as a memory drive [which] is taken out of a computer,” and unites with the spirit (Jeong 2019, I, 21; I also rely on interviews of members of Providence, and Jung himself, conducted in South Korea and Taiwan in 2019, and was allowed to consult material in the church’s archives in Wolmyeongdong, including texts such as *Christian Gospel Mission 2017* that are normally reserved for members only). While we are alive, according to our good or bad deeds, the spirit dwells either in the domain of life or the domain of death; there is also a middle level domain (Jeong 2019, I, 22).

Heaven and Paradise, according to Providence, are not the same. Actually, the world is divided in six main levels (although, from a more complex perspective, these levels can in fact be millions): Hell, Abyss, Hades, the Good Spiritual World, Paradise, and Heaven. Heaven in turn is divided in the three levels of servants, children, and brides of God (which also correspond to the Old, New, and Complete Testament). The Good Spiritual World and Hades (also called the evil spiritual world) are on earth, all the other levels are destinations for our souls after this life. In almost all cases, where we will go is determined by what we did in life, although in some special circumstances the spirit is able to lift itself up in the spiritual world. Spirits can visit their own and lower levels, but not upper levels. While on earth, we cannot see the spiritual worlds, but we can receive information about them by “becoming spiritual,” understanding the Bible, receiving spiritual dreams, and learning from spirits who come on a mission from Heaven (Jeong 2019, IV, 78–83).

God (regarded as male in Providence’s theology) created human beings to be his brides (irrespective of whether they are male or female), and exchange love with him. “God’s purpose of creation is only love” (Jeong 2019, II, 17). Archangel Lucifer opposed God’s creation of human beings, as he was envious that they would be closer to God than the angels. God could have thrown him into Hell immediately, but instead exiled him to earth, giving him an opportunity to repent. But he continued to oppose God, and induced Eve to fall. The fruit of the

Tree of Good and Evil is the female sexual organ (Jeong 2019, II, 75), and eating it for Eve meant making love with Adam after having been spiritually corrupted by the serpent (Lucifer). Those familiar with the Unification Church would recognize here one of the elements of similarity. The fact that the original sin had a sexual component does not mean that sex is regarded as evil by Providence. What is evil is becoming addicting to sex, or indulging in its practice before having achieved the necessary spiritual maturity.

As a consequence of the Fall, Lucifer became Satan, and Eve, Adam, and their descendants could not become brides of God, only servants. The Trinity could have created human beings as perfect and incapable of sinning. But it did not, because a love for God conquered by overcoming imperfections and temptations is more valuable than a love imposed by God and practiced without effort.

Because of the Fall, humans need to be saved. In due time, the Holy Son, through Jesus, opened the path of salvation. We are saved through the mission of the Holy Son, the second person of the Trinity. However, it is a key teaching of Providence that the Holy Son and Jesus “are not the same person” (Jeong 2019, I, 54). The Holy Son is a divine being, with no visible body. He “came upon Jesus” (Jeong 2019, I, 55), a human being, allowing him to become the Messiah. It was the spirit of Jesus, not his body, that resurrected, as the bodies of human beings do not resurrect. After manifesting itself to the disciples, the spirit of Jesus ascended to Heaven, while the Holy Son, having worked through Jesus, sat “on the right hand of God” (*1 Peter* 3:22). It is not Jesus who seats at the right hand of the Father, it is the Holy Son (Jeong 2019, I, 57).

Thanks to Jesus’ mission, humans were able to become children of God rather than servants. But not yet brides of God, a higher position. In order for humans to become brides of God, the Second Coming was needed. Many Christians believe that Jesus will come back in the Second Coming, but in fact it is not Jesus. The Holy Son works in different times through different human beings, who are persecuted and suffer. Jesus was the “standard of sons.” Now, the “standard of brides” should come (Jeong 2019, III, 20–9). Just as he used Jesus in the First Coming, the Holy Son appears again in the Second Coming by using “a worthy person,” which will assume a key role in the history of salvation, yet remain a human being, “a person of the earth like Jesus of Nazareth” (Jeong 2019, I, 59).

Several Christian denominations also expect the Holy Son physically “coming on the clouds” (*Matthew* 24:30) at the Second Coming. But in fact, according to

Providence, the “clouds” are the “cloud of witnesses” of *Hebrews* 12:1, i.e., a “cloud” of human beings who will believe in the Second Coming. In a miniaturized version, the “cloud” is the “man-of-mission” himself, in a “magnified” version it represents those who believe in his mission. Providence believes that this man-of-mission is President Jung, and we can know and believe this as certain through numerology and logic.

The Trinity works in history through the key numerological principle of “a time, times, and half a time,” which appears twice in *Daniel* (*Daniel* 7:25 and 12:7) and once more in *Revelation* (12:14). It can mean three and a half days, three and a half years (1,260 days), or 1,260 years (according to the principle “one year for one day” of the Adventist tradition, on the history of which, see From 1946–1954). This numerology is part of a “miniaturized” version of the principle (Jeong 2019, I, 77). There is also a large-scale version, where the principle is connected with the number 40 of *Ezekiel* 4:6 and *Numbers* 14:34, and can refer to periods of 40, 400, or 4,000 years—40 for the individuals, 400 for the nations, 4,000 for the world.

The 400 years passed four times (1,600 years) between Adam and Noah. Then, there were 400 years between Noah and Abraham and between Joseph and Moses. The Old Testament globally is a period of 4,000 years preparing for Jesus, who came 400 years after Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament. The New Testament lasts for half the years of the Old Testament, i.e. 2,000 years, and the man-of-mission in the Complete Testament should come 400 years after Martin Luther (1483–1546), who is regarded by Providence as the last prophet of the New Testament, and in turn came 1,600 years after Jesus (Jeong 2019, I, 79 and III, 89). Since Luther died in 1546, the man-of-mission used by the Holy Son should be born in 1945, which points to Jung and rules out other candidates. Also, 1945 comes at the end of a 40-year period relevant for Korea, the Japanese occupation from 1905 to 1945.

The 1,260-day (or year) period of *Daniel* 7:25 and 12:7 is also related to the 1,290 days of *Daniel* 12:11, and the 1,335 days of *Daniel* 12:12, making Providence’s numerology even more complicated. Only the man-of-mission was able to break the seal and unveil the mystery of *Daniel* 12:7, which is “God’s heavenly law” and “the clock of history” (Jeong 2019, III, 108), and he did it at an appropriate numerological time.

Jung admits that the principle “a time, two times, and half a time” was already discussed by Han Enoch in the 1940s. He stated that, “Han Enoch unraveled half of the secret about ‘a time, two times, and half a time’,” which confirms that he was a true prophet. However, Han only disclosed “half of the secret,” as some of his interpretations were wrong (Christian Gospel Mission 2017, 105).

Daniel 12:11 also mentions 1,290 days from the “abomination” in the place of the holy sacrifice. For Providence, the “abomination” is the mosque built in Jerusalem where the Temple once stood, in 688 CE, and 688 plus 1,290 makes 1978, which is when Jung started preaching the Word of the Complete Testament. From 1999 to 2012 there were four three-and-a-half-year times, “grave periods” for Providence preceding “resurrections.” Providence believes that 1999 was also prophesied by Nostradamus (1503–1566), who is probably more read and well-known in East Asia than he is in Europe or North America, as “a time of the last days” (Jeong 2019, I, 95). All kind of signs and expectations of the end happened in the world in 2012. From 2013, Providence became completely independent from the New Testament and entered into the era of the Complete Testament (Jeong 2019, III, 89).

Numerology, Providence teaches, also attests the connection between Jung’s mission and world peace. 1945, the year Korea was delivered from the Japanese and Jung was born, is also the year the United Nations were founded. In the year when Jung started its peace activities in Europe (1999), the euro as a common European currency was introduced. When he was visiting Italy, the Holy Son directed Jung to go and pray in the Cathedral of Milan on October 31, 1999. He came from a Protestant tradition, and did not understand why he should pray in a Catholic Church. However, he later learned that on that day Catholic and Lutheran representatives had signed in Augsburg the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (Lutheran World Federation and Catholic Church 1999), a historical step in the reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants (Jeong 2019, I, 96–7).

Numerology offers one proof that Jung is the man-of-mission for the Complete Testament. His life and ministry, Providence teaches, provide additional evidence. Jung acquired his position gradually by totally reciprocating the Holy Son’s love, becoming the bride of the Holy Son, and preaching to thousands who would also become brides of God (no matter whether they are female or male).

A part of Protestant Christians believes in the Rapture, i.e. in the theory that at some stage in the Last Times faithful believers will be “raptured” to be with Christ in Heaven. According to some interpretation of the Rapture, they will thus be spared the apocalyptic disasters predicted in the *Book of Revelation*, while others believe the Rapture will happen after these disasters. Providence has a different theory of the Rapture. It teaches it is a spiritual event, not an event of the flesh, and it already happened, on March 16, 2015.

Although in 2015 Jung was in jail, Providence believes that crucial spiritual events happened on that date. Jung turned 70, and 6,000 years from the beginning of salvation history were completed. March 16 (3/16), besides being Jung’s birthday (or perhaps because of this), has a numerological significance, 3 representing the Trinity, 1 Pastor Jung, and 6 a “miniaturized version” of 6,000 years, but ultimately the date of the Rapture was decided by God. On that date, the Holy Son ascended to Heaven (Jeong 2019, III, 72–3).

From that date, March 16, 2015, “a time, two times, and half a time,” i.e. 3-and-a-half years started, where those raptured were able to raise their level. The 3-and-a-half-years before March 16, 2015, were also important, as Providence members were called to remain loyal to their persecuted leader and follow his instructions. Those who failed to do so were not raptured (Jeong 2019, IV, 118), although as long as Jung is alive there are still possibilities to join the Rapture. More precisely, Rapture means entering the Golden City of Heaven. There are four conditions for this: to defeat Satan by obeying God’s word; defeat those who slander Providence; succeed where Adam and Eve failed by loving God unconditionally, and not falling sexually in the body; believe absolutely in the Savior sent by God, i.e. Jung. Like the resurrection of Jesus, the rapture is spiritual. Bodies are not involved. But the spirits become beautiful (Jeong 2019, III, 60).

After March 16, 2015, Satan, who was further enraged by the Rapture, tries to interfere acting through human bodies and causing suffering to those raptured, in order to falsely persuade them that “they have not raptured.” Some fall, others manage to defeat Satan.

Providence believes in the Trinity, but teaches it consists of three “separate entities.” While the Holy Son is male, the Holy Spirit is female, and is also known as Mother God. Pastor Jung Jo-eun, was identified as “the symbolic entity of the Holy Spirit,” who is female (Jeong 2019, IV, 39), and in 2009 assumed the role

of “revival preacher for the Holy Spirit.” Pastor Jung Jo-eun, according to Providence, assumed her mission related to the Holy Spirit because of her great efforts aimed at testifying God’s words in the new era, comparable to the Apostles’ efforts after they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As mentioned earlier, she also led Providence during Jung’s detention and transmitted his messages to the church.

But What About the Court Case?

Although the main Providence controversies are about sexuality, the movement has also been accused of dissimulation in its proselytization, and of anti-Semitism. The first criticism is commonly directed against many if not most Korean Christian new religions. Like other groups, Providence uses a variety of different names. While they may reflect different organizational models in different countries where the movement is active, there is little doubt that the name “Providence” is often avoided because of its media notoriety after President Jung’s court case. As it happens with other Korean movements, this perpetuates a vicious circle (see Bromley and Shupe 1980, 231–33 for the Unification Church; Introvigne 2020 for Shincheonji). The more Providence is attacked in the media, the more it tends to use other names when first inviting potential converts to its activities, which in turn results in more media criticism against its dissimulation strategies.

In 2016, the Australian edition of the British tabloid *Daily Mail* reported that, according to one ex-member, Providence is anti-Semitic and the pastors “praise Adolf Hitler in their teachings,” although it also mentioned that a spokesperson for the church firmly denied that this was the case (Groom 2016). My perusal of the writings, sermons, and messages of Jung did not find any reference to Hitler. I did find, however, references to the Jews being punished for the persecution of Jesus and the first Christians, but the punishment came in the shape of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD. The theme is still common in Providence (Jung 2020a, 2020b), but is a common interpretation in conservative Protestantism of *Luke 21:5–6*, where Jesus predicts that the Jerusalem Temple will be destroyed, and “the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” The most negative comments about the Jews are found in a 2014 Sunday Message by Jung, where he said that

those who were personally responsible for torturing and killing Jesus are all in Hell, and one consequence was that Christians for the 2,000 years of New Testament history “did not mix” and “did not intermarry” with the Jews (Jung 2014). However, this implies that in the era of the Complete Testament the preclusions against the Jews will be overcome.

While thousands of college students are familiar with Providence mostly because of its student clubs and on-campus activities, the public opinion in South Korea and some other countries only knows the movement because of the high-profile trial of President Jung.

After the media campaigns of 1999, Jung left South Korea for his world tour, but his enemies pursued him abroad, and he was also investigated in other countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. An anti-cult organization called Exodus was formed to actively oppose Providence, and it organized press conferences in South Korea and abroad, where masked women appeared and told how Jung had molested them. On May 1, 2007, following a request by South Korean authorities, Jung was arrested in Anshan, China. He had to return to South Korea in February 2008, according to his lawyers after complying voluntarily with a summons by the South Korean authorities rather than as a result of a formal extradition by China.

On August 12, 2008, the Seoul Central District Court sentenced Jung to six years in jail on three counts of rape. As usual in South Korea in “cult” cases, he was also sentenced for embezzling money belonging to the movement, although the distinction between the funds of Providence and the private funds of Jung was not easy to establish. On February 10, 2009, the Seoul High Court overturned the part of the first-degree decision that had recognized Jung not guilty of a fourth count of rape, and sentenced Jung to a total of ten years in jail. On September 24, 2009, the South Korean Supreme Court upheld the Seoul High Court verdict and Jung remained in jail, until February 18, 2018, when he ended serving his term.

It is perhaps appropriate at this stage to reiterate that it is not my intention nor, I believe, the task of scholars of new religious movements to determine whether Jung was guilty or innocent. It is, however, important to describe as clearly as possible the positions of the prosecutors and the defense, what courts exactly decided, and on which arguments Providence members rely to affirm their persuasion that their leader was innocent. I am aware of the fact that, in times of

“Me Too,” not only anti-cultists but also well-meaning feminist scholars believe that mentioning the arguments members of a religious movement use to assert that their male leader convicted for sexual abuse of female followers was innocent is disrespectful towards the women who accused him. This position is, I believe, wrong. If we do not ascertain why followers continue to believe, notwithstanding a conviction, that their leader was innocent, we cannot understand whether they remained in the movement and caused it to resist and even grow.

There are, in fact, three irreconcilable narratives about the charges of sexual abuse. The court’s narrative is that Jung sexually molested four South Korean women in countries other than South Korea after 1999. The decision did not take a position on whether “sexual initiations” were practiced or not within Providence, as opponents maintained, but regarded the women as believable, and the context of a “cult” where members were “psychologically manipulated” by the leader reinforced the judges’ opinion.

In fact, the Korean Criminal Act distinguishes between three different crimes, rape (Section 297), sexual assault (Section 298), and “quasi-rape” and “quasi-sexual-assault” (Section 299). The latter section refers to cases where the perpetrator takes advantage of the victim’s “condition of unconsciousness or inability to resist.” In Jung’s case, all victims (which I would designate with letters for the sake of privacy) were Korean women. A and B claimed to have been molested in Hong Kong, C and D in Anshan City, China, and E in Malaysia. In the case of A and B, Jung was found innocent of rape, as the court did not believe there had been violence or intimidation, but guilty of “sexual assault” in the form of unsolicited “indecent touching,” and of “quasi rape” because, although not physically coerced or threatened, A and B psychologically were “in a state of inability to resist.”

C eventually became a main public voice for the anti-cult association Exodus. D eventually withdrew her accusations, saying C had coached her to lie. C was a forceful accuser at trial, and the judges believed her claim that she had been physically raped while taking a shower. The defense argued (and Jung’s followers insist) that C was a martial art champion, and could have easily resisted a 61-year-old man, but her testimony stood.

In the case of E, the judges of the lower court found Jung innocent of all charges, concluding that from E’s own account no violence or threat had emerged. The appeal court, however, reversed the decision and argued that, since

E “thought that Jung was Jesus,” she was in a status of “inability to resist,” and Jung was found guilty of “quasi-sexual-assault.”

The defense also argued that the accusers had participated in “camps” organized by Exodus, where they had been indoctrinated by the anti-cultists. This was regarded as true but not relevant by the first degree and appellate courts. Indeed, the question whether a woman who believes that her male spiritual leader has a special divine mission is, for this reason, in a condition of “inability to resist” sexual advances by him, has been frequently discussed in “cult” cases. The positive answer involves the usual accusations of brainwashing and mind control, which would allow the conclusion that a “quasi-sexual-abuse” occurred even in a consensual event, where the consensus was allegedly created through mental manipulation. According to the court, this was the case for A, B, and (in the appellate case) E, while C successfully alleged full-blown rape.

There is a second narrative, common in South Korean and other media, claiming that the four cases for which Jung was sentenced were just the tip of the iceberg, with some tabloids claiming that “hundreds” or even “thousands” of “beautiful college girls” had been involved (see the article by Tsai and Peng in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*). Nathalie Luca also regarded these accusations as believable (Luca 1997). Apart from the legal qualification of what allegedly happened as consensual or otherwise, in several cases South Korean and Taiwanese courts found these accusations excessive, including when Jung was serving his term in jail. Providence won lawsuits against different media, as courts allowed details of the trial to be published but still regarded generalizations and allegations about hundreds or thousands of alleged sexual abuse cases as defamatory. They also found that, in some cases, media had doctored photographs and audio recordings of Jung to make them appear more sinister or incriminating than they in fact were. Some journalists and media had to publish apologies (Christian Gospel Mission 2017 discusses these cases at length; I have been supplied with copies of the corresponding court decisions and settlement agreements: they show that not all defamation suits were successful, but some of the most high-profile cases were indeed won by Providence).

The third narrative, which is passionately believed by members of Providence, is that a cabal of slanderers and anti-cultists created the whole legend of the “sexual initiations,” and that these never happened. Later, this narrative goes, the anti-cultists found some vindictive ex-members and women whose main purpose

was to extract money from Jung, which led to the trial and the convictions, which happened in a South Korean cultural climate where somebody branded by the media and the powerful mainline churches as a “cult leader” could not expect to be treated fairly by the judges. Jung himself has always denied all charges.

As I mentioned earlier, outside observers obviously cannot determine which narrative is true, although I may add three general comments. The first is that most, if not all, Korean Christian new religious movements come from a common matrix, the so-called “Jesus Churches,” a cluster of Christian Korean new religious movements including the Holy Lord Church, the “Inside Belly Church” (*Bokjunggyo*), the Israel Monastery, and the Wilderness Church. These movements became notorious for their practice of *p'ikareun*, a “blood exchange” between the leader and the followers involving, at least in some cases, sexual intercourse (Choe 1993, 140–45; Chryssides 1991, 91–103). Both Reverend Moon and Elder Park Tae Son (1917–1990), the founder of the Olive Tree movement, which is at the origin of a whole lineage of Korean Christian new religions, had contacts with the Jesus Churches, and were accused of practicing *p'ikareun*. What was practiced, or not practiced, in each movement is a matter of controversy, but because of these precedents it became a matter of course for Korean anti-cultists and mainline churches to accuse all “heretic” movements of performing “sexual initiations.”

Second, Providence’s membership consists mostly of college students. There is a majority of female students, although a good 40% consists of males. The women are undistinguishable in their dressing style from the average college student in their respective countries, a style that is far away from the conservative habits of most mainline South Korean Protestant churches. What would be regarded as normal in a college party may easily appear as scandalous to conservative South Korean Protestants.

Third, Providence teaches that there is a relation between internal (spiritual) beauty and external beauty. Although spiritual beauty, not easily visible to human eyes, is more important, external beauty is a metaphor and a symbol of internal beauty. Accordingly, in the visual and performing arts of Providence there is no trace of a puritanical restraint about the human body, and fashion, both traditional Korean and modern-Westernized, is regarded as a valid form of art and culture.

While these elements may help in understanding the context, the conflict between Providence members' firm belief in their founder's innocence, which was essential for the movement's resilience and growth while Jung was in jail, and the different narrative emerging from court decisions and prevailing in most Korean media remains irreconcilable.

References

- Adams, Roy. 1981. *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press.
- Akimoto, Ayano. 2019. 命の道を行く 鄭明析氏の歩んだ道 (Going the Way of Life: The Path of Mr. Jung Myung Seok). Tokyo: Parade.
- Bromley, David G., and Anson D. Shupe. 1980. "Financing the New Religions: A Resource Mobilization Approach." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19:227–39.
- Choe Yoong-Jun. 1993. "The Korean War and Messianic Groups: Two Cases in Contrast." Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University.
- Christian Gospel Mission. 2017. *Handbook for Defence Against Slander*. Wolmyeongdong, Seokmak: Christian Gospel Mission.
- Chryssides, George. 1991. *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs and Practices of the Unification Church*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Chryssides, George. 2016. *Jehovah's Witnesses: Continuity and Change*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dawson, Lorne L. 1999. "When Prophecy Fails and Faith Persists: A Theoretical Overview." *Nova Religio* 3(1):60–82.
- Di Marzio, Raffaella. 2020. "People Trapped Inside Shincheonji": Broadcasting the Darker Side of Deprogramming." *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(3):57–69. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.3.4.
- Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*. 2014. "용문산기도원" (Yongmunsan Retreat Center). Accessed December 17, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3qdGzWI>.
- Fautré, Willy. 2020. "Coercive Change of Religion in South Korea: The Case of the Shincheonji Church." *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(3):35–56, DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.3.3.
- Festinger, Leon, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. 1956. *When Prophecy Fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Froom, LeRoy Edwin. 1946–1954. *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*. Washington DC and Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.
- Groom, Nelson. 2016. “Your White Skin Arouses Me: Inside the Sinister Hitler-Loving Korean Sex Cult Luring Young Australian Girls Into Being ‘Spiritual Brides’ for a Serial Rapist—But Members Strongly Deny the Claims.” *Mail Online [Australia]*, May 20. Accessed December 17, 2021. <https://bit.ly/32aulWE>.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2020. “Deception, New Religious Movements, and Claims for Damages: The Case of *H.E. et al. v Seosan Church of Shincheonji et al.*” *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(4):49–68. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.4.3.
- Jeong, Myeong-seok [Jung, Myung Seok]. 2019. *Read and Preach*. Edited by Jeong [Jung] Jo-eun. 4 vol. Seoul: Youngil Publishing.
- Jeong, Myeong-seok [Jung, Myung Seok]. 2020. *War Was Cruel: Love and Peace in the Vietnam War, 1966-1969*. Artesia, California: Evergreen.
- Jung, Myung Seok. 2014. “Sunday Message for March 9, 2014.” English translation, archives of Christian Gospel Mission, Wolmyeongdong, Seokmak.
- Jung, Myung Seok. 2020a. “Sunday Message for January 12, 2020.” English translation, archives of Christian Gospel Mission, Wolmyeongdong, Seokmak.
- Jung, Myung Seok. 2020b. “Sunday Proverbs for February 2, 2020: Be Careful on Your Own.” English translation, archives of Christian Gospel Mission, Wolmyeongdong, Seokmak.
- Kim Chang Han. 2007. “Towards an Understanding of Korean Protestantism: The Formation of Christian-Oriented Sects, Cults, and Anti-Cult Movements in Contemporary Korea.” Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary.
- Luca, Nathalie. 1994. “L’Église de la providence: un mouvement messianique à visées internationales.” Ph.D. diss., Université Paris X.
- Luca, Nathalie. 1997. *Le Salut par le foot. Une ethnologue chez un messie coréen*. Geneva: Labor et Fides.
- Luca, Nathalie. 1998. “Le salut par le foot ou le football rattrapé par les sectes.” *Sociétés & représentations* 7:213–25.
- Luca, Nathalie. 1999–2000. “Jouer au football pour fêter Dieu. Le culte d’une Église messianique coréenne.” *Études mongoles et sibériennes* 30–31:405–29.
- Lutheran World Federation and Catholic Church. 1999. “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” Accessed December 17, 2021. <https://bit.ly/30JvYdn>.
- Melton, J. Gordon. 1985. “Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails.” *American Studies* 26:17–29.

- Tumminia, Diana G. 2005. *When Prophecy Never Fails: Myth and Reality in a Flying-Saucer Group*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tumminia, Diana G., and William H. Swatos, Jr., eds. 2011. *When Prophecy Lives*. Leiden: Brill.
- Zygmunt, Joseph F. 1972. "When Prophecies Fail: A Theoretical Perspective on the Comparative Evidence." *American Behavioral Scientist* 16:245–67.

The Christian Gospel Mission (Providence) Church in Taiwan

Tsai Chih-Che

National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

r96123015@gmail.com

Peng Ten-Lung

National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Douliu, Taiwan

perngdl@yuntech.edu.tw

ABSTRACT: The article presents the birth and development of the Christian Gospel Mission (Providence Church) in Taiwan before, during, and after the detention of its founder, President Jung Myung-seok, between 2008 and 2018. The success of the movement in Taiwan, which was not stopped when the founder was sentenced for sexual abuse, is studied from three different angles: Providence's view of Taiwan and its subjectivity; the group's "feminist" theology and promotion to roles of leadership of women pastors; and how it reacted to COVID-19, making it difficult for anti-cult movements, both in South Korea and Taiwan, to apply to the church the theory that "cults" are "plague-spreaders" successfully used to scapegoat Shincheonji and others.

KEYWORDS: Christian Gospel Mission, Providence Church, Jung Myung-seok, Providence Church in Taiwan, New Religious Movements in Taiwan, New Religious Movements and COVID-19.

Introduction: Taiwan's History and the Pursuit of Subjectivity

This article discusses the presence of Providence Church, also known as the Christian Gospel Mission, in Taiwan, through three different windows: Providence's view of Taiwan's subjectivity, its "feminist" theology and promotion of women pastors to leadership roles, and its reaction to COVID-19. Both authors have studied Providence's presence in Taiwan as part of their academic research activity. However, theirs is an emic-etic approach to the subject, as they are also members of Providence. We are aware that much of the literature about

Providence has been dominated by the court case in which its founder, Jung Myung-seok, normally referred to as President Jung by his followers, has been sentenced in 2008 in South Korea to a jail term of ten years for sexual abuse. While it would be impossible not to mention the repercussions this decision had in Taiwan as well, it is not our purpose here to discuss President Jung's court case. However, we will make some comparisons between the situation of Providence in Taiwan and South Korea.

Benedict Anderson (1936–2015), a scholar of nationalism who is mostly renowned for his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Anderson 1983), depicts a prototype of anti-colonialist nationalism rising in the early stage of globalization in his book *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (Anderson 2005). This receptive nationalism, conceived facing imperialism and colonialism, appears keenly aware of the contemporary world, values global interconnections, and echoes internationalism. This revolutionary vision reverses the impression and refutes the accusation that nationalism is intrinsically inward-looking and exclusionary. In the era of globalization, countries at the periphery reached out to the world by taking advantage of the paths that the empires had created.

Wu Rwei-ren, a well-known Taiwanese scholar, discusses how Taiwan and Hong Kong confront the growing threat posed by China today:

In the late globalization era, we had no choice but to suffer the fate of drifting from different colonizing powers and consecutive colonial occupations. However, the global network became so interwoven that we could acquire vast knowledge of the world, make countless friends all over the world, and build strong international connections. Today, we have reached the level of internationalization that far exceeds that of [José] Rizal [1861–1896, well-traveled Philippine writer and nationalist martyr] more than a century ago. In the late globalization era, every Taiwanese, every Hongkonger could be a Rizal who traveled around the world. If one Rizal is able to push open the door to the imagined nationality, what will thousands of millions of Rizal achieve? An empire is strong but fragile because it circles itself on the continent. But islands encircle the world (Wu 2019).

In certain historical circumstances, globalization and nationalism can be complementary rather than opposing each other. With its rich cultural and historical background, Taiwan in particular has such diversity and inclusiveness. Taiwan has experienced consecutive cultural oppressions under foreign control. Taiwan was under the rule of the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1912)

dynasties of China. After fifty years of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), the Republic of China (ROC) government began exercising jurisdiction over Taiwan.

To suppress the Taiwanese cultural identity, the Japanese regime labeled the Taiwanese as *Chankoro* (“slaves of the Qing”). The Japanese colonizers humiliated the Taiwanese by degrading their predominant Chinese identity. This representative example illustrates how the name-calling practice left an imprint on the historical memory for most Taiwanese intellectuals under the Japanese colonial rule. Being subjected to such humiliation and unfair treatment, many Taiwanese intellectuals were determined to fight against the Japanese colonialism.

Wu Zhuo-liu (1900–1976), hailed as “the poet of iron and blood,” was an influential Taiwanese poet and novelist after World War II. He founded the magazine *Taiwan Literature and Art* and the Wu Zhuo-liu Literary Prize in his later years. In his autobiography *The Fig Tree*, Wu wrote:

Look, our nation, our people have been crushed beneath the iron heel of you Japanese for fifty years, yet the Taiwanese have never yielded and have gone on resisting at the spiritual level. In school, on the sports field, in every kind of office or organization, we have competed against you and striven not to lose to you. You Japanese have constantly proclaimed your superiority, conceitedly assuming you were far better than us, but we Taiwanese consider ourselves to be Han Chinese and as such culturally more advanced than you. Subconsciously we Taiwanese have been engaged in a contest of spiritual strength; for the last fifty years we have competed against you for the moral high ground (Wu 2002, 95).

A proof of this is the fact that Taiwan conceded nothing to Japan as far as respect for the law was concerned. Taiwanese believed that their social behavior, with emphasis on such values such as refusing to lie and keeping one’s bond, had attained higher standards than that of the Japanese. Humiliations stimulated Taiwanese national consciousness. To fight against the Japanese colonial rule, besides participating in armed uprisings in the early years of the Japanese administration, the Taiwanese adopted an approach emphasizing Han Chinese ethnicity and protecting the Han Chinese culture.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) states that, “While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember” (Halbwachs 1950, 48). An interesting echo is found in Huang Chun-chieh’s analysis of the

“motherland consciousness”—a type of collective memory that dwells in the spiritual world of Taiwanese intellectuals (Huang 2006, 96–7). “Motherland” is the collective, historical burden that stemmed from the recognition for the Han Chinese culture. Moreover, the motherland consciousness was constructed and shaped by the contemporary society, especially under Japanese colonial rule and oppression.

During the period of Japanese occupation, Taiwanese intellectuals looked at the motherland’s history and culture as the collective memory shared by the Taiwanese community. This collective memory further became a part of their cultural identity. Among all factors that might have sparked the motherland consciousness among the Taiwanese, the power structure of politics played the most prominent role. The unbalanced power structure forced the Taiwanese to rapidly develop their motherland consciousness. However, after Japan’s defeat in World War II, the corruption and discrimination pervading the ROC government altered and smothered the motherland consciousness of the Taiwanese (Huang 2006).

After the ROC government took over Taiwan, the 228 Incident, i.e., the massacre of tens of thousands of protesters on February 28, 1947, marked the beginning of the White Terror period. Indeed, the ROC government has achieved modernization, industrialization, and rapid economic growth, but the negative impact of the authoritarian regime can be regarded as a “re-colonization after the colonization.” Chen Tsui-lien (2002) argued that the Chinese who relocated to Taiwan had already formed mistaken impressions of local Taiwanese (for example, of the Taiwanese *Rōnin* [vagrants]) for a long time, because of the Japanese political manipulation.

The Cairo Conference of 1943 stipulated that Japan should return Taiwan to the ROC. While the ROC government was preparing to take over Taiwan, there was significant discussion about the governance of the island. Some believed that the Taiwanese had to be reeducated and mentally sanitized for a period of time before obtaining full freedom, because the Taiwanese had been poisoned by the “enslaving colonial education.” Some suggested that “the entire motherland should treat the Taiwanese like an old student who had studied abroad for fifty years,” and warned that “instead of celebrating Taiwan’s restoration, China would end up colonizing Taiwan if the Chinese saw and treated the Taiwanese like the way the Japanese did.” The Taiwanese in Chongqing pinned all their

hopes on the ROC government's "trust, love, and respect for the Taiwanese," asking the Chinese "not to discriminate against local Taiwanese." With hindsight, those opinions were not taken seriously and did not eliminate the prejudice about "the enslaved Taiwanese" (Chen 2002, 148–49). This preconceived bias was blatantly held by Chen Yi (1883–1950), who was the chief executive and the postwar governor of Taiwan.

Motherland governors not only continued the ruling power style of the foreign colonizers, but also claimed their cultural superiority over the colonized local culture in Taiwan. Proponents of such idea alleged that the Taiwanese had been poisoned and polluted by the Japanese colonial mentality. From their point of view, the Taiwanese were enslaved, narrow-minded, and incapable of self-rule. To eradicate the deep-rooted Japanization and slave mentality, the Taiwanese must be re-Sinicized. Re-Sinicization propagated the preeminence of the Chinese culture and the progressiveness of the "Three Principles of the People." Moreover, Chinese political upstarts imported Chinese traditions and cultures. They imposed on the Taiwanese the New Life Movement, a government-led program that had failed to become widespread in China.

The ROC mentality bore remarkable resemblance to that of the Japanese empire. The only difference was that the political power was transferred from Yamato to Chinese people (Chen 2002, 162–63). The Japanese conquerors thought of the Taiwanese as *Chankoro* from *Shina*, and the ROC government that relocated to Taiwan in 1945 again labeled the Taiwanese as the Japanese's slaves.

In the debate over the issues of Taiwan's enslavement, both supporters and opponents were inclined to homogenize differences. However, Taiwanese intellectuals were acutely aware and capable of independent thinking. They gained an insight into the culture of Taiwan, which was no longer limited to either the Han or the Japanese culture under Japan's fifty-year rule. Taiwanese intellectuals neither blindly worshipped the Han culture, nor felt ashamed of having been colonized in the past. They believed that the culture of Taiwan could thrive by re-evaluating the Japanese colonial legacy along with learning from China and other countries. Furthermore, they outlined Taiwan's status in a world of cultural globalization, setting a collective goal of modernization and democratization for the Taiwanese society.

It is the power of self-awareness and self-determination that has driven the progress towards the development of decolonization. Looking back at the

postwar history, we can understand that Taiwanese ideologies changed, but the people's struggle for autonomy continued (Chen 2002, 189). Even though the Taiwanese were persecuted during the White Terror era and silenced during the martial law period, which lasted for 38 years and 56 days, from May 19, 1949, to July 15, 1987 (Dong 2011), the pursuit of subjectivity still stayed in the mainstream of the intellectual community. After suffering from oppression at the hands of the Japanese colonialism and tragedies like the 228 Incident under the ROC's military administration, Taiwanese intellectuals aspired to a greater degree of subjectivity. They were eager to build their national identity and increase their civic pride. Wu Chan-liang, a professor of the Department of History at National Taiwan University, once said:

National identity and national dignity are what the Taiwanese truly strive for. It is a consequence of suppressing the self for centuries. Anything that enhances the national identity and the sense of dignity will be admired, otherwise fiercely resisted. Since the rise of the Tangwai ["outside the Party"] movement, the core and the most emotional appeal behind all protests has been to help the Taiwanese achieve self-identity and self-respect (Wu 2012).

Historical memories of oppression and humiliation motivated the Taiwanese to pursue their national identity and dignity. It has become the most important course of thought in the development of Taiwanese philosophy. In pursuit of Taiwan's identity, Christianity played an essential role. In particular, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) had a strong presence in the advocacy of Taiwan's subjectivity.

Christianity in Taiwan and the Pursuit of Taiwan's Subjectivity

Amid the rising tension between Taiwan and China, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) issued a public statement on August 16, 1977, asking the ROC government to "take effective measures whereby Taiwan may become a new and independent country." The PCT was the first organization that publicly called for Taiwan's independence.

Our church confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord of all mankind [sic] and believes that human rights and a land in which each one of us has a stake are gifts bestowed by God. Therefore, we make the declaration, set in the context of the present crisis threatening the 17 million people of Taiwan... As we face the possibility of an invasion by the Communist China, we hold firmly to our faith and to the principles underlying the

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. We insist that the future of Taiwan be determined by the 17 million people who live there. We appeal to the countries concerned—especially to the people and the government of the United States of America—and to Christian churches throughout the world to take effective steps to support our cause.

In order to achieve our goal of independence and freedom for the people of Taiwan in this critical international situation, we urge our government to face reality and to take effective measures whereby Taiwan may become a new and independent country.

We beseech God that Taiwan and all the rest of the world may become a place where “Mercy and truth will meet together; righteousness and peace will embrace. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85:10, 11) [TEV and KJV]. SIGNED BY: H.E. Chao, Moderator of the General Assembly; H.K. Weng, Deputy Moderator of the General Assembly (Acting in the absence of the Moderator); C.M. Kao, General Secretary (Chao, Weng, and Kao 1977).

The Kuomintang (KMT)-led government did not like that the PCT supported the groups promoting Taiwan’s independence. In addition to spying on church members, the KMT government infiltrated, subverted, and split the Presbyterian churches. The KMT state apparatus sought all means to tarnish the reputation of the PCT. When the Formosa Incident, i.e. the repression of pro-democracy demonstrations in Kaohsiung, took place in 1979, the PCT general secretary Kao Chun-ming (1929–2019) was arrested for having hidden one of the leaders of the protest, Shih Ming-teh (1941–), and was jailed for four years (from 1980 to 1984). Kao’s sentence was a representative case of the imprisonment of clergy in Taiwan’s history.

While intellectual elites were walking on the way of pursuing Taiwan’s subjectivity, church ministers took actions to support the activists of the Tangwai movement, who were fighting for multi-party democracy. In addition, Christianity placed a high value on human rights, which struck a chord with Taiwanese intellectuals, and chimed in with the mood of the nation. All these were favorable factors for the Christian evangelization of Taiwan. The development of Christian new religious movements in Taiwan, including Providence, can also be understood in a similar way.

Along with the globalization starting in the 1980s, the wave of decolonization swept over Taiwan. Unrelenting student movements and political activities highlighted the protest against China’s oppression, the restoration of Taiwan’s identity, and even the pursuit of Taiwan’s independence. The wider society

encouraged the liberation of personality, which turned Taiwan into the most tolerant and inclusive country in East Asia.

Providence Church Introduced from South Korea to Taiwan

In 1987, Providence Church, which Jung Myung-seok had established in South Korea, was introduced to Taiwan. Ever since Jung got acquainted with Taiwanese intellectuals, he publicly called Taiwan “a country” in front of all Providence members, outsiders, or public figures, and praised Taiwan highly among all Providence churches in the world. Jung often refers to Taiwan as “a great nation,” a contrasting view to what most people think of Taiwan (Jung 1995). He firmly believes that Taiwan is one of the three most important countries in the development of Providence’s history. Not only did he recognize Taiwan’s importance in the world, but also asked Providence members worldwide to pray together with him for Taiwan, especially for the situation of rising tension between Taiwan and China (Jung 1995). Jung fully understood that Taiwan had been excluded from many intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, due to the political pressure from China. However, he often stated that “Before God, Taiwan is already an independent country” (Jung 1995).

On July 15, 1987, the ROC government officially announced the lifting of the martial law, ending the period of political suppression that had lasted for 38 years and 56 days. On December 1, 1987, the Government Information Office proclaimed that the lifting of press restrictions should be implemented on January 1, 1988. On November 5, 1987, the Executive Yuan approved the Statute on the Organization of Civil Associations, signifying that laws on civil associations should be applied to political parties. More than twenty new political parties were founded. On January 20, 1989, the Legislative Yuan passed the three readings of the Civil Associations Act for the Period of Communist Rebellion. Since then, citizens have been allowed to establish parties or organizations, enjoy the freedom of assembly and demonstration, and participate in political activities in accordance with the law (Chiu 2001). The above-mentioned changes in policy and law-making contributed to the lifting of party ban and press ban in Taiwan. However, Article 100 of the Criminal Code was not amended until May 15, 1992. The provision reads as follows:

Any person by violence or threats committing an overt act with intent to destroy the organization of the State, seize State territory, or using illegal means, change the Constitution or overthrow the Government shall be sentenced to imprisonment for not less than seven years; the ringleader shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

The amendment of Article 100 of the Criminal Code marked an important step in the progress of democratization because it ensured that people would not be imprisoned for their peaceful advocacy of Taiwan independence. Decades of democratic movements have pushed open the door to freedom of speech and the protection of human rights. After the lifting of martial law, the Taiwanese society entered a crucial stage, in which younger generations identified with Taiwan's subjectivity and were eager to separate themselves from Chinese nationalism. To defend the right to advocate Taiwan independence in public, some protesters even committed the act of self-immolation.

Providence was introduced to Taiwan precisely at the peak of democratization and upon the lifting of martial law in 1987. In the early phase of its evangelization, quite a few members of the intellectual elite who later became key leaders in the church actually took part in the Tangwai movement.

In 1989, Jhou Syuan-shih and Lin Huei-chuan, who would be ordained as pastors after a few years, became two of the very first Providence members in Taiwan. Pastor Jhou graduated from the Department of Law at National Taiwan University and worked as a legislative assistant to Chen Shui-bian (the first president from the Democratic Progressive Party). Meanwhile, Pastor Lin graduated from National Tsing Hua University and served as a legislative assistant to Wu Shu-chen (who is Chen Shui-bian's wife and a wheelchair user). Both Pastor Jhou and Pastor Lin used to be active in the Tangwai movement and believed that they could change Taiwan by entering politics. However, they later decided to change the society through more spiritual means.

They remembered that President Jung had been always thinking highly of Taiwan and appreciating these young people's goals to reform the society. After listening to Jung, the two young Taiwanese put their trust in faith instead of pursuing a political career. Pastor Jhou recalled:

On the frontlines before and after the lifting of martial law, it couldn't be more natural for students to be concerned with Taiwan. With more and more people calling for reform, law and political science became mainstream academic disciplines. However, I realized that power often went hand in hand with personal desires. Distortions seemed to be inevitable. Once incentives were undermined or distorted, all efforts would be in vain. I

started as a legislative assistant after completing my military service. I devoted myself entirely to elections. I went out to work early in the morning and return home late. Within one month, I started from scratch and teamed up twenty political clubs in different cities to support the candidate that I worked for. When I went back to Taipei, I saw the overhead door was locked and a person in charge of general affairs was resting. I helped re-establish the campaign headquarters in Taipei, which used to be large yet empty. Finally, the candidate won the legislative election! After I engaged in all these political activities, I came to realize that the key to a successful reform lies in “the change of life.” If we couldn’t improve ourselves, all reforms would end up being manipulated by personal desires. No matter how successful the rising stars of politics might be, they would be criticized and become the target of reform eventually. Distortions and deteriorations intoxicate reformers! Real reforms start from the reform of the heart. This country should embrace Christian love with open arms (personal interview, 2020).

Pastor Lin recalled how he got interested in Providence:

Mr. Huang Ching-yuan, who was the legislative assistant to Ms. Wu Shu-chen, made a good impression on me. He was immaculately dressed in suit and tie. The first thing he did right after he came to work was sweep the office floor. What he did impressed me. As soon as I learned that he was a Christian and a graduate student in philosophy at National Taiwan University, I wanted to ask him a few questions about life.

A couple of days before the Election Day, the candidate was on the brink of winning. People at the campaign headquarters were stressed and worried. Mr. Huang asked Mr. Chen (Shui-bian), “May I ask some church members to come visit and pray for us?” Of course! The atmosphere was no longer stifling after sisters in the church came at that evening. We had a good conversation. Surprisingly, when they prayed for us, the atmosphere was lightened and peace was in the air. I started to participate in the Bible studies during the Wild Lily Student Movement in March 1990. I realized that Taiwan could be saved only if there were enough righteous people. I agreed that political reforms could change the society dramatically. However, if we want to change ourselves completely, we need faith. I learned from my experience—if I do not improve my personality, I just make an external improvement. The core of self-improvement is to improve our thoughts. That’s why I chose the path of faith over the path of politics (personal interview, 2020).

Baptized during the early stage of Providence development in Taiwan, Pastor Jhou and Pastor Lin used to devote themselves to the political ideal of Taiwan independence. However, after they listened to Jung’s teaching on Christian beliefs and faith, they realized that renewing the mind of people is far more important than carrying out a political reform. Thus, they did not continue their career in politics. Instead, they kept exploring and promoting those Taiwanese values that they found in the world of faith. In addition to the pastors’ individual

political backgrounds, a decisive factor that motivated them to walk on a religious path was Jung's appreciation for Taiwan. Jung has been always showing considerable respect for Taiwan's subjectivity. Pastor Lin recalled:

In September 1991, while visiting the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Teacher [Jung] mentioned that God pitied Taiwan, so the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek [1887–1975] relocated from China to Taiwan, which was similar to how Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. In an interview with [Japanese novelist] Shiba Ryōtarō [1923–1996] in April 1994, President Lee Teng-hui [1923–2020] also compared himself to Moses—the leader who was blessed by God and freed the Israelites from coercion. In December 1995, Mr. Jung Myung-seok said that, although China has missiles, God will protect Taiwan (personal interview, 2020).

Throughout history, many ethnic groups and theologians have been applying the biblical story of the Promised Land to illustrate the establishment of new countries and the discovery of continents. Jung also used this biblical reference—leaving Egypt and entering Canaan—to depict how Taiwan became independent from China and turned into the Promised Land of faith for the ethnic Chinese. As a foreigner and a friend of Taiwan, Jung expressed the hope that from the perspective of faith, he could help cultivate young Taiwanese elites, especially those who walk the path of spiritual reformation instead of entering politics.

Pastor Jhou recalled that when he went to South Korea for the first time in 1990, he visited the National Assembly and had in-depth exchanges with elites studying at prestigious colleges. At the end of the journey, Jung said in front of members, “Today, Taiwanese elites are also working very hard to learn for their people” (personal interview, 2020). These words remained engraved in Pastor Jhou's heart. These Taiwanese intellectuals who later became pastors introduced Jung to some leading figures of Taiwan's democracy movement, including Chen Shui-bian, whose success in the presidential election marked the very first party alternation in Taiwan's history.

Providence Church and Taiwan's Subjectivity

Since 1999, Providence has been at the receiving end of considerable media criticism in South Korea. Meanwhile, Jung started proselyting overseas, and left South Korea to visit Taiwan and other countries. Jung also held an international soccer tournament promoting world peace in Taipei. He invited Chen Shui-bian, the newly elected president of Taiwan, to attend the tournament. During his stay

in Taiwan, Jung met Shih Ming-teh, the former chairperson of the Democratic Progressive Party who had been imprisoned for more than 25 years because of his participation in Taiwan's independence movement. They discussed Christian ideas about love for enemies. In addition, by visiting many historical sites, Jung got a better understanding of Taiwan. He recognized that Taiwan was a model of democracy and proclaimed it the firstborn son of faith in the ethnic Chinese society. Either in interpersonal relationships or in spoken discourse, Jung continued to show his support and respect for Taiwanese intellectuals' pursuit of Taiwan's subjectivity.

In May 2007, Jung was incarcerated in China. After ten months in prison, he was extradited to South Korea, where he was sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment. During these ten years, although Jung could not attend church activities in person, he still wrote letters to emphasize Taiwan's values and status in Providence:

When there are "two olive trees, two witnesses" and "the Original Entity," he wrote, they can become one and the history can develop. Japan, like "a female," is good at managing the world of internal functions. Taiwan, like "a male," is good at managing the world of external functions. Just like "the more spiritual one" and "the more physical one" become one and work together, "Japan" and "Taiwan" become two witnesses and push the history with the Original Entity. "Japan" and "Taiwan" are the two countries that other countries cannot catch up with. There are young people pushing the history in these two countries. There will be 10,000 people in a short period of time (Jung 2018c).

Serving as a deputy to Jung while he was in jail, the Revival Speaker Pastor Jung Joeun hosted evangelism activities and events around the world. She continued Jung's work and recognized Taiwan's sovereignty and efforts in Providence:

The Lord spoke through Teacher [Jung]: Taiwan has a great national character—decisiveness. Let's run for the Providence history proactively! Let's do it proactively! Do not envy those big countries in the world. You should run for the history proactively!... You are indeed the best in the world.

From the perspective of the people, Taiwan has been independent from that big country, has it not? Since Taiwan freed itself from that country, Taiwan has been facing unfair treatment and oppression. It is very difficult for many countries to apply for a visa to that country. However, Taiwan is one of the three pillars in Providence. One of the three pillars! Taiwan is one of the three leading countries. In Providence, everyone acknowledges Taiwan. Before God, they will all recognize Taiwan... In the Kingdom of Heaven, for God and for Teacher, Taiwan is one of the three countries on which Teacher really focuses (Jung J. 2013).

Taiwan is small in size, but it is not a small country. Perhaps some become disappointed at the country's situations. However, if you can overcome this disappointment through faith, your dreams and expectations will be fulfilled.

Except Providence, not a single organization in the world will cherish Taiwan like this. Before Heaven and earth, only the Holy Trinity and the Lord treasure and cherish Taiwan so much. South Korea has the first place, and the second belongs to Taiwan. This is predestined. You can make it because you have the character to succeed (Jung J. 2016).

Following the directions given by President Jung, the South Korean pastors of Providence fully understand that Taiwan has been facing diplomatic pressure from Mainland China on all kinds of international occasions. On the contrary, in international activities and joint gatherings of Providence, Taiwan is treated with the utmost respect. This really touches the heart of Taiwanese intellectuals who pursue the restoration of subjectivity. In an international gathering, which was centered in Taiwan yet open to other overseas countries online, "Tears of Formosa" was chosen to be the theme song. The song illustrates the retrospect and prospect of Taiwan's history:

In 1949, the Nationalist government relocated to Taiwan.

In 1971, the United Nation expelled Taiwan.

Diplomatic allies became China-friendly, cutting ties and turning against me. All happened in a row.

They call me Chinese Taipei.

Kind, enthusiastic, people of hospitality.

Putting our hands together, we pray, labor, and remain pious.

It's time. It's fate. It's destiny.

Let the incense of prayers ascend to Heaven.

Let the sudden and drastic changes come to an end.

With all my heart, I pray to Heaven.

Peace is my deepest wish.

Pity me, I ask for nothing else.

Free me from changes and upheavals (Chang 2015).

With the choice of this theme song, Providence showed its respect for Taiwan's history and cultures, and reflected its understanding of Taiwanese emotions. Within thirty years from the first activities in the island, the management positions for the Providence clergy in Taiwan became entirely localized.

Ten years after being convicted, Jung was freed from prison on February 18, 2018. Having been in jail himself, Jung empathizes with inmates and stands up against judicial mistakes and for the humane treatment of prisoners, themes that have attracted great interest in Taiwan. Not unexpectedly, Jung presents the theme in his own theological terms:

In China, Teacher [Jung] suffered because of those who were controlled by Satan. Besides Teacher, several people were incarcerated at that time. A passage in the Bible states, “You will suffer persecution for ten days.” “One day” was extended to be “one month”—in such a way God calculates time. We had been suffering for ten months and later were released. We endured great torment and agony. “Ten months” were like “ten years.”

Half piece of steamed corn bread was provided at each meal. At first I thought, “I like this kind of corn bread. Corn is good for health. Thank goodness!” However, after a few weeks, I felt tired of eating corn bread. The soup was cooked by putting sliced cabbages into iced water and then adding some soybean oil to it. I had severe diarrhea afterwards, so I washed away the soybean oil before eating the soup. When I stayed there, a lot of things happened. I remembered one incident in particular. Sometimes, soup with some meat was provided. One day, one staff member tried to scoop some pieces of meat from the soup barrel for me. She scooped again and again. Finally, some pieces of meat came to the surface of the soup. She scooped up the meat pieces right away and put them into bowl. I saw this and prayed to the Holy Son, saying “Your love is extreme.” The Holy Son replied, “I tell you because you see all of this. I scooped for so many times, but there was barely any meat. I really want to give you one more piece of meat, but there were only tiny minces. Eventually, I still found one piece of meat for you.” I never forget that. I always keep that in mind, so I can share the story with you (Jung 2018d).

Somebody was walking on a street, and he saw that a person was knocked out by a bully. That man ran over there to stop the bully, but he was also stabbed and knocked out by the bully. Both the man and the person who was first injured got arrested by the police. The judge said, “This man hit the person who was first injured. During the fight, he was stabbed and then he stabbed the other. Two knives were found on the spot. These two people were fighting each other!” In fact, the bully stabbed these two people, left the two knives on the spot and fled. The judge failed to find out the truth because the eyes of his body, the eyes of his brain, the eyes of his mind, and the eyes of his judgment were blind and rotting! (Jung 2013b).

If God wants to help “someone who is imprisoned,” He can only use the things at that place to help that person. The situation will be worse than that of “someone who is neither imprisoned nor helped.” After all, God can only select the clothes among all the clothes at that place if He wants to give some clothes to that person. God can only give the person a bit more of the food among all the food at that place. Thus, the situation will be still worse than that of “someone who is neither imprisoned nor helped.” This is how

God helps people. However, people said, “What did God do for me? Nobody helped me. I did it all on my own” (Jung 2018b).

Based on his own experience, Mr. Jung Myung-seok advocates prisoner rights and speaks out against injustices in the judicial system. He asks members to pray with him for the protection of human rights in prison. Subsequently, prison conditions and regulations in South Korea improved. For example, a separate toilet cubicle is now provided in the cell; officers are required to adopt a less hostile attitude towards prisoners; the release time is changed to 4 a.m. for those who have completed their sentences; the quality of meals served to prisoners is improved. Jung repeatedly emphasized that God does His best work even in impossible situations, so people should give thanks to God (Jung 2020a).

Reflecting on his experience in China, where he was first jailed, Jung also comments on democracy, another theme of obvious interest in Taiwan:

Leaders and directors on Earth shouldn't be dictatorial because the kingdom of God has come upon us. We should walk with God together! (Jung 2020b).

Today's world is different from the past. Now is the era of integrity, democracy, and freedom. It's the time that people are allowed to speak up, so you shouldn't say whatever you want or feel without thinking twice. This is not going to work. This is not going to work. If you do so, people will rise to resist. Despite being a leader, an arrogant person will not be liked by his people. He looks so arrogant wherever he goes. “Teacher, why do you act like this?” You're all going to say that (Jung 2020b).

The same situation also applies to politicians. If a politician imposes his will on his people and educates them according to his own mentality, this is not the right thing to do. God will strike this kind of people. Communists in the past educated and brainwashed their people according to their own mentality. They eventually came to a dead end. God lets us realize this (Jung 2020b).

Influenced by these teachings, Providence members in Taiwan take actions to advocate universal values, such as human rights, opposition to dictatorship, and democracy. For three years in a row since 2016, a Providence member who served as the president of the NTU Graduate Student Association has invited the theater troupe led by Baba Sakura, a famous Japanese playwright, to present the stage play *71 Days for the White Taiwanese Lily*. The performance was held at NTU to commemorate Freedom of Expression Day and to remember the spirit of sacrifice of Cheng Nan-Jung (1947–1989), the activist who set himself on fire for democracy. It reminded the younger generation of Taiwan that the path to today's democracy was long and steep.

Female Presence in the Providence Church in Taiwan

In the second part of this paper, we present some reflections on the presence of a majority of women in Taiwan's Providence Church, preceded by some theoretical premises.

Rodney Stark, a well-known American sociologist of religion, pointed out that early Christianity was able to attract many female followers because Christian communities at that time treated women better than their pagan or Jewish counterparts. In early Christian communities, women took positions of honor and authority. A great number of early Christian women transcended traditional gendered roles (Stark 2011). In this way, as a new religious movement, Christianity had better gender equality practices, and many female followers were attracted to the new religion. Like Stark, Karen Armstrong turns the traditional patriarchic portrait of Paul the Apostle (ca. 5–64 CE) on its head to show that the early church did not immediately repress the autonomy of women (Armstrong 2015). Ting Jen-chieh's research shows that in traditional Chinese patriarchal societies, women often pursue autonomy by choosing to participate in religion (Ting 2020). This occurs not only through mainstream religion, but also through new religious movements. Both the theology of Providence and its development in Taiwan demonstrate a "feminist" theology in action.

To understand the background of this topic, we need to present a brief overview of Taiwan's and Korea's women's rights movements. Taiwan, as a member of the East Asian Confucian cultural circle, has embraced a kind of filial piety that serves the interests of men. Traditional norms of gender relations in Taiwan often involve a certain violence over women to show the dominance of the patriarchal society, causing women to often self-silence themselves and exhaust their will power, such that they "lose themselves" or feel displaced. Since the 1980s and the end of martial law, the women of Taiwan started pursuing their autonomy based on their cultural, physiological, and psychological needs. In Taiwan, the development of women's rights movement has its own specific historical context, and it inevitably became one of the most important social movements in Taiwan (Chiu 2010; Ku 2020, 10).

In South Korea, which shares with Taiwan deep cultural roots in Confucianism, there also exist efforts to protect women's rights (Cui 2008). The 2019 movie *Kim Ji-young: Born in 1982*, adapted from a novel of the same name,

has a protagonist who lives in contemporary South Korea. Her rather common name alludes to the entire female population in the country. The movie portrays the protagonist's mental state and the difficulties she encounters, criticizing the oppressing ideals of the East Asian family that requires women to sacrifice their own ideals for men's success (Chen 2020). Reception for a reflective movie like this should have been favorable, and South Korean society should have re-examined how it treated women (including in its movies: Dong 2019). However, when the movie was shown in the theaters, it generated various controversial incidents, even lethal attacks.

In 2016, about the time the novel was first published, there was the Gangnam random killing incident. The murderer claimed to be a misogynist. In 2018, during a fan-meeting event, Irene (Bae Joo-hyun), the leader of the South Korean musical girl group Red Velvet, said she read *Kim Ji-young: Born in 1982*, which prompted some fans to protest by shredding or burning her posters. When the movie producers first announced its casts, social media accounts of the main actress Jung Yu-mi were flooded by toxic comments, such as "Why would you ever participate in a feminist movie? We will cancel you to no end." In addition, even before the movie was shown, it was bombarded with negative reviews, and the actresses involved were personally attacked (Wang 2019). From these incidents, we can see how difficult it is to fight for women's rights in South Korea. Nevertheless, in Taiwan as well as South Korea, the fight for women's rights kept growing. Religion also had a role to play in these struggles.

Scholars have noticed that some new religious movements play a significant role in the struggle for women's rights. Ting Jen-chieh argues that under the Chinese patriarchal society, the role of the daughter implies a minimal degree of autonomy. Ting suggested that women living in Chinese societies often feel psychologically repressed by the patriarchy's many demands, and their needing a way out fueled the growth of new religious movements (Ting 2020). Ting is not alone. Wong Wai-ching also argued that women have little place in East Asian traditional and folk religions because of their inherent patriarchal tendencies. As a result, East Asian women often resort to Western religions such as Christianity in their attempt to find more space (Wong 2004, XXXII). In addition, Li Yuchen suggests that women have been the silent majority in the religious sphere, and most women are excluded from religious texts and traditions. It is thus important to examine the female experience in religions (Li 1996).

Moreover, Li Yuchen's latest research analyzes female participation in new religious movements. In her studies of Daesoon Jinrihoe, she suggests that modern Korean politico-economic upheavals induced great suffering on the Korean people, and women, who were at the bottom of the social strata, suffered even more. Li Yuchen, whose work is one of the inspirations for this part of our article, further discusses the success of Daesoon Jinrihoe from a female perspective to understand the values of new religious movements and compare the religious niches for women in such movements in Eastern Asia (Li 2020). In short, the connection between women's rights and religion is particularly strong when it comes to new religious movements.

That being said, there is a dialectical relationship between religion and women's rights. Sometimes religion plays a positive role to protect, lead, and empower women's rights; other times, religion is reduced by conservative forces to an excuse to oppress women. This is why feminist researchers in the past have taken a more critical perspective on religion and gender issues. Citing the work of various Western scholars, Tian Hai-Hua suggests that in the evolution of human society and culture, it is almost a universal phenomenon that women have been assigned more subordinate roles. This is vividly illustrated by the Hebrew Bible, where often the life and bodies of women have been under the control of men (Tian 2006). Like the Jewish faith, conventional Christian theology has also been frequently criticized by feminists.

Apart from theological debates, whether women can serve as clergy is also another dilemma, one where the churches do not necessarily practice what they preach. Even when women have served and acted as clergy for many years, they still face more obstacles than men. As Tsai Min-hui (2003) puts it, God's punishment for human original sin was somehow twisted into a justification for men's domination over women.

Tsai further argues that the conventional view that the husband is the "head" and the wife is the "body" is more a cultural product than a universal truth. Although John Calvin (1509–1564) once suggested that men and women should live in harmony, his gendered theology still prioritized men over women, who he argued have no right to question or disobey men. Calvin ultimately posits that men should always assume leadership positions (Tsai 2003). The imposition of the "virtue" of obedience has made it difficult for women to take leadership roles. Even when women do lead, they are expected to be obedient to men. If the church

has a congregational polity, the senior pastor is usually male; and if the church has a hierarchical polity, then branch leaders can be female as long as a male takes the central authoritative position. As we can see, many churches still operate on the implicit “spiritual principle” of “men before women” and “men lead, women assist” (Tsai 2003, 68–9).

Theologian Paul King Jewett (1920–1991) studied arguments against female clergy among Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Anglicans, and organized them into three types of motivations. First, allowing women to lead services would alter the mood of worshiping because men will have sexual thoughts for female clergy. Second, women should not take leadership positions because they were only created after men. Third, given that Jesus and the twelve apostles were all men, women cannot serve as representatives of God (Jewett 1980).

Christians in East Asia echo these arguments. Chuang Shu-chen points out that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan needs better “gender justice” practices. In the 1990s, female clergy only accounted for 2% of those who participated in headquarters meetings. As of 2017, female Presbyterian clergy accounted for 17.86%. Even so, female clergy are underrepresented and discriminated, and some churches have jointly declared their unwillingness to receive women as pastors (Chuang 2019, 54–8).

Despite all the negative influences mentioned above, Christianity has a dynamic instead of a static relationship with women’s rights movements. Theologian Rosemary R. Ruether believes that one needs to start from tackling “theories of God” to challenge traditional dualist theology, according to which the female is dominated by the male (Grenz and Olson 1993). Ruether (1993) argues that the Bible offers an equal portrayal of males and females: biblical texts do not claim that women belong or are subordinate to men. If the words used to describe God as male are just allegories, then there exist no grounds to support the idea that women are subordinate to men.

Scholars have also discussed whether women may be regarded as divine. Lin Jen-chien (2018) studied Aisha (613?–678), one of Muhammad’s (570–632) wives, Muhammad’s daughter Fatimah (605?–632), and Maryam, as Mary the mother of Jesus is called in the Quran, to study how the “essence of divinity” could have been attributed to these women (Lin 2018, 99–101). These works prompt us to rethink whether it is possible to support the women’s rights

movement out of sources other than conventional theology, including the doctrines and practices of new religious movements.

I would suggest that the Providence Church offers interpretations that give more space to women in the religious sphere. On the one hand, Providence Church from Korea has its fair share of conventional Christian beliefs, but on the other hand it is also a new religious movement. We should now study President Jung's feminist theology and examine the practices of the Providence Church to see whether they allow for a fairer religious space for women.

Discourses on Feminist Theology by the Providence Church

Conventional theology about women is connected with the narrative of the fall in the Genesis, hence is susceptible to patriarchal interpretations such as "Adam was seduced by Eve" or "the husband shall rule over the wife." Ruether believes that the ancient portrayals of God's feminine characteristics are simply ignored, although they are not eliminated. The feminine depictions of wisdom and spirits are inherent in the Jewish tradition. In addition, in some early Christian non-canonical gospels, the Holy Spirit is seen as a feminine being. The *Gospel of the Hebrews* states that, "Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on to the great mountain Tabor" (Ruether 1993, 59).

Ruether (1993) finds the feminine portrait of the Holy Spirit to have existed from the beginnings of Christian theology, especially among the mystics. This is also prominent in Christian iconographies. In a church not far from Munich, a 14th century fresco depicts the Trinity, where three icons share the same roots: an elderly man as the Holy Father, a younger man as the Holy Son, and a woman as the Holy Spirit (Ruether 1983, 60).

Ruether further argues that we should not brand the feminine portrait of the Holy Spirit as a later aberrant invention of Christian heresy. In contrast, what we see is that an earlier Christianity open to feminine portraits of God was gradually marginalized by a Greco-Roman Christian theology (Ruether 1993, 72–6). Even if ancient Christian traditions acknowledged both the masculinity and femininity of God, hence the divinity of the woman, she was still subordinate to the man. If this is the case, God cannot be really transcendent, and the idea that God is above all becomes the idea that the man is above the woman.

Providence's President Jung has not been through systematic theological or academic training, so presumably he has not been trained in feminist theology—he might not even know what feminism means—but based on his own family and church-leading experience, he expressed many thoughts related to gender issues. For example,

When I was young, sometimes I had arguments with my younger sister. My mother would defend her even when it was her fault. I remember feeling alienated because of that. However, I have come to understand the parental sentiment to stand on a daughter's side even when the fault is hers. During the Vietnam War, an enemy soldier and I were pointing guns at each other... In this disadvantaged situation, I sought help from God, then I heard a voice loud enough to shake the entire world. It was an imperative: "Love!" After hearing this command, I asked God: "If I love my enemy, he's going to shoot and kill me." As soon as I had that in mind, I hear God once again telling me: "Love." Even if my enemy were going to shoot me, I couldn't care more about the heat of the battle. I approached the enemy because following the word of God is the most important thing in my life. When I approached him, his face clearly turned into the face of my sister. He didn't open fire. I hugged him and we talked for about forty minutes (Jung 2017).

Living in a Korean society based on a hierarchical social order that prioritizes men and seniority, Jung found himself more compassionate to women, which might have been an extension of his bonds with his sister. Jung frequently mentions his sister in his sermons, in particular the above incident during the Vietnam War, where he saw his sister in a vision in the middle of the battle, and all of a sudden saw a North Vietnamese soldier as his sister. They both put down their weapons to weep in tears. This incident would later come to greatly shape Jung's theology of women.

The theology of Providence Church emphasizes gender equality. Jung begins from the purpose of creation to interpret gender. Discussing how modern society distinguishes biological sex from gender, Jung cites Revelation "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (*Revelation 21:2*, NIV), to suggest that the new era has arrived as foretold in the Bible, and the ideal relation between God and humans should now be one of "husband and wife." He thus makes the distinction between biological sex and "spiritual gender," or the gender of the soul, which in some ways offer a narrative on "the religious body" (Lu 2000, 276–77):

Male or female, humans are loved by God (Jung 2012).

Humans play the “role of the bride,” and humans are for God, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Son “counterparts of love”... If we love water, would “the gender of the water” matter? If we love food, would “the gender of the food” matter? The Holy Spirit sees human beings in this way (Jung 2018a).

Although Jung still acknowledges the difference between biological sexes, he believes that from the perspective of the soul, both biological males and biological females are to God what the bride is to the husband. His narrative downplays texts susceptible to disadvantageous interpretations of the status of women, offers a different interpretation of gender relations from the fundamental purpose of creation, and affirms that from the perspective of the Creator, men and women are entirely equal (Jung 2012). In some ways, Jung offers a degendered (or even fully feminized) biblical exegesis of the religious body. As we have seen, Jung reinterprets conventional theology concerned with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and affirms the values of the feminine. While a more conservative theology sees the Trinity as a mystery not to be easily tampered with, feminist theology attempts to replace masculine interpretations of “the Holy Father” with feminist interpretations of the Creator (Yeh 2001). Jung sees the Holy Spirit as a “feminine” being. In his own words:

The Holy Spirit is a feminine God, the highest empress and heavenly mother under the heavens and above earth. Since She is a feminine God, She carefully tends to her creations and educates them meticulously. Those who believe the Holy Spirit to be weak because She is a woman are ignorant ones (Jung 2015a).

The view that the Holy Spirit is a woman or a mother is not unique to Jung, but he is more original in insisting that the Holy Spirit is an omnipotent female being who is one of the Creators of humankind. This is echoed, he suggests, in *Genesis* 1:26, where God, as if conversing with some other beings, creates humankind in “their” image and likeness.

Like Ruether, Jung sees the Holy Spirit as a feminine being, and affirms the feminine values of a co-creator:

The Holy Spirit is the Goddess most beautiful under the heavens and above the earth. She has “the highest beauty under the heavens and above the earth.” Her face is covered by a radiant light, so no beings can see Her real face. Although beings can see an image of the Holy Spirit according to their own spiritual level, no one can entirely see the true face of the Holy Spirit. Only those who recognize and understand the Holy Spirit can closely serve and love Her. Even if you cannot see her, imagine. Imagine the Holy Spirit as a being “most beautiful under the heavens and above the earth,” serve and obey Her words all the time, and do not add to Her worries. The Holy Spirit is beautiful and pure.

The Holy Spirit is a feminine God, so it is easiest to recognize and know Her through the female image (Jung 2015b).

Although Jung also emphasizes the mystical properties of the Holy Spirit as conventional theologians do, such that human beings can never perceive her real being, his sermons more frequently emphasize the idea that the Holy Spirit is a feminine God who more frequently works through “the female,” and that those who have faith should imagine the Holy Spirit as “the most beautiful under the heavens and above the earth.” However, concerning how the Holy Spirit sees what is beautiful, Jung says:

There is one thing you can do to anger the Holy Spirit. What do you think is that? It is when you criticize a woman for not being beautiful. This is when the Holy Spirit will reprove you. Just like in a family, when the brother asks the mother why his sister is so ugly, the mother will respond “And are you handsome? You’re not handsome because you look like your father.” In this way, the Holy Spirit is like the mother. If you criticize her creation for being ugly, she will express disapproval of you (Jung 2018e).

Bullying people for their appearance occurs frequently among campuses and across the Internet. Jung tackles these contemporary issues, which is one reason why his younger followers find his sermons relevant.

As Ruether (1993) underlines, in many Christian traditions and throughout the patriarchal theology of Christianity, women are banned from serving prominent positions in the church. Women cannot take leadership positions in the church, just as they cannot take leadership positions in secular societies. Under Christian patriarchies, women usually are given subordinate roles, and their duty is just to obey or remain silent.

Although Jung himself is a male who grew up in the highly patriarchal society of Korea, he takes female service in the church seriously and gives women equal access to all positions. Young women in his church can take prominent clerical positions authorized to give sermons and administer sacraments. The theological interpretation that the Holy Spirit is feminine is not just a theory in Jung’s church, but something that has been put in practice concerning daily administration:

When the Holy Spirit works, She chooses a vessel with a physical body, that is, She chooses from a pool of women, then works through that person and demonstrates the image and being of the Holy Spirit... Preacher Joeun is a female, and amongst many women, the Holy Spirit chose her and gave her a mission. The Holy Spirit as well as the Holy Son works through Preacher Joeun to facilitate the works of the Holy Spirit. When

the Holy Spirit works, the Holy Son too works through the female image to reflect the looks, image, and qualities of the Holy Spirit... (Jung 2013a).

Every woman on this earth is a potential vessel of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Son will choose women who can “reflect the qualities of the Holy Spirit” as the core vessel to carry out Providence and do the work of the Holy Spirit (Jung 2013a).

The Providence Church affirms the importance of women from its theology of the Creator, and puts its theological teachings into practice and administration. In the previous passage, Jung emphasizes that every woman is a vessel of the Holy Spirit, and women can properly reflect the radiant qualities of the Holy Spirit, more so than men. Even Jung, the founder of the church, acknowledged that in this aspect he cannot outperform the female figure who has been given the mission, i.e., Pastor Jung Joeun:

The Holy Spirit is a female God, so apart from myself, among women there needs to be someone who can serve as “the embodiment and body of the Holy Spirit” (Jung 2015b).

Preacher Joeun’s mission is not to serve as a substitute for me. God, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Son have chosen and educated a person among women, so that she could become “the representative of brides” (Jung 2015b).

As the founder of a new religious movement, Jung is a charismatic leader and is highly respected by his followers. However, he is willing to accept the pivotal role women play in representing the Holy Spirit to serve God, epitomized by Pastor Jung Joeun, who gave sermons and held revival meetings in Korea and abroad when Jung was in prison. When she was still young and had only been in the church for a short time, Jung recognized her efforts, and she eventually made irreplaceable contributions to the development of Providence, highlighting the importance of female devotees.

In the past, media and public opinion have often portrayed the Providence Church as a centralized organization that practices the personality cult of its leader. This is the main reason why critics of the church condemn it as a “cult,” and brand Jung as a “cult leader,” the more so after he was sentenced to ten years in prison for sexual abuse and rape. Notwithstanding the court verdict, Providence believers maintain that Jung was innocent and point out both that China, a country without religious freedom, after ten months of investigation, had released him due to a lack of evidence (see Introvigne 2020; Akimoto 2019, 122–24), and that the Korean judicial system was susceptible to the influence of

mainstream Christian churches, and anti-cultists. One Providence devotee expressed the perception of church members by writing that,

The reason for this decision was because: “Although there is no concrete evidence for the accusations... the court accepts the testimonies of the female victims and the reports of Japanese magazines... Jung was in a position of power concerning female followers... Henceforth, the court believes the accusations that Jung treated the female victims with violence.” Even when there was a lack of physical evidence, the judge preferred to believe the prosecutor and the testimonies of the female plaintiffs. Thus said the judge: “It didn’t matter that there wasn’t any physical evidence. The defendant is a cult leader, and women followers must have found it hard to resist his demands.” The judge further added: “If Jung had been an average salary man, the court would not have found him guilty” (Akimoto 2019, 125–26).

Due to the sentence and ten years of imprisonment of its founder, followers of the Providence Church lived a tumultuous decade plagued with controversies and crises. However, the church grew in this decade, a phenomenon of interest to sociologists (Introvigne 2020). During his imprisonment, Jung wrote sermons and letters that firmly established the prominence of female clergy in his church. In a Confucian Korea that has a long track record for emphasizing seniority and favoring men (Deuchler 1992), Jung’s willingness to give women equal opportunity in the church could be considered a bold gesture.

Interviews and Analyses of Female Leaders of the Providence Church in Taiwan

In the decade of his imprisonment, Jung further elaborated his theological foundations for the prominence of women in church service. We focus here on Taiwan, which is one of the three key areas for Providence, the other two being South Korea and Japan. Ever since its inception in Taiwan, the Providence Church has never imposed any restrictions on gender for any clerical or ministerial positions. In fact, women took many important positions. They were able to give sermons and lead the church. As for clergy gender ratio, women would occasionally outnumber men.

This study interviews two senior female pastors and one upcoming pastor to analyze the image of female leaders in the Providence Church. The first interviewee, Pastor Lee, studied in Taipei First Girl’s High School; she was in the Class for the Math and Science Gifted, placed first in her year, was granted admission to the chemistry department of National Taiwan University (NTU), and

eventually graduated with a master's degree in Medicine. After her graduate studies in 2003, she was delegated as a pastor to lead a small-sized church of 20. The same church eventually grew into 500. Apart from leading the local church, she also partook in nationwide decision making. In retrospect, she said:

My father is a professor of geoscience. I've performed well in studies related to science since I was a kid. But this made me think: what is the goal of performing better than other people? I would later think: perhaps to benefit people (personal interview, 2020).

From Lee's background, had she not been exposed to religion, she might have become a scientist. During the interview, she recalled being summoned by Taiwan's president because she was about to represent Taiwan in an international science fair:

I was going to be in the next cohort of students to represent Taiwan in the international science fair. My face was on portraits hanging in the presidential palace... but even if that was considered to be very honorable, and I achieved what I thought to be the highest reachable goal at my age, there were still many problems I could not solve. That's why I started listening to the word of God (personal interview, 2020).

After the international science fair, Lee was not satisfied with just scientific knowledge. Therefore, she joined the Providence Church in search of something more. She also started thinking about issues in the humanities and social sciences:

I remember reading *Datung* and *Xiaokang*, where Confucius [551–479 BCE] discusses his vision of the best and second-best regime. Our high school teacher asked if anyone thought the ideal regime of Confucius was possible, and only two students raised their hands; one was me, the other a Christian friend. I thought at that time, if elites like my peers thought the ideal world wasn't possible, then it really can't be. About the same time, I started going to church. Although I was awarded admission to NTU Chemistry, and I did enjoy studying chemistry, what I really wanted to do was to catalyze a change of hearts with the word of God. This is why I wanted to serve in church (personal interview, 2020).

During her high school and early college years, Lee was intellectually ambitious, and along with her more idealistic personality, she pursued faith even further. But as a high school student and college first-year student, initially she did not take up many responsibilities in church. This changed when she graduated from college and was about to enter graduate school:

In 1999, the topic of the first sermon in January was "From East to West." Jesus told Pastor Jung to evangelize from East to West, so he left Korea. However, scandals

concerning Pastor Jung broke out in South Korea at the same time, and the church was full of mayhem and confusion. I was attending a church in Taipei; the male pastor would preach what you can find in magazines like *Business Weekly*. I was helping in the translation department, and I read sermons written by Pastor Jung, only to discover that the male pastor was not preaching according to the sermons he was supposed to preach. Not only was he preaching from his own experience, he even embezzled church funds... As communication between Pastor Jung and the church was cut off, I thought the church grew to have a more pressured atmosphere. Sometimes I would hear teachings of Yiguandao, that some pastors started practicing qigong with followers, and they would run around in the church in circles, even puke. It felt strange and I wanted to leave this kind of church. But at about the same time, I watched a movie called *K-19 The Widowmaker*, in which the main characters [offered the options to go to United States after a submarine disaster] decided to stay with the submarine and return to Russia. I changed my mind about leaving. I thought that if I left church and studied abroad, I would allow the church to fall apart. I decided to contact Pastor Jung even when communication was difficult. In the end, he took things in his own hands in a democratic manner. He asked all the members of the church to congregate, and asked: "Raise your hands if you want a different pastor." Although Pastor Jung didn't explicitly point out what the current pastor was doing wrong, half of the congregation voted to change the pastor. Eventually I was voted to be the pastor, and Pastor Jung boldly delegated me to lead the church, regardless of my youth and my gender (personal interview, 2020).

1999 was a turning point for the Providence Church. South Korean media delivered a full onslaught of attacks on the church. The Providence Church was facing an existential threat. Jung was in Europe, not in South Korea, and it was only natural for his churches in South Korea to face many problems. The churches in Taiwan too, were heavily impacted. Lee was just a young church member in 1999 and did not have a lot of experience. Yet, she was inspired by a movie to give up studying abroad, and stepped up to report how the male pastor was leading the congregation astray from its spiritual path. Jung, in turn, asked the congregation to vote, respected the democratic results, and appointed Lee as the new pastor. Until now, apart from serving as the main pastor of a single congregation, she has taken up many important positions in the Providence Church, such as the head of human resources in headquarters, one of the regional representative pastors of Taipei, and the pastor of campus fellowships in NTU. In 2018, Lee supervised the purchase and construction of the largest Providence church in Taiwan. She would become the pastor of a church that hosts over five hundred people.

The second interviewee is Pastor Sun, who graduated from Zhongshan Girls High School and from the department of international business from National Chengchi University (NCCU). She started serving in the central art department in the Providence Church when she was 20, and when she was 29, she became the pastor of a church about the size of 40 people. Three years later the church had over 100 members, and she was transferred to lead a church in Taipei. During the 12 years of her service, she served important positions such as the head of evangelization in headquarters and national revival preacher. She is currently the head pastor of Taipei's largest congregational region, which has about 1,000 members. In 2009 to 2010, she facilitated the reform from Korean personnel to native personnel in the headquarters of Taiwan.

This is the story of how Sun joined Providence clergy in Taiwan:

When I was a kid, I had two very peculiar thoughts. The first was that my parents weren't my biological parents. It's as if they just picked me up from some random place. The other was that I really wanted to outperform boys. I even wanted to be a boy. I was unhappy because I had to be a girl, and I thought the name my mother gave me was too effeminate. This was mostly because my mother valued sons and had a bias against daughters, and I resented her... When I started attending the Providence Church, I noticed that Pastor Jung treated women equally. I was thankful for being given so many responsibilities even when I had just joined from a short time.

When I was a sophomore, Pastor Jung told me that I should become the bridge between pastors and church members. I was shocked because I had been baptized for no more than two years. I didn't think I could function as any kind of bridge. Pastor Jung said: "When church members have doubts about the pastor, you should help them understand the intentions of the pastor. When pastors do not understand the church members, you should help pastors understand what they have in mind." I felt honored to have received such instructions as a college student, so whenever I had disagreements with anyone concerning church service, I would speak up. I really tried my best. Pastor Jung told me that I was sitting in the front-passenger seat, and the pastor was the driver; if the driver dozed off, it was my responsibility to wake the driver up. I remember being shocked because I didn't think as a young person, I could do anything important. However, Pastor Jung's words made me realize that God valued me even if I were young. Thereafter I worked harder in church and summoned my courage to express my thoughts. In 2009, I led Taiwan's headquarters to report to Pastor Jung about the improper conduct of a South Korean missionary. I requested that he recall the missionary. It was because he did this that the Providence Church at Taiwan was able to operate and thrive with more local personnel playing central roles (personal interview, 2020).

Sun never liked how her mother preferred sons to daughters, so she wanted to be a boy instead. This thought echoes with one of the reasons why women suffering from gender inequality wished they were men. When she had just joined the church, Sun thought she could not take on too many responsibilities. However, Jung encouraged the sophomore to express her ideas and speak up against male pastors despite her youthful age. Most importantly, in 2009, Sun was one of the few people who directly reported to Jung about the improper conducts of the above mentioned South Korean missionary, which resulted in his recall. After that, the Providence Church in Taiwan became more autonomous and achieved more progress in growth.

Apart from these achievements, Sun's motivation to stay single and dedicate the rest of her life to church service is worth mentioning:

When I just joined the church, I often heard male pastors saying things like “Women who don't marry become weird old virgins.” At that time, I didn't know that some people in the Providence Church remained celibate like Catholic priests and nuns, dedicating their lives to loving God without marrying. My family was rather traditional, so I had been told that women need to get married, assist their husbands, and educate their children. Because I witnessed too many unsuccessful marriages, I was afraid of marriage, and I didn't want to get married. After joining the Providence Church, I discovered that members were nice, so I grew open to the idea of getting married with someone in church. However, when I heard how Pastor Jung loved Jesus so much that he wouldn't marry, in my prayers I started to have the same idea not to marry in order to dedicate myself to church service... In the end, I chose not to marry and I enlisted as a full-time clergy. The reason was simple. I had very high standards for my ideal partner. He had to be someone better, someone who can teach me for the rest of my life; he needed to understand and be good at many things. However, I knew all too well the imperfections of human beings, and I thought that the Lord was the most perfect being, and God was the one who could teach me for the rest of my life. All things considered, why would I marry anyone else? (personal interview, 2020).

Although the Providence Church encourages marriage within the church, unlike most Protestant denominations Providence also preserved the Catholic tradition of remaining celibate to serve God. This option is available regardless of gender, and the internal name given to those who stay celibate to serve God is “Stars of Faith.” However, the female celibate members often became targets for detractors, who accused them of being involved in “sexual scandals” (Introvigne 2020).

Through our interviews with Sun, we found that her motivation is closer to what Ting Jen-chieh (2020) pointed out in his research: to pursue autonomy. Although Ting's focus groups are Buddhists and Sun is a Christian, the idea of celibacy and dedicating oneself to religion can be viewed in both cases as a fully conscientious choice.

The last female interviewee belongs to a younger generation in the Providence Church. Gu, who double majored in Sociology and Bio-Industry Communication and Development, joined the church as a first-year college student. After graduation she worked as an administrator in the department of social work, and after work she would help lead the NTU campus fellowship. She graduated from the Providence Church's own seminary a few years ago, took a position similar to an associate vicar at a church near NTU, and decided to work full-time for the church. During the interview, Gu discussed how the Providence Church viewed female talents and helped foster their church careers:

Unlike the workforce that has a glass ceiling, the Providence Church does not hesitate to delegate prominent positions to women. Instead, merit and personality are prioritized when it comes to human resources. I compared the ratio of male to female pastors and the gender ratio of those who attended the seminary, and I concluded that the Providence Church gives equal opportunity to everyone. As a matter of fact, in the many years of my experience, women are often more motivated, perform better, and even outnumber men (personal interview, 2020).

Gu's observation is representative of the latest developments of the Providence Church in Taiwan. She even collected data on clergy gender ratio, and compared Providence with other Christian denominations.

According to Gu's statistics, there are 110 clergy members in the Providence Church in Taiwan. 67.2%, or 74 of them, are female. In the 19 churches across Taiwan, 31 of the 43 pastors and associate pastors (or those authorized to give sermons and lead the church) are female, which is about 72%. Of these 31 female clergy members, 14 serve as the main pastor. One thing worth mentioning is that in churches with over 300 members all the main pastors are women. In addition, 5 of the 6 regional congregations are led by female clergy, which is about 83%. Most important of all, 5 of the 7 seats on headquarters are entrusted to women (71%). This group has decision-making power for national affairs and is at the top of Providence's organizational hierarchy in Taiwan.

Members of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, such as Chuang Shu-chen, are still rallying for gender justice. According to Chuang's statistics, in headquarters meetings of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan in 1990, just 2% of the participants were female. These numbers grew to 17.86% in 2017. Female clergy still face discrimination in terms of both theory and practice. Some of their church members still openly refuse to accept female clergy appointments (Chuang 2019, 54–8). As for the Providence Church in Taiwan, ever since its inception between 1987 and 1988, women have accounted for more than 50% of clergy members. Providence Church members generally take it for granted that women can serve as clergy and take leadership positions.

Apart from female perspectives, interviews with male pastors were also conducted to provide a different angle on the female image in the Providence Church. One interviewee, Pastor Chou, who graduated from NTU Law, is one of the most senior members in Taiwan:

I studied in a seminary in the States for three years and saw many churches. After receiving my Master of Divinity, I returned to Taiwan to serve. Because I've observed many denominations, I noticed that ever since the first native clergy, Pastor Lai, was ordained, along with the ordination of many female elders and deaconesses later, the Providence Church, by fully respecting women, has proven to be unhindered by the many taboos of conventional churches; not to mention those ordained who come from different generations... After I returned to Taiwan from the States in 2002, I noticed that local churches in central and southern Taiwan were struggling because there weren't any missionaries who were pastors, so I discussed with my wife and prayed to God to see what I can do to serve Him better. In the end I decided to travel south to Taichung to help with evangelization. I was responsible for helping the church, while my wife took care of the bread... Many church members in Taichung were medical school students, who later became doctors, pharmacists, nutrition scientists, and clinical scientists. Some of them even opened clinics of their own. The gender balance at that time was about 1:1. Those who were ordained as female elders or clergy were professionally accomplished people passionate to help the church grow. Associate pastors were also professionals who temporarily set work aside to serve the church full time. One of them was a registered nurse, the other a counselor. Both of them are now married and have their own full-time careers. I believe these are good cases that demonstrate how the church is not confined to conventional gender roles within Christianity (personal interview, 2020).

Chou himself used to be in a mainstream church, which gives him a comparative perspective. He witnessed how very different women, such as celibate clergy, married clergy, and other professionals, could all take leadership positions or play prominent roles in the Providence Church. Chou's success in Taichung was

partly due to his willingness to let female church members take important positions. These members often had medical backgrounds and had much to contribute.

From these examples, we can see that the feminist theology of the Providence Church is not just theoretical, but also practical. Considering the fact that both South Korea and Taiwan's social orders have been influenced by Confucian patriarchal ideas, the Providence Church is carving out more space for women to pursue autonomy.

Revisiting the “Brainwashing” Thesis Concerning Female Followers of New Religious Movements

Patriarchal prejudice sees women as sentimental, lacking in rational judgement, easily dominated by external factors, and gullible to men. We can derive a list of such prejudices from Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986):

Not accepting logical principles and moral imperatives, skeptical about the laws of nature, woman lacks the sense of the universal; to her the world seems a confused conglomeration of special cases. This explains why she believes more readily in the tittle-tattle of a neighbor than in a scientific explanation... Within her sphere all is magic; outside, all is mystery. She is unfamiliar with the criterion of plausibility; only immediate experience carries conviction—her own experience, or that of others if stated emphatically enough. As for her own self, she feels she is a special case because she is isolated in her home and hence does not come into active contact with other women; she is always expecting that destiny and men will make an exception in her favor. She believes in her intuitions much more firmly than in universally valid reasoning... (de Beauvoir 1956, 584–85).

Patriarchy assumes that women believe in intuition and mysticism instead of reason and inference, not to mention scientific explanations (Huang 2001). Likewise, accusations from mainstream media and mainstream religions that charismatic “cult” leaders “brainwash” female followers of new religious movements share the same rhetoric. They argue that female believers unconditionally accept every unreasonable demand from “cult” leaders, even sexual advances or rape. In doing so, accusers are depriving women of their agency. They deny that it is possible for them to break out of the shackles of religious patriarchy to pursue autonomy in new religious movements.

“Cults” are frequently accused of “brainwashing” female (and male) believers, and leaders of new religious movements are often accused of demanding sexual favors from their followers. However, the “brainwashing thesis” in general has long since been debunked by Western scholars of new religious movements (Barker 1984; Richardson 1993; Richardson and Introvigne 2001). Accusations that women are coerced into sexual relationships by male leaders of new religious movements may be true in some comparatively rare cases. More often, they are unfounded, and serve the patriarchal prejudice in their own way by stigmatizing and infantilizing women who attempt to pursue autonomy through unconventional means.

Taiwanese have lived under patriarchy for a long time. It is not surprising that news about rape usually incite strong reaction and criticism from the society. However, reactions to such incidents are shaped by the structure of patriarchy, which may influence how the women involved are perceived (Tsai and Su 2016, 87).

Due to the commercialization of the media, reports on sexual violence have been increasing, and the content is becoming more explicit. The intention is to hook readers with these explicit reports (Tsai and Su 2016, 91). These kinds of news risk to report male on female sexual violence in a normalized, individualized, and trivialized manner, which reinforces male dominance and is consistent with the ideology of patriarchy. Taiwanese mass media often adopt what has been called “excitable speech” to reinforce a fascination with rape, which contributes to a culture that reacts excitedly to sexual transgression against women (Tsai and Su 2016, 91). Mass media do not care about social justice or the well-being of victims, but about whether the articles can gauge the readers’ interest (Tsai and Su 2016, 99). In news and magazines concerning sexual assaults, a kind of “media truth” that exaggerates words and pictures is created to highlight sexual violence. Mass media resorts to imagination to reconstruct incidents, offering readers a channel to take pleasure in peeking into other people’s lives (Tsai and Su 2016, 125).

This is reflected in the sensational titles that followed accusations against President Jung in South Korea, and claimed women had been abused by him also in Taiwan:

The latest issue of *Next Magazine* uses huge fonts and pictures to report how the leader of the Korean Providence Church, Jung Myung-seok, claimed to be the messiah to lure hundreds of campus beauties to sleep with him (*Next Magazine* 2001).

According to Taiwan media reports, the cult has invaded the campus, and hundreds of female students from National Taiwan University and Central University were raped by the leader (*People's Daily Online* 2001).

Models are expressing themselves on the catwalk. They look professional, but no one can see that they are students at National Central University... the founder of their organization is the Providence cult leader Jung Myung-seok, who is wanted by the Taipei District Prosecutors Office... (*CTS* 2005).

The Providence cult, originally from Korea, has been active in Taiwan for about ten years. Most of their members are from elite universities such as NCCU, NTU, and National Central University, the evil cult leader raped hundreds of female college students... (*KK News* 2016)

The Providence cult uses extracurricular activities such as sports and music to lure college students to join them. They even have a “model department” and “female cheerleading group” to specifically lure young and beautiful female college students (*KK News* 2016).

The leader of the Korean Providence cult targets virgins (*KK News* 2016).

Some terms used in the content mentioned above, such as “campus beauties,” “virgins,” and “young and beautiful female college students,” reflect the fetishes of a patriarchal society. They serve a rhetoric that denies the agency of women by insinuating that elite female college students who joined Providence are incapable of rational thought and making their own common-sense judgements.

While it is true that Jung was investigated in Taiwan, the case was closed and the authorities determined that none of the accusations was corroborated by evidence. In fact, Providence threatened to sue or sued some of the accusers for defamation. Some of the cases were settled with letters of apology from the accusers such as the following:

I, XXX, currently enrolled in XXX University, contacted *Apple Daily* in October 2005 to disseminate false information defaming your church and the founder of your church Pastor Jung Myung-seok, as well as Pastor Lin Chang-ching, and Pastor Lin Hui-chuan. At the same time, I used PTT Gossip and Hate forums... along with various electronic bulletin boards to spread false accusations that defamed your church. I recognize that my actions have greatly damaged your reputation, and caused tremendous troubles to Pastor Jung, Pastor Lin, and Pastor Hong, among many other pastors and church members... After introspection, I am deeply regretful, and I hereby express my deep regret and

state that I will not make any false accusation(s) again in the future. Otherwise I will be severely punished by the law (Figure 2).

聲 明 書

本人 陳 ■ 明，於民國 94 年至 95 年間在網路上發表對中華基督教新時代青年會(社會大眾普遍所知曉的攝理教會)不實及污滅文章，造成社會大眾對其產生負面觀感及誤解，並造成該會眾教友困擾，對此本人感到相當抱歉，在此聲明中對該宗教團體致歉，也感謝該宗教團體人士包容及諒解，並給予本人改過自新的機會，本人在此切結，保證日後不會再犯，否則將受法律嚴厲制裁。

此 致

中華基督教新時代青年會

聲明人：陳 ■ 明

陳 ■ 明

身分證字號

住址：

中華民國九十五年八月十一日

Figure 2. Letter of apology from YYY.

In other case, the accusers did not settle, and were sentenced by Taiwanese criminal courts for slander. For example, in June 2006, the Keelung District Court sentenced Wang Wen-yi to 30 days of criminal detention with a probation of 2 years for spreading false rumors of “[President] Jung sexually assaulting

female followers” (Figure 3). However, the damage to Providence Church’s reputation was irreversible.

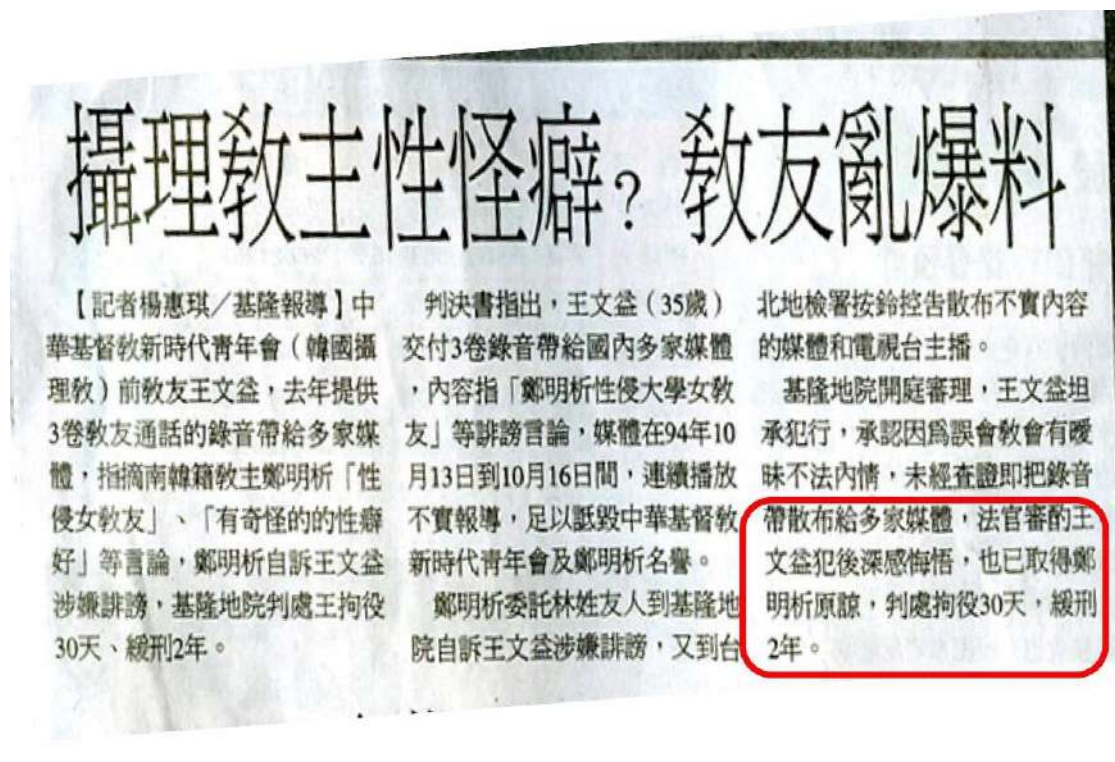


Figure 3. Reference to decision against Wang Wen-yi.

Citing American philosopher Lynne Tirrell’s works, Yang Wan-ying pointed out that calling a mature women a “girl” is an act of assigning her a certain role that denies her adulthood and justifies the way paternalism treats her. Likewise, calling a mature women a “maiden” not only provides an excuse for paying less salary and discrediting her decision-making abilities, but also denies her autonomy and judgement. Once being branded as a lesser, lesser treatment follows (Yang 2019, 182–92). By depicting Providence female members as “brainwashed girls” or “concubines of a cult leader,” detractors and mass media denied their autonomy and perpetuated patriarchal stereotypes.

Religious Tensions Rise During the COVID-19 Pandemic

New religious movements were again stereotyped and discriminated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian and the author of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), believes that the decisions people make in response to the COVID-19 pandemic could change the lives of

people for years to come (Harari 2020). Will the impact of COVID-19 crisis on societies, economies, and countries bring human communities closer together or do the exact opposite? Will law enforcement agencies and surveillance systems be designed to protect or to coerce civilians? These challenges are addressed differently around the world. Instead of drawing a hasty conclusion on post-pandemic opportunities, we would like to argue that the pandemic probably helps us reexamine the problems that have been haunting our society.

Religious tension is on the rise in many parts of the world, and was exacerbated by the pandemic. In East Asia, particularly in South Korea, relevant conflicts were reported by international media outlet such as *The New York Times* and the *CNN* (Choe 2020; Hancocks 2020). Looking back at what happened in 2020, we cannot ignore how South Korean public opinion was manipulated by some conservative Christian groups with the intention to make new religious movements the target of a witch hunt.

According to a study by Chiu Hei-yuan (2001), new religious movements usually face persecution from two directions—from authoritarian governments and from mainstream denominations. Both the authoritarian Nationalist government and Communist China inherited the old notion and the policy of ancient Chinese dynasties to root out groups classified as *xie jiao* (“heterodox teachings,” or “evil cults”). During the period of martial law in Taiwan, the Nationalist government also labeled Yiguandao and other sects that are distinct from pre-existing religions as *xie jiao*.

The category of *xie jiao* (Introvigne 2021c) was used both in Taiwan, during the martial law period, and in Mainland China in the 1950s for the now forgotten massive persecution of Yiguandao, a large Chinese non-Christian new religious movement, which in fact became the model for the subsequent repression of other groups. Many new religious movements are also rejected by mainstream denominations. The more neutral stance by scholars of new religious movements may help neutralize the influence of the negative public perception of new religious movements (Lin 2004), yet the latter continues to be spread by the media, with the religious conflicts in South Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic providing a textbook example.

South Korean COVID-19 Witch Hunts Against New Religious Movements

The Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a new religious movement founded in South Korea, was blamed for the country's first coronavirus outbreak in the first half of 2020. Shincheonji and related groups were scapegoated and labeled as responsible for the majority of infections in the country. The actions taken against Shincheonji could be regarded almost as a witch-hunt. For example, its leader and other members were arrested and the permission for establishment was revoked. The city of Daegu, once the epicenter of the pandemic, was seeking billions of won in damages from Shincheonji and its leader Lee Man-Hee in a lawsuit. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of South Koreans signed a petition calling for the forcible dissolution of Shincheonji. COVID-19 was used as a pretext for persecution of an unpopular movement (Tsai 2021), although eventually Lee and the other Shincheonji leaders who had been arrested were found innocent of all COVID-related charges both in first degree and appeal (Introvigne 2021a, 2021b).

Regardless of the controversial nature of new religious movements, every believer shall have the right to freedom of religion and shall not be discriminated against because of his or her belief. Conservative Protestant denominations in South Korea were also accused of violating the laws on the prevention of epidemics, yet at the same time manipulated the public opinion to wipe out the new religious movements they saw as dangerous competitors (Grisafi 2021).

Scholars have pointed out that since the late 20th century, conservative Christian churches in South Korea spared no effort to promote the values of their respective denominations in the public arena through the use of media, tracts, or direct approach. Megachurches have long been lobbying members of the Parliament, leaders of political parties, and high-ranking government officials in an attempt to persuade policy-makers and administrators to adopt policy ideas that are favorable to members of conservative Christian groups. Conservative Protestant churches in South Korea wield enormous influence in politics and economics, and are often able to manipulate the public opinion (Guo 2014). Over time, conservative Christian denominations have been exerting considerable impact on the thinking of the majority of South Koreans. The most influential denominations also use their power to slander and stigmatize new religious movements.

Western scholars concluded that Lee Man-Hee and Shincheonji did not disobey the emergency measures or hamper disease control efforts (Introvigne et al. 2020; Burke 2020), and their position has been so far (since an appeal to the Supreme Court is pending) vindicated by Korean courts of law. There has also been a double standard in how Shincheonji and Protestant conservative churches, both accused of violation of COVID-related violations, have been treated by the authorities and the media. Fautré (2020) points out that the handling of the COVID-19 epidemic by the authorities in South Korea with regard to religious groups revealed a strong bias to the detriment of Shincheonji and a more conciliatory treatment of Protestant churches. Shincheonji was met with stigmatization, deceptive and destructive rumors, demands of lists of all members and properties, unfounded suspicions, threats, fiscal harassment, prosecutions, spurious charges, and arrests and imprisonment of several leaders, including the founder. As opposite to this, excessive tolerance and impunity were shown towards several Protestant churches that violated the prohibitions and continued to gather during the pandemic. Fautré provides concrete facts and evidence highlighting the discriminatory treatment of Shincheonji, and analyzes the religious and socio-political dynamics underpinning the harassment of this new religious movement. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, while protecting themselves, conservative Christian groups spread disinformation to scapegoat and hunt out of existence some new religious movements. The attempted annihilation of Shincheonji was just one of the examples.

Providence and COVID-19

Although the doctrines, practices, and rituals of Shincheonji may be controversial and unacceptable to most traditional Christian churches, in a democratic country like South Korea where the rule of law applies, freedom of religion should be guaranteed to all citizens. Shincheonji is not the only target of conservative South Korean Christian churches. They also attempt to wipe out other Christian new religious movements, including Providence. In the case of Providence, however, any attempt to connect it with the spread of COVID-19 clashed with the evidence, both in South Korea and Taiwan.

Since mid-February 2020, Providence has been implementing public health measures in accordance with the guidance and directives of state and local

authorities. Providence branches all over the world were called to maintain the highest level of vigilance, cancel all physical meetings, and hold online worship services only. In fact, Providence won the praise of the South Korean government for the record of almost zero confirmed cases of COVID-19 within the movement. On February 23, 2020, at a special meeting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic chaired by President Moon Jae-in, he thanked religious organizations that had proactively cancelled their activities and expressed his gratitude to those groups that had followed the public health guidance of the government. Providence had already decided to move worship services online in South Korea and in other Asian countries before Chung Sye-kyun, the South Korean Prime Minister, delivered a speech to the nation including this request on February 22, 2020 (Yoo 2020). Since March 2020, Taiwan Providence has also replaced events and gatherings in church buildings with online conferences and online worship services in the hope of minimizing the risk of infection (Christian Gospel Mission 2020; Table 1 below).

The COVID-19 Situations in Taiwan		Taiwan CGM Precautionary Measures	
1/16	WHO issued its first epidemiological alert on the novel coronavirus.	1/25	CGM announced the COVID-19 precautions and measures.
1/31	The cruise ship Diamond Princess, with several passengers who later tested positive to COVID-19, docked at the Port of Keelung.	2/2	CGM increased the knowledge of pandemic prevention in every branch with videos and other measures.
2/16	A private-hire car driver became one of the new confirmed cases and the number of local cases increased in Changhua.	2/8	CGM branch in Keelung was temporarily closed and members of the congregation were required to self-monitor.
2/29	The number of local infections exceeded that of imported cases.	2/20	CGM officially cancelled the concert that was going to be held on February 25.
		2/21	CGM branch in Changhua was temporarily closed and members of the congregation were required to self-monitor.
		3/2	CGM moved every gathering online.

Table 1. CGM (Providence) in Taiwan and COVID-19.

In his analysis of various new religious movements and their responses to SARS in 2003, professor Ding Ren-jieh, a researcher at the Institute for Sociology, Academia Sinica, singled out some religious groups that proactively cooperated with epidemic prevention measures announced by the government. In fact, Providence fits perfectly into such a category of religious groups. Professor Ting argues that in terms of common values and mechanisms that drive and bind societies, the expansion of civil society and the stability in the public sector do not seem to collide in East Asia, which is different from the development of Western societies. That is, leaders of civil societies in East Asia seldom take a strong position against government authorities unless under special circumstances.

The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in Taiwan was used as an example in Ting's paper to illustrate religious groups that cooperated with the government during the SARS epidemic. During the COVID-19 epidemic, President Jung asked Providence members to comply with the government's COVID-19 policy. He proactively asked his followers to show respect for the medical profession and to adopt an extremely cautious attitude towards COVID-19. He did not use freedom of religion arguments to protest against restrictions on religious gatherings. We can conclude that Providence belongs to the type of religious groups that "uphold society values and urge collective responsibility" described by Ding (2003).

However, despite all its efforts to fight COVID-19, Providence was still attacked by traditional Christian denominations that took advantage of the pandemic. A South Korean religious network called Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) falsely argued in one of its TV programs that Providence had been hiding cases of infection. CBS, which has played a leading role in the witch hunt against Shincheonji, was clearly attempting to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to go after other new religious movements as well.

Ironically, it was among the CBS personnel that COVID-19 problems caused a disruption of services. CBS shut down its building and cancelled the regular radio programming after a reporter tested positive. After cleaning and disinfecting the entire building, CBS could re-open its programs on August 20, 2020 (*KBS World* 2021). This is another example of double standard: Christian conservative religionists badmouth the new religious movements as plague-spreaders, yet fail themselves to take the necessary precautions against COVID-19.

Conclusion

The articles addressed three different issues concerning Taiwan and Providence: the church's view of Taiwan and its subjectivity, its theology of womanhood, and its—and its opponents'—reactions to COVID-19.

Along with the globalization starting in the 1980s, the wave of decolonization swept over Taiwan. Unrelenting student movements and political activities highlighted the protest against China's oppression, the restoration of Taiwan's identity, and even the pursuit of Taiwan independence. The wider society encouraged the liberation of personality, which turned Taiwan into the most tolerant and inclusive country in East Asia. In 1987, the lifting of martial law in Taiwan was proclaimed. In that same year, Providence was introduced to Taiwan. Ever since President Jung got acquainted with Taiwanese intellectuals, he proclaimed Taiwan "a country" in front of all Providence members, outsiders, and public figures, and praised Taiwan highly among all Providence churches in the world.

Providence values are in line with the intellectual trends developed over the past forty years in Taiwan. Providence both follows the principle of separating church from state, and disagrees that politics is the answer to all questions in life. Whenever there is an election in Taiwan, the Providence leadership never gives any instructions to influence the members' vote. Even if a few Providence members have pro-China feelings, Taiwan's subjectivity is always valued and honored in the church. President Jung proclaims his great respect for Taiwan's history and cultures, and deeply sympathizes with the dilemmas and obstacles Taiwan confronts. His affirmation of Taiwan's subjectivity is one of the reasons the movement has been successful in Taiwan.

The second part of this article started from an analysis of Jung's feminist theology and practices, and pointed out various reasons why the Providence Church has been welcomed by a significant number of Taiwanese women since its very inception. It then tackled how public opinion and mass media often misunderstand female participants of new religious movements, depicting them as irrational, "brainwashed," and psychologically and sexually obsessed with "cult leaders." Contrary to this stereotypical image, we argued that women in Providence are in fact attempting to carve out their own space, and assert a form of autonomy that otherwise would not have been well-received in mainstream

society. They are one of Ruether's female minorities who choose a different source for their beliefs, resist religious tradition with more critical views, and explore heterodoxies that have previously been marginalized. These pursuits reflect an unwillingness to be simply happy with traditional views, and a deeper desire to look for meaning in a specific historical context (Ruether 1993, 28–9). If we can transcend how mass media infantilize female Providence members, we may be able to see how these women affirm in their own way a form of female autonomy in the religious space.

Like all churches, in the last months Providence had to confront COVID-19. American political theorist Francis Fukuyama observed that, confronted with the pandemic, some democracies have performed well, but others have not, and the same is true for autocracies. The factors responsible for successful responses to the pandemic, Fukuyama argues, are state capacity, social trust, and leadership. Countries with all three factors—a competent state apparatus, a government that citizens trust and listen to, and effective leaders—have performed impressively, limiting the damage they have suffered. Countries with dysfunctional states, polarized societies, or poor leadership have done badly, leaving their citizens and economies exposed and vulnerable (Fukuyama 2020).

Ever since the start of the global pandemic, the state-society collaboration to contain COVID-19 in Taiwan has been universally recognized as effective, and later became a model for other countries. Taiwan's remarkable achievement in combating COVID-19, as Fukuyama (2020) acknowledged, stems from the public trust in the medical profession and in the government.

If they want to battle COVID-19, religious communities should see the government as a partner rather than as an enemy, but in turn the government should not look at them with suspicion and prejudice. In Taiwan, both mainstream religions and new religious movements, with very rare exceptions, followed the advanced deployment and strict prevention measures announced by the government proactively and responsibly. The situation is different from South Korea, where several Christian churches were accused of continuing to gather and hold services after the government had prohibited them.

A parallel development in South Korea was that conservative Christian churches tried to take advantage of COVID-19 to denounce new religious movements they regard as “cults” as plague-spreaders, and try to destroy them. This strategy was, at least initially, successful with Shincheonji, but unsuccessful

with Providence, which could prove that it had complied with all COVID-related regulations. As opposite to South Korea, in Taiwan most mainline religious organizations did not use COVID-19 as an opportunity to spread untrue rumors or accusations against rival religious movements. While Taiwanese media in the past had slandered Providence and tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the authorities that President Jung had abused women in Taiwan too, Korean accusations against Providence based on COVID-19 had a very limited echo in Taiwan. Both the political power of conservative Christian churches and a Confucian influence on Christianity that still shapes its attitude towards politics (Fang 2021), prevailing in South Korea, do not appear to be a significant part of the religious situation in Taiwan.

References

- Akimoto, Ayano. 2019. *命の道を行く 鄭明析氏の歩んだ道 (Going the Way of Life: The Path of Mr. Jung Myung Seok)*. Tokyo: Parade.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2005. *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*. London and New York: Verso.
- Armstrong, Karen. 2015. *St. Paul: The Apostle We Love to Hate*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Barker, Eileen. 1984. *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Burke, Ciarán. 2020. “Abusus Non Tollit Usus? Korea’s Legal Response to Coronavirus and the Shincheonji Church of Jesus.” *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(5):64–85. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.5.4.
- Chang, Jue 2015. *福爾摩沙眼淚 (The Tears of Formosa)*. Accessed December 16, 2021. <https://youtu.be/v7WK0Dxsc0Y>.
- Chao, H. E., Weng H.K., and Kao Chun-Ming. 1977. “A Declaration on Human Rights by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.” *Taiwan Church News*, August 16, 1977.
- Chen, Lin. 2020. “82 年生的金智英》看時代病症與女性性別困境” (Insight About Contemporary Problems and Women’s Difficulties from *Kim Ji-young: Born 1982*). *電影文學 (Film Literature)* 7:134–36.

- Chen, Tsui-lien. 2002. “去殖民與再殖民的對抗：以一九四六年「臺人奴化」論戰為焦點” (Decolonization vs. Recolonization: The Debate over ‘T’ai-jen nu-hua’ of 1946 in Taiwan). *Taiwan Historical Research*, 9(2):145–201.
- Chiu, Hei-Yuan. 2001. “解嚴、宗教自與宗教發展” (Lifting of Martial Law, Freedom of Religion, and the Development of Religions). In *威權體制的變遷—解嚴後的臺灣* (The Transformation of the Authoritarian System: Taiwan after the Lifting of Martial Law), edited by the Committee for Promotion of Taiwan Studies, 249–76. Taipei: Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica.
- Chiu, Tzu-hsiu. 2010. “台灣女性主義批評三波論” (The Three Waves of Feminist Criticism in Taiwan). *Journal of Women’s and Gender Studies* 27:251–74.
- Choe, Sang-Hun. 2020. “In South Korea’s New Covid-19 Outbreak, Religion and Politics Collide.” *The New York Times*. August 20. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://nyti.ms/3qCgZLk>.
- Christian Gospel Mission (CGM). 2020. “以全民防疫為第一優先，基督教福音宣教會即日起取消各項室內聚會，全面更改為線上形式” (Making Pandemic Prevention for All People a Top Priority, Christian Gospel Mission Cancels All Indoor Meetings and Move Meetings Online From Now On). March 2. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://cgm.org.tw/news/events/1514-2020-03-02-06-09-39>.
- Chuang, Shu-Zhen. 2019. “從兩性平權到性別公義的努力” (The Efforts into Gender Equal Rights to Gender Justice). *The New Messenger* [Taipei] 170:54–8.
- CTS. 2005. “攝理教主涉性侵專收高挑美女” (The Leader of Providence Is Suspected of Sexual Abuse on Especially Tall Beauties). October 13. Accessed December 16, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3z5Lz3t>.
- Cui, Xian-xiang. 2008. “年以後韓國女性政策的變化與發展” (The Changes and Development of Feminist Policies in Korea After 1980). *當代韓國* (Contemporary Korea) 23:47–54.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. 1956. *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by J.M. Parshley. London: Johnatan Cape.
- Deuchler, Martina. 1992. *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University.
- Ding, Ren-Jieh. 2003. “捍衛社會身體—臺灣 SARS 疫情中的災難治理及其宗教論述” (Protecting the Social Body: Disaster Tackling and Its Religious Discourses Under Taiwan’s SARS Outbreak). *Thought and Words: Journal of the Humanities and Social Science* 41(4):1–69.
- Dong, Fang-Yuan. 2011. “國民黨政權的宗教迫害” (Political Repressions Led by the Kuomintang Regime]. In *揭穿中華民國百年真相* (Uncover the 100-year Truth about the Republic of China), edited by Jhang Yan-ian and Li Fu-jhong, 203–7. Taipei: Wu San-Lian Taiwan Historical Foundation.

- Dong, Juan. 2019. “傳統‘男尊女卑’道德驅使下的韓國電影研究” (Studies of Korean Movies Under the “Man-Dominating” Ethics). *電影批評* (Film Criticism) 18:68–71.
- Fang, Jhao-Huei. 2021. “波士頓學者論儒家 (1) : 杜維明論儒學的跨文化發展” (Boston Scholars on Confucianism (1): Tu Weiming’s Studies on the Cross-Cultural Development of Confucianism). *Aisixiang.com*, February 15. Accessed December 13, 2021. <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/50077.html>.
- Fautré, Willy. 2020. “COVID-19: Treatment of Clusters in Protestant Churches and the Shincheonji Church in South Korea. A Comparative Study.” *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(5):86–100. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.5.5.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 2020. “The Pandemic and Political Order.” *Foreign Affairs*, July-August. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://fam.ag/3z51gb8>.
- Grenz, Stanley J., and Roger, E. Olson. 1993. *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*. Westmont, IL: IVP Academic.
- Grisafi, John G. 2021. “A Marginal Religion and COVID-19 in South Korea: Shincheonji, Public Discourse, and the Shaping of Religion.” *Nova Religio* 25(1):40–63.
- Guo, Ruei. 2014. “冷戰後韓國基督教的保守化傾向及對國家政治的影響” (The Conservative Trend of Christianity in South Korea After the Cold War and Its Impact on National Politics). *Studies in World Religions* 4:113–20.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1950. *The Collective Memory*. Translated and with an introduction by Mary Douglas. New York: Harper-Colophon Books.
- Hancocks, Paula. 2020. “South Korea’s Latest Church-Linked Coronavirus Outbreak Is Turning into a Battle over Religious Freedom.” CNN, August 19. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://cnn.it/3JkMbqO>.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2014. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2020. “The World After Coronavirus.” *Financial Times*, March 20. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://on.ft.com/3ey59fk>.
- Huang, Chun-chieh. 2006. *臺灣意識與臺灣文化* (Taiwanese Consciousness and Taiwanese Culture). Taipei: National Taiwan University Press.
- Huang, Li-Li. 2001. “身心違常：女性自我在父權結構網中的“迷”途” (Psychosomatic Disorder: The Straying of a Woman’s Self Within the Patriarchal Structure). *Indigenous Psychological Research in Chinese Societies*, 15:3–62.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2020. “Providence (Christian Gospel Mission).” World Religions and Spirituality Project, October 11. Accessed December 1, 2021. <https://wrldrels.org/2020/10/02/providence-christian-gospel-mission>.

- Introvigne, Massimo. 2021a. "Killing the Competition: Opposition to Shincheonji Before and After the COVID-19 Crisis." *Nova Religio* 25(1):14–39.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2021b. "Shincheonji: Chairman Lee Not Guilty of COVID Offenses, Appeal Court Said." *Bitter Winter*, December 1. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://bit.ly/32tT6gN>.
- Introvigne, Massimo. 2021c. "The *Xie Jiao* Tradition, Taiwanese Governments, and Minority Religions." *Bitter Winter*, December 9. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://bitterwinter.org/the-xie-jiao-tradition-taiwan>.
- Introvigne, Massimo, Willy Fautré, Rosita Šorytè, Alessandro Amicarelli, and Marco Respinti. 2020. "Shincheonji and the COVID-19 Epidemic: Sorting Fact from Fiction." *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(3):70–86. DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2020.4.3.5.
- Jewett, Paul King. 1980. *The Ordination of Women: An Essay on the Office of Christian Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Jung, Joeun. 2013. "An Excerpt from the Words of the Revival Assembly 'Follow the Time Period' on July 20, 2013." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Joeun. 2016. "An Excerpt from the Words of Heaven's Tour in Taiwan on July 11, 2016." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 1995. "An Excerpt from the Words of the Sermon Delivered at National Taiwan University in December 1995." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2012. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on September 30, 2012." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2013a. "An Excerpt from Monday Predawn Proverbs on March 18, 2013." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2013b. "An Excerpt from Wednesday Predawn Proverbs on October 16, 2013." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2015a. "An Excerpt from Friday Predawn Proverbs on May 25, 2015." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2015b. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on June 7, 2015." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2017. "An Excerpt from Wednesday Predawn Proverbs on April 19, 2017." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.

- Jung, Myung-seok. 2018a. "An Excerpt from Friday Predawn Proverbs on June 1, 2018." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2018b. "An Excerpt from Tuesday Predawn Proverbs on June 12, 2018." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2018c. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on September 30, 2018." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2018d. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on November 18, 2018." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2018e. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on December 9, 2018." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2020a. "An Excerpt from the Words of Wednesday Sermon on February 19, 2020." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- Jung, Myung-seok. 2020b. "An Excerpt from the Words of Sunday Sermon on March 1, 2020." Copy in the archives of the Christian Gospel Mission, Taipei.
- KBS World*. 2021. CBS 因出现新冠确诊病例停播 KBS 和 EBS 出演者也被确诊 (CBS Has Stopped Broadcasting Due To a Confirmed Case of Coronavirus, and KBS and EBS Members Have Also Been Infected). August 20. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3eBKHKt>.
- KK News*. 2016. "邪教魔掌緣何頻頻伸向大學女生?" (Why College Girls Are Usually Cheated by Cults?). September 7. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://kknews.cc/news/yekbpg.html>.
- Ku, Yen-lin. 2020. *台灣婦女運動：爭取性別平等的漫漫長路* (The Feminist Movement in Taiwan: A Long Way to Go to Achieve Gender Equality). Taipei: Owl Publishing House.
- Li, Yuchen. 1996. "佛學之女性研究—近二十年英文著作簡介" (Feminist Buddhist Studies: A Brief Review of Recent English Works). *New History* 7(4):199–222.
- Li, Yuchen. 2020. "大巡真理會的女性宗教參與：以驪州本部道場為例" (Women's Religious Engagement at Daesoon Jinrihoe's Yeosu Headquarters). *Journal of the Daesoon Academy of Sciences* 34:75–105.
- Lin, Jen-chien. 2018. "瑪莉婭與法蒂瑪：一神信仰中女性宗教成聖性的比較" (Maryam and Fatima: A Comparative Study on Female Holiness in Abrahamic Monotheism). *New Century Religious Study* 16(3):99–129.

- Lin, Pen-Hsuan. 2004. “新興宗教運動的意義及其社會學意涵” (The Meaning of New Religious Movements and Its Sociological Implications). *Studies In World Religions* 3:1–26.
- Lu, Hwei-Syin. 2000. “現代佛教女性的身體語言與性別重建以慈濟功德會為例” (Body Language and Gender Reconstruction of Contemporary Buddhist Women: A Case Study of Tzu Chi Merit Association). *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* 88(6):275–311.
- Next Magazine* 2001. “邪教主誘姦臺大政大百位女生” (Cult Leader Seduces One Hundred Girls from National Taiwan University and National Chengchi University). 24 (November).
- People's Daily Online*. 2001. “邪教入侵台灣大學校園 上百女大學生慘遭教主誘姦” (Cult Invades Taiwan University Campus, Hundreds of Female College Students Raped by the Leader). November 9. Accessed December 16, 2021. <https://news.sina.com.cn/s/2001-11-09/396064.html>.
- Richardson, James T. 1993. “A Social Psychological Critique of ‘Brainwashing’ Claims About Recruitment to New Religions. In *The Handbook of Cults and Sects in America*, edited by David G. Bromley and Jeffrey K. Hadden, 75–97. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Richardson, James T., and Massimo Introvigne. 2001. “‘Brainwashing’ Theories in European Parliamentary and Administrative Reports on ‘Cults’ and ‘Sects.’” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40(2):143–68.
- Ruether, Rosemary R. 1993. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. 2nd ed., with a new introduction. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Stark, Rodney. 2011. *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*. New York: HarperOne.
- Tian, Hai-Hua. 2006. “性別與權力——對希伯來聖經律法的女性主義閱讀與詮釋” (Gender and Power: Feminist Reading and Interpretation on the Law of the Hebrew Bible). *Journal of Women's and Gender Studies* 22:119–42.
- Ting, Jen-Chieh. 2020. *民眾宗教中的權威鑲嵌：場域變遷下的象徵資本與靈性資本* (Authority Insertion in Common People's Religions: The Symbolic Capital and Spiritual Capital under Field Transformation). Taipei: Linking Publishing.
- Tsai, Chih-Che. 2021. “韓國新冠疫情失控下，對新興宗教的獵巫恐懼” (Witch-Hunting Fears for New Religious Movements as the Coronavirus Pandemic Got Out of Control in South Korea). *The News Lens*, March 10. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://www.thenewslens.com/article/132196>.
- Tsai, Min-Hui. 2003. “女性神學對女性形象之重構” (The Reconstruction of the Feminine Image in Feminist Theology). Master's Thesis. Chung Yuan Christian University, Taoyuan City, Taiwan.

- Tsai, Yan-Wen, and Herng Su. 2016. “性侵報導的強暴迷思與轉變” (Evolution of Rape Myths in Newspaper Coverage). *新聞學研究* (Journalism Research) 128:85–134.
- Wang, Shihan. 2019. “韓國為何如此厭女？《82年生的金智英》背後的關鍵數據” (Why Is Korea so Misogynistic? A Look into Crucial Data Behind *Kim Ji-young: Born 1982*). *天下雜誌* (Commonwealth), December 2. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5097972?template=fashion>.
- Wong, Wai-ching. 2004. “中譯本導言” (Introduction to the Chinese Edition). In Rosemary R. Ruether, *性別主義與言說上帝* (Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology), trans. by Yeo Khiok-khng and Leung Shuk-jing, XV–XXXIII. Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma Press.
- Wu, Chan-liang. 2012. “台灣人真正要的是什麼” (What the Taiwanese Truly Wants). *Sina.com blog*, January 30. Accessed December 13, 2021. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_9b49a3540100wbp9.html.
- Wu, Rwei-Ren. 2019. “《全球化的時代》吳叡人導讀：《想像的共同體》理論架構下的菲律賓經驗個案研究” (Introduction to *Under the Tree Flags: The Case Study of Philippines under the Theoretical Framework of Imagined Communities*). *The News Lens*, November 7. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://www.thenewslens.com/article/126784>.
- Wu, Zhuoliu. 2002. *The Fig Tree: Memoirs of a Taiwanese Patriot*. Trans. by Duncan Hunter. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
- Yang, Wanying. 2019. “沒有選擇的選擇—女性從政者的雙重束縛” (Choice when There is no Choice: The Double Restricts of Female Politicians). In *這是愛女，也是厭女：如何看穿這世界拉攏與懲戒女人的兩手策略？* (Loving and Hating Women at the Same Time: How to See Through the Double-Standard Strategy Opening to Women and Punishing Them?), edited by Wang Xiaodan, 171–92. Taipei: Common Master Press.
- Yeh, Bao-guei (Cecilia). 2001. “天主聖三與女性神學—並檢視其本位化象徵” (Trinity and Feminist Theology). *Collectanea Theologica* 127: 134–57.
- Yoo, Jae-won. 2020. “기독교복음선교회발빠른코로나 19 대처호평” (Christian Gospel Mission Is Highly Praised for Coping with COVID-19). *Seoul City*, February 23. Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3qpNU5w>.

The Charitable Works of Vietnamese Caodaism

Nguyễn Tuấn Em

Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan

Elmernguyen1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: The article explores the Works of Charity (Phước Thiện), a branch of Cao Đài's structural organization, as a central feature of that religion's activities. It traces their origins to the 1920s and 1930s, and follows their development and resilience through different Vietnamese political situations. The Works of Charity in Caodaism established solid foundations for the religion to grow, and became an effective economic tool to assist the Vietnamese in overcoming sufferings in times of both war and peace.

KEYWORDS: Caodaism, Cao Đài, Cao Đài Works of Charity, Holy See of Tây Ninh, New Religions in Vietnam.

Introduction

Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (大道三期普度), commonly known as Caodaism, is a syncretistic religion officially born in Vietnam in 1926. Caodaism aims to combine the Three Great Teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and to unify the Five Branches of the Great Way: Way of Humanity, Way of the Genii, Way of Saints, Way of Immortals, and Way of Buddhas. Caodaism's motto is to bring about "Justice and Universal Love" to all human beings and living beings with three objectives: Life Protection, Benevolence, and Universality (Bảo Sanh, Nhơn Nghĩa, and Đại Đồng). Caodaism was one of the very few Vietnamese homegrown religions to be involved in the politics of Nationalist Movements. The religion persisted during the period of French Colonization, surprisingly survived throughout the Vietnam Wars, and quietly developed to

become Vietnam's third largest religious organization after Buddhism and Christianity, despite suffocating suppression by ruling governments.

Although there is still debate over why and in what ways this religious organization was politically engaged, and over how it could survive and firmly develop through such a critical context in Vietnam, Caodaism remained a shelter for its followers in terms of spirituality and personal security. The Cao Đài Religion emerged in Southern Vietnam in 1926 and was widely accepted by large groups of people within a short period of time, gaining more than 20,000 new followers within two months of the religion's official inauguration (Gobron 1950, 28), and around 500,000 "fellows" by 1930 (Blagov 2016, 27). This religious organization became a spiritual phenomenon not only because of its new system of philosophy and doctrine but also because of its active political involvement during the first half of the 20th century.

There have been several studies on how Caodaism quickly became an essential part of the Vietnamese's daily spiritual life, how this religious organization could gain the trust of the masses within a short time, and how this religion developed at different stages. Nevertheless, researchers seem to have paid an overwhelming attention to Caodaism's representative figures, history, structural organization, philosophy, doctrine, and even political involvement, while to date little research has been done on an important institution of Caodaism called Works of Charity (Phước Thiện) and on its commitments to social development.

The purpose of this article is to study how the Caodaists implemented their "Universal Love and Justice" motto in practice, and how they tried to achieve their three aims "Life Protection, Benevolence, and Universality" through their charitable system. My research will also show that the well-organized charitable activities by the Caodaists were an effective way to finance the religious organization's growth. In addition, Cao Đài humanitarian activities through the Institution of Works of Charity were central to help relieving human sufferings in social crises, making Caodaism a reliable institution where Vietnamese learned to take refuge.

History of Cao Đài Charity Works (Phước Thiện)

Soon after the official inauguration ceremony of Caodaism in Tây Ninh in 1926, under the instructions they believed they had received by the divinities

through spirit writing, the Caodaists went to different provinces and localities to construct Cao Đài Temples and propagandize Caodaism to the populace. In 1927, they reported that, through spirit messages, the Holy Mother Goddess instructed the Hộ Pháp (the Dharma Protector and Head Medium Phạm Công Tắc, 1890–1959) to go to Phú Mỹ Village in the Châu Thành District of Mỹ Tho Province in the Mekong Delta to construct a Cao Đài Temple named Khố Hiền Trang.

Also in 1927, Caodaists believe that the Spiritual Pope Li Tai Bai (李白, 701–762, a Chinese poet during the Tang Dynasty in ancient China) instructed from the spiritual world a medium named Đinh Công Trứ (1903–1949) in this village to establish the “Conscience Benevolence Group” (Minh Thiện Đàn), to gather disciples and teach them spiritual self-cultivation and mediumship. Then, in 1929, devotees believe that Guan Gong (Đức Quan Công or 關羽, 162–220, a Chinese military general in the last Han Dynasty in ancient China) instructed another medium called Lê Văn Trung (1876–1934) also in this Phú Mỹ Village to establish a “Common Gratitude Group” (Đồng Nghĩa Đường) to recruit members for the Conscience Benevolence Group (Hông 1997, 13).

In 1929, it was reported that the Spiritual Pope Li Tai Bai, in a Spiritualist séance, taught that “Conscience Benevolence Group” (Minh Thiện Đàn) means “Returning to the good” (Quy Thiện), which also means “Buddha Gate” (Phạm Môn) and instructed the Hộ Pháp, as Supreme Leader of Caodaism, to take charge of this group.

The Hộ Pháp chose 72 pioneers out of approximately 700 members of this Conscience Benevolence Group, and sent them to Tây Ninh Province to work as volunteers at a farm called Phạm Nghiệp. In the meantime, the other members of the Conscience Benevolence Group were advised to cooperate with the Khố Hiền Trang Cao Đài Temple in the same village to do charitable works and to help one another and the villagers in their daily lives, and wait for the chance to be chosen to join the other 72 pioneers in Tây Ninh Province. Some of these Conscience Benevolence Group members were also sent to other localities to help develop charitable activities along the same model there. Soon, the number of the “Conscience Benevolence Group” followers who were later converted to Cao Đài grew to more than 17,000 (Hông 1997, 16).

The 72 pioneers who went to Tây Ninh to work as volunteers were organized in a group called Phạm Môn, under the direct instruction and management of the Hộ Pháp. The Phạm Môn members called the Hộ Pháp “Master,” because he trained them in additional ways of esoteric self-cultivation in Caodaism. The members of Phạm Môn were organized into small communities in which they worked and did business together, trying to make a living independently for themselves and donating the profits to the Cao Đài religion, both for religious activities and infrastructure construction and to support the underprivileged.

The initial small farm called Phạm Nghiệp in the Trường Hòa village eventually became a well-developed agricultural production area and a multi-business manufacturing enterprise, which recruited many more volunteers and supplied abundant funding for the religious activities and construction of Cao Đài religious facilities.

The rapid development of the Cao Đài religious organization and the Phạm Nghiệp enterprise made the French in Indochina suspicious of the Caodaists. Subsequently, the French shut down all these manufacturing facilities and harassed the business activities of Phạm Nghiệp. In this critical context, the volunteers and workers scattered to all the Mekong Delta provinces to continue clearing new farmlands and operating manufacturing businesses.

In 1935, when the French finally granted full religious freedom to the Caodaists, the Hộ Pháp transformed the Phạm Môn group into the “Cơ Quan Phước Thiện” (Organ of Good Works, or Charitable Body), which managed all the religion’s agricultural lands, manufacturing facilities, and business activities throughout the six provinces of Southern Vietnam.

In 1938, the Cơ Quan Phước Thiện became an official part of the Cao Đài Religion under the “Cao Đài Religious Law 1938” (*Đạo Luật Mậu Dần 1938* 1969) (see Figure 2). Also in this year, the Hộ Pháp—and, the Caodaists believe, the Spiritual Pope Li Tai Bai from the spiritual world—signed Decree No. 48/PT dated October 19, Year of the Tiger (solar calendar: December 10, 1938) confirming the establishment of the Charitable Body and its twelve holy ranks (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Dignitaries of the Charitable Body in the 1940s.
Courtesy of the Cao Đài Overseas Missionary.

The Structural Organization of the Cao Đài Charitable Body

In the chronological order of twelve rankings in this organization, the “Buddha-like Cultivator” (Phật Tử, equivalent to Pope) is the highest rank, followed by “Immortal-like Cultivator” (Tiên Tử, equivalent to Censor-Cardinal), and “Saint-like Cultivator” (Thánh Nhơn, equivalent to Cardinal), down to the lower rank “Wise Person” (Minh Đức, simple fellow).

As shown in Figure 2, the ranks in the Charitable Body/Council are equivalent to parallel ranks in the Executive Council (Cửu Trùng Đài), depending on the accumulation of the Caodaists’ virtues, good deeds, and contributions to religious activities and charitable works.

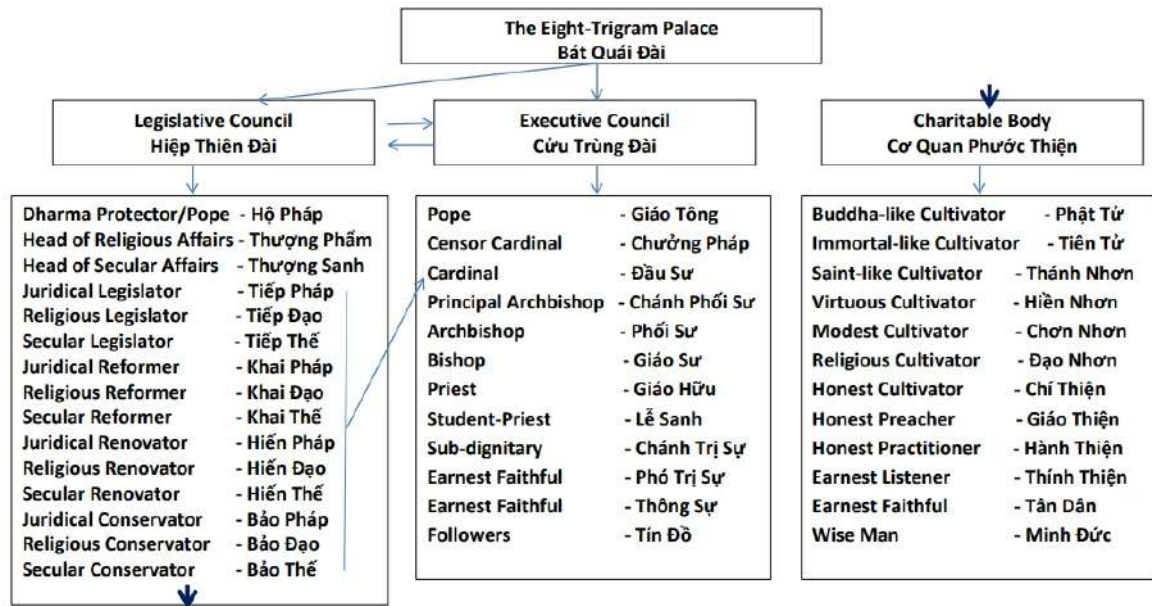


Figure 2. Cao Đài Religion’s hierarchy.

The structural organization of this Charitable Body (see Figure 3) is also similar to that of the Executive Council, which manages the administration of the entire system of the Cao Đài Religion. Accordingly, in the Charitable Body, the Chairperson is a member of the Legislative Body (Hiệp Thiên Đài). There are also two different “sides” for males and females. These two sides have separate responsibilities and powers. There are two different sub-chairpersons who have achieved at least the fifth rank of “Chơn Nhơn,” one for the male side and one for the female side. Under the sub-chairpersons, there are vice sub-chairpersons of each side managing the nine ministries (viện) including “Interiors, Rites, Security, Finances, Supply, Education, Agriculture, Public Works, and Health” (Nghia 1974, 143).

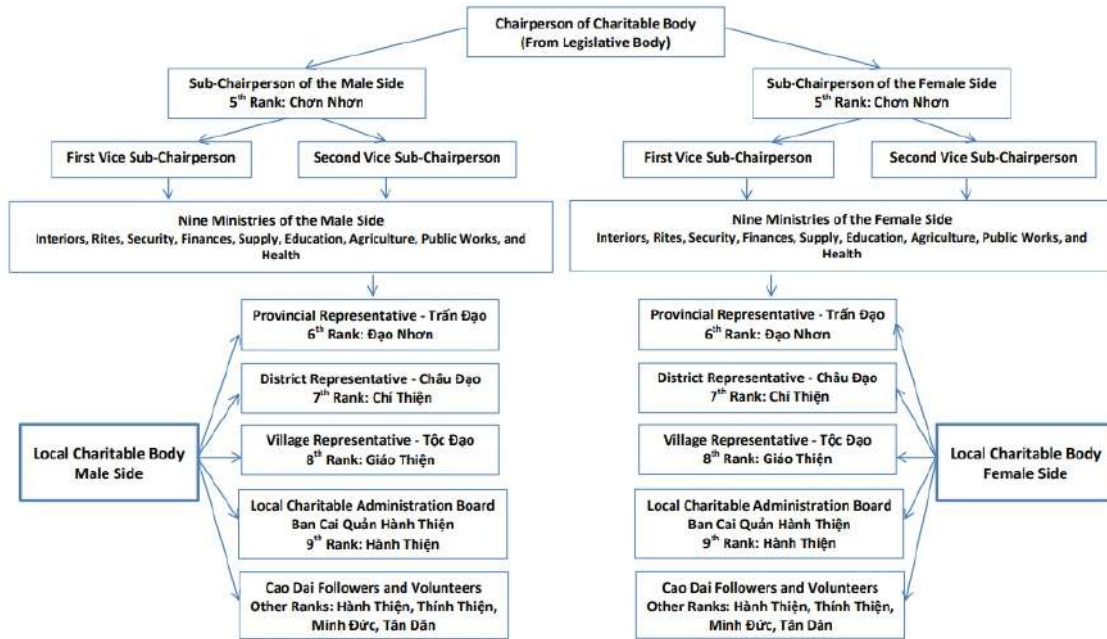


Figure 3. Structural organization of the Charitable Body, from headquarters to local units.

The two systems of the Executive Body and the Charitable Body operate parallel to each other, from the Central Headquarters in the Cao Đài Tây Ninh Holy See to local parishes. The Dignitaries from the Executive Body are responsible for religious affairs and for the construction of temples of God the Father, whereas the dignitaries from the Charitable Body are responsible for charitable works and construction of temples of the Holy Mother Goddess. To fulfill their responsibilities, the Charitable Body encourages the Caodaists and volunteers to increase agricultural production, manufacturing, and other business activities to serve charitable works and religious purposes.

Until 1971, there were a total of 6,044 dignitaries in the Charitable Body. Due to the effects of the Vietnam War and the political change in Vietnam after the national reunification, although the charitable activities continued in the local units, the administration of this Central Charitable Body in the Tây Ninh Holy See was nearly halted. This was just an interruption in the official management board of the Charitable Body, and did not affect the charitable activities in each local community of Caodaists.

The Cao Đài Central Charitable Body became active again in 2005. According to recent statistics, there are more than 2,000 dignitaries appointed by the Sacerdotal Council of Cao Đài Tây Ninh Holy See to work in charitable bodies

from the Headquarters to local units. However, the number of Caodaists and volunteers donating to charity activities is much higher.

The Charitable Body's Major Responsibilities

In the Cao Đài Religious Law 1938 the Charitable Body was described as mainly concerned with the development of the social community of Caodaists in the Tây Ninh Province and other localities where Cao Đài followers lived.

As regulated in the Cao Đài Religious Law 1938, the Charitable Body should cater to the needs of the elderly, widows, orphans, and in general all the underprivileged, whether or not they belong to Caodaism. In addition, it should care, both spiritually and materially, for the families of those dignitaries who abandoned their homes to devote themselves entirely to the religious activities of Caodaism (*Đạo Luật Mậu Dần 1938* 1969).

To fulfill its charitable responsibilities, the Charitable Body must have sufficient financial and material means. For this purpose, the Charitable Body petitioned the Cao Đài Sacerdotal Council to be authorized to manage forests and industrial works, the development of agricultural production, and manufacturing and local commercial activities (Minh 2013).

After 1938, when the Charitable Body officially became part of the Cao Đài Religion, its structural organization was well-established and developed, from the local parishes to the headquarters at the Tây Ninh Holy See. In 1970, the Cao Đài Charitable Body managed a total of 108 different business activities throughout Southern Vietnam, including ninety-nine rice paddy fields, three rubber plantations, five handcraft manufacturers, and one shopping center (Huan n.d.). Thousands of hectares of agricultural lands, and thousands of manufacturing units and businesses operated in all provinces and cities in Southern Vietnam, generating large financial resources for charitable activities as well as for the construction of all Cao Đài infrastructures and facilities.

The Charitable Body: Financial Means

Caodaism was established in Tây Ninh Province in a context where the entire economy in Indochina was under the strict control of the French colonial

government, while the great majority of Vietnamese were impoverished (Smith 2009). Therefore, during the first decade after its establishment, the Cao Đài religion had tremendous financial difficulties in constructing worship places and conducting religious activities. Some of the wealthier followers donated most of their fortunes to the construction of the Tây Ninh Great Temple and other Cao Đài temples in more distant localities. Nevertheless, these donations were unstable and limited.

After the Charitable Body was established, the Caodaists turned large forests into agricultural regions, and a variety of manufacturing enterprises emerged, bringing a huge revenue stream. Part of this income was reinvested in new crops and business activities and to cover religious and charitable activities of the local units. The rest was sent to the Tây Ninh Holy See for the construction of its headquarters and other religious facilities in the Cao Đài Holy See Complex.

In addition, Cao Đài followers started to donate foods and necessary materials for the construction of Cao Đài temples and the support of charitable activities, as a way to implement the “three achievements” self-cultivation method (Tam Lập). This method taught the Caodaists about doing the good works in Caodaism and contributing to charitable organizations (Lập Công); upholding the religion’s virtues (Lập Đức); and spreading the word of the Third Amnesty (Lập Ngôn). The Caodaists believe that the more contributions to the Cao Đài religion they make, the more merits they accumulate (Hồng 2003, 309–11).

During the 1930s, there were 105 new Cao Đài Temples built, and a total of 128 Cao Đài parishes throughout Indochina came under the control of the Tây Ninh Holy See. In all 128 parishes, the Charitable Body was well-established as a way of connecting Caodaists together, and linking them with local people of all religions through spiritual, economic, and social activities. A strong network of local Caodaist Charitable Bodies took deep roots in daily lives throughout Indochina, especially in the countryside.

Salvation through Religious and Charitable Activities

The Cao Đài Religion emerged when all of Indochina was under French colonization and administration. Under the harsh administration and exploitative policies of the French government, the gap between the rich and the poor grew increasingly large. The poor in rural regions lost their lands, and became even

more impoverished. They were trapped in an economic crisis, and almost lost hope in life because of their limited options.

The philanthropic activities and the good works of the Caodaists grew in importance among the peasants who struggled economically due to the exploitative policies of the French government in Indochina. The Caodaists improved the peasants' lives, giving them a sense of salvation through religious and charitable activities (My-Van 1996, 181; see Figure 4).



Figure 4. A poor villager's home rebuilt by the Caodaists in Tây Ninh province. Courtesy of Cao Đài Overseas Missionary.

From the 1920s through the 1970s, constant political and armed conflicts amongst different political forces including French colonizers, the Japanese army, Communist forces and other revolutionary groups, nationalist forces, and American troops, left the Vietnamese abandoned and confused. They felt their lives were constantly threatened and disoriented.

Although there is still a debate about the role of the Cao Đài Armed Force during the 1940s and 1950s, it was apparent that it was effective in protecting the religion, the Caodaists, and the people in the communities from brutal and fatal attacks by both the French and revolutionary political forces. In regions controlled by the Cao Đài Armed Force, people felt safe and secure, as their agricultural production and manufacturing activities could continue without being disrupted by armed conflicts and political militias (Fall 1955; Perrin 2011).

After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the general feeling was that the Vietnamese people did not have a bright future, under the new government's

centrally planned economy and closed-door policy. The poor faced a number of spiritual and economic crises as well as annual natural disasters such as floods and droughts, and their lives deteriorated.

In this hopeless situation, Caodaists did their best to help. The Charitable Body and the local Cao Đài Administration Boards together put their resources at the disposal of the dispossessed, particularly peasants in rural areas (Jammes 2016, 251).

Throughout different phases of Vietnamese history, the Cao Đài Charitable Body offered the advantage of being locally organized in each community. The Caodaists knew the affairs of the villages, and cared for them. During the French period, those peasants who had lost their land to French or pro-French landowners found work at the Cao Đài farming and manufacturing activities. They also joined the Caodaist farming groups in clearing the forests and creating new farms for themselves. Those who had lost their houses or were too poor to build a house of their own were helped to build homes by the Charitable Body. In case of natural disasters or accidents, the Caodaists were often the first in the community to assist them mentally and psychologically to overcome their crises.

Due to abundant financial resources from the agriculture, business activities, and donations, all the main events in the community—different celebrations, marriages, funerals, and rites—were taken care of by the Caodaists free of charge. Widows were taken to the nursing homes run by the Caodaists, while homeless children or orphans were cared for in orphanages or adopted by Caodaists. In addition, the Caodaists opened philanthropic clinics and schools. There were more than 20,000 students studying free of charge in schools run by Caodaists in the early 1970s. In each Cao Đài community, the Caodaists reserved a large Caodaism-owned plot of land for burying the dead free of charge (Huan n.d).

The Executive Body of each local Cao Đài temple took care of the spiritual and mental health of each community, while the Caodaists from the local Charitable Body took care of the material lives of the underprivileged people, from cradle to grave.

In present-day Vietnam, there are more than 475 Cao Đài communities of approximately five million Cao Đài followers. And thus, there are about 475 Cao Đài Charitable Bodies operating in parallel to the Executive Body in each locality,

with even a stronger social impact on the community than before. Although a large number of agricultural lands, properties, and business facilities were confiscated by the new government after 1975, charity activities could continue thanks to donations from the community. Cao Đài charitable activities now focus on building homes for the underprivileged and assisting the victims of natural disasters. In the meantime, ritual ceremonies for all life incidents such as engagement, marriage, funerals, and other local cultural events are still conducted by the local Caodaists, keeping Caodaism as part of the traditional culture in each locality.

Conclusion

Sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) believed that religion is mostly about community, and could link people together and generate social cohesion (Durkheim 1912). Religion can also promote principled and consistent behavior, and offer strength to the populace during their transitions and tragedies (Little and McGivern 2014, 473). Caodaism may be viewed as having fulfilled its religious role by bringing about social coherence, and social control as well as meaning and purpose to many Vietnamese.

Caodaism's Executive Body and Charitable Body became, and remain, reliable institutions on which many Vietnamese can lean. While the dignitaries of the Executive Body take care of the people's spirituality, those in the Charitable Body care for their material life.

Traditionally, the Cao Đài Charitable Body was a well-organized institution, with religious ranks equivalent to those in the Executive Body. That a Caodaist achieved a religious rank in the Charitable Body meant that his or her contribution to the religion and the community was appreciated. Spiritually, this accumulation of virtues would be counted as one among different ways to escape the cycle of karma.

A large network of charitable bodies in all communities of the Caodaists helped bring Caodaism closer to the people, making Cao Đài religious activities part of their daily lives and at the same time their daily lives part of the Caodaists' concern and care. The Charitable Works have helped the Caodaists reach their three objectives, "Life Protection, Benevolence, and Universality," and mobilize

a large number of human and financial resources for religious and charitable activities.

The Caodaists live, work, and go through crises together with the community in each city or village where they operate. Therefore, they find it easy to understand what sufferings or difficulties in life the local people meet, and promptly offer support, both spiritually and materially. In addition, even if proselytization is not the aim of the Charitable Body, the dedication, benevolence and enthusiasm brought about by many Caodaists has led many who have encountered their charitable work to convert to the religion, in times of both war and peace.

References

- Blagov, Sergei. 2016. *Cao Dai*. New York: Nova Science, Inc.
- Đạo Luật Mậu Dần 1938* (Religious Law in the year of the Tiger 1938). 1969. Edited by Hội Thánh Cao Đài Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh. Tây Ninh: Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh.
- Durkheim, Émile. 1912. *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie*. Paris: Félix Alcan.
- Fall, Bernard B. 1955. "The Political-Religious Sects of Viet-Nam." *Pacific Affairs* 28(3):235–53.
- Gobron, Gabriel. 1950. *History and Philosophy of Caodaism*. Translated by Pham Xuan Thai. Saigon: Tu Hai.
- Hông, Nguyễn Văn. 1997. "Thánh Giáo—Minh Thiện Đàn 1928–1938" (Divine Messages—Minh Thien Dan 1928–1938). Edited by Tầm Nguyễn. *Daocaodai.info*. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://bit.ly/32nc2NQ>.
- Hông, Nguyễn Văn. 2003. *Bước Đầu Học Đạo: Danh cho Tân tín đồ Cao Đài* (First Steps to Caodaism: Used for Newly Converted Cao Đài Followers). Wiley Park, New South Wales: Thánh Thất New South Wales.
- Huan, Nguyen Ngoc. n.d. "Những đặc điểm chính trong truyền giáo Đạo Cao Đài (Featured Characteristics in Caodaism's Missionary Activities)." *Ban Tôn Giáo Chính Phủ*. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3JdalmY>.
- Jammes, Jérémy. 2016. "Caodaism in Times of War: Spirits of Struggle and Struggle of Spirits." *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31(1):247–94.

- Little, William, and Ron McGivern. 2014. *Introduction to Sociology*. 1st Canadian Edition. Victoria, BC: BCCampus.
- Minh, Thanh. 2013. “Phạm Môn—Minh Thiện—Phước Thiện: Từ Cơ Quan Đến Hội Thánh, Quyển I-II” (Pham Mon—Minh Thien—Work of Charity: From Local Organizations to Central Sacerdotal Council, Book I & II). Edited by Tâm Nguyễn. *Daocaodai.info*. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3H43oCR>.
- My-Van, Tran. 1996. “Japan and Vietnam’s Caodaists: A Wartime Relationship (1939-45).” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27(1): 179–93.
- Nghia, Tran Duy. 1974. *Chánh Trị Đạo* (Religious Administration and Management). Tây Ninh: Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh.
- Perrin, Stephanie. 2011. “Visions of Vietnam. The Nationalism of the Caodai: Religious Sect and Mass Movement.” *History Matters* 4:118–32.
- Smith, Ralph Bernard. 2009. *Pre-Communist Indochina*. Edited by Beryl Williams. London and New York: Routledge.

⊗ The Journal of CESNUR ⊗
