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English 212W

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Christianity in South Korea established a unique voice in the process of westernization. It is not well-known that homosexuality is part of Korean history; for instance, ‘in the later Choson Dynasty (A.D. 1392-1910)...homosexual practices were reported as common among the upper-middle classes as well as the lower classes in rural communities (Kim, 61). As Choson Dynasty deteriorated in the early 1900’s, Korea became modernized from an influx of new ideas, including Christianity. Christian missionaries spread strict evangelical ideas, and they became a foundation of moral values of Christians in modern Korea, including their views on homosexuality. Many Christians in Korea have angrily label homosexuality as ‘a western creation and a western export’ (Armour, 108).

Many articles and polls are observing an increase in tolerance towards homosexuality in Korea. Churches in urban areas such as Seoul are slowly becoming tolerant towards homosexuality; recently, Open Doors Community Church in Seoul added in their website that “we affirm that in the Body of Christ there is no distinction or hierarchy according to racial, ethnic, gender identity, sexual orientation or social identity and economic status”. However, the articles fail to notice that churches in less urban areas in Korea are still very outspoken against LGBT groups. In my research, I will focus on Daegu and responses from Christians toward homosexuality.

Daegu is the 4th largest city in South Korea, and it is considered to be one of the most conservative cities in the country. Citizens of Daegu are born and raised in the city—and

although many people leave the city for education, most people come back to settle down and raise families. The more metropolitan the city is, the more options there are for people to choose a group to belong in. However, options are limited in Daegu since it is much less urbane compared to cities such as Seoul or Busan. Therefore, people tend to form tight communities in their groups of interest. Religion is one of major communities in Daegu.

Focusing on Christianity, most Christian college students in Daegu join a Christian fellowship group on campus. Outside school, college students are very involved in the church. Young adult ministry is mostly run by students; they are given roles to work the cameras, the microphone, or to teach Sunday school. Older members of the congregation are also committed in various communities. The choir and the orchestra meet before service every Sunday for practice. Diverse bible studies are available for the congregation outside the Sunday service. For instance, there are bible studies whose members comprise of a specific type of profession such as professors, which provide grounds for socializing and learning more about the scripture.

However, Daegu is not necessarily secluded compared to rest of the country; there is a U.S. army base in the outskirts of the city, and recently, many more 'foreigners' (non-Koreans) have moved live in Daegu to teach English. The city has been constantly making an effort to be more open. A few years ago, the city spent a lot of money to hold the IAAF World Championships in 2011.

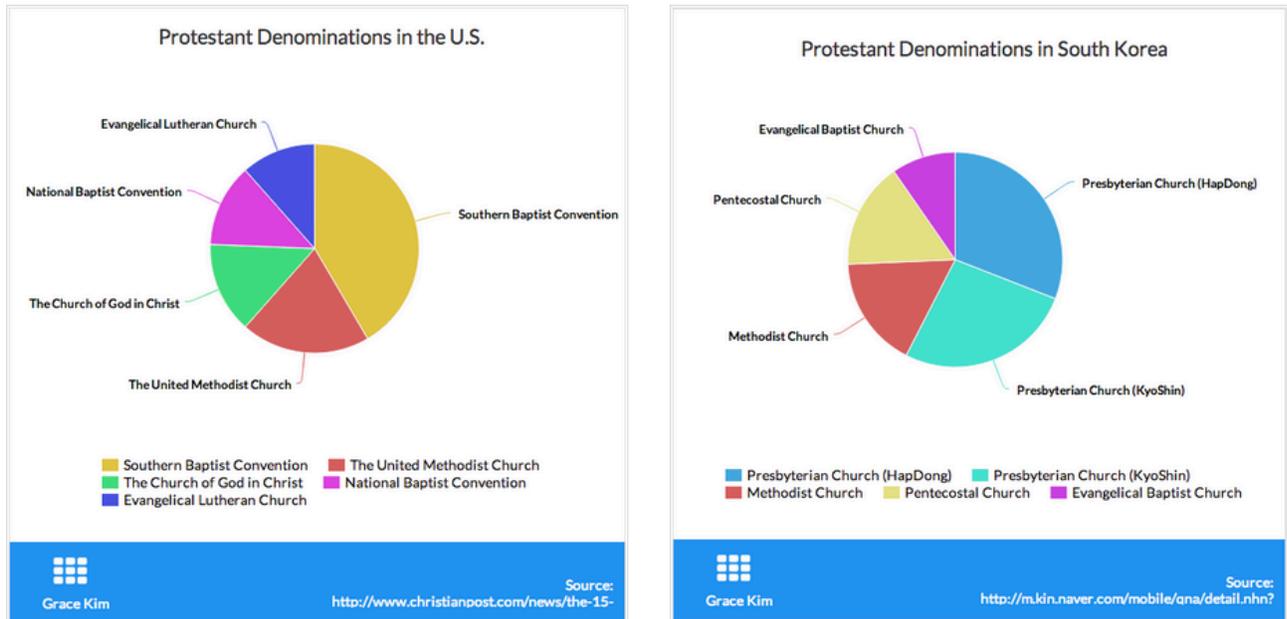
Foreigners are accepted to Daegu because English education has become very popular in Korea in the last few decades. Many non-Koreans from around the world come to Korea to teach English for a few years. The job pays extremely well; once you're hired to a private institution that teaches English, they will most likely pay for your plane tickets and provide housing. Private institutions prefer native speakers of English who is not Asian descent.

I personally have had experience of teaching English in Daegu, and because I am a Korean-American, I taught a different class where a native speaker of English was not necessary. I often interacted with foreign teachers in the office, where I noticed a unique behavior among them. There were many people in the office who identified themselves as part of LGBT group; two female teachers who sat next to me, as a matter of fact, were in a relationship and they have been living together for almost a year. None of the Korean teachers knew about the relationship, and their relationship seemed very platonic. Although foreigners are not discriminated due to sexual orientation when hired, they are expected to not show display of affection nor talk about their sexual orientation in public, especially at work.

Similar ambiance is observed in English services for 'foreigners' in churches. The English service is almost an extension of private institutions. Most of the congregation is foreigners who are staying in Daegu short term. The service is usually available in big churches, as they are active in accepting congregation of all race and ethnicity. Sermons tend to be different from that of Korean service; the sermons in the English service tend to avoid talking about social issues such as homosexuality, and they were focused on neutral and fundamental biblical ideas. The members of English service are active in hosting various events, such as Korean BBQ night or rock climbing. Like private educational institutions, issue of homosexuality is never mentioned and at the same time, no one judges each other based on sexual orientation.

In Daegu and rest of the South Korea, Presbyterian Church is considered to be a major conservative denomination. Presbyterian church in South Korea is comparable to Southern Baptist church in the United States. It is the largest denomination in the country, and well known for its conservative views that are based on fundamental Christian values. With 16.2 million

members in Southern Baptist church and 3.5 million members in Presbyterian churches in South Korea, both denominations are opposed to gay marriage/homosexuality.



Southern Baptist churches in the United States are openly outspoken against homosexuality. In the official website of Southern Baptist Convention, the church issues an official statement that redemption that is available to sinners is also available to homosexuals. Moreover, many pastors of Baptist churches are 'kicked out' from the Convention because they decided to accept homosexuals and preach equal rights/love. For instance, the Southern Baptist Convention has recently announced to cut ties with New Heart Church in California, which has decided to pick the 'third way' in addressing homosexuality. 'Third way' refers to a situation where the members of congregation accept homosexuals into the church and do not judge based on sexual orientation.

Similarly, Presbyterian churches in Korea are also very outspoken against homosexuality. Two years ago, all Korean churches including Presbyterian churches were opposed against Lady

Gaga's concert in Seoul. They criticized Lady Gaga as a symbol of homosexuality and satanic worship, and that letting her perform in Korea will have a negative influence on Korean teenagers. They argued that for the good of the youths of Korea and to protect the Korean culture, Lady Gaga should not be allowed to perform.

From researching anonymous online responses of members of both types of churches concerning homosexuality, I learned that there was a difference between degrees of tolerance that existed among Christians of different denominations. For instance, while many members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SPC) forum asserted 'tough love' where the church takes a firm stance against homosexuality, it was not difficult to find few members of the SPC who took a more tolerant stance towards homosexuality. Such members wrote that perhaps homosexual orientation may be forgiven, but homosexual behavior is sinful and must be overcome with firm faith in Christianity. Some other people invoked the idea of 'homosexuality gene', and that one should not immediately judge homosexuals with hostility but rather with tolerant and forgiving attitude.

However, responses from Korean Christians online were not as diverse as forums of SPC. There were significantly less Christians online who expressed tolerance towards homosexuality. The few questions/assertions by Christians who did not consider homosexuality was a sin tended to be young, usually in late teens or early twenties. Those who commented on such claims/ideas utilized biblical passages to strongly advocate the sinful nature of homosexuality. The responses seemed to come from members of congregation in the country who were in their middle ages and who have been involved in the church for decades. Interestingly, almost all of the commenters who supported gay rights were non-Christians.

I did find one outlier to this data concerning Korean Christians. I found a blog named: 'A Happy Lesbian who believes in Jesus'. She had recently moved to Daegu, and was looking into various churches. She described her experience in one of the Presbyterian churches in Korea; she was surprised by how authoritative the pastor was and a large choir that she only saw in TV. She had initially wanted to participate in bible studies where she could freely talk about her sexual orientation, but she felt that it would be hard to come out in such an ambiance. She was also scared of being kicked out of the church, and of slanders that she will receive from other members of the church. She seemed conflicted between coming out with pride in her sexual orientation and not coming out to avoiding judgment from the congregation.

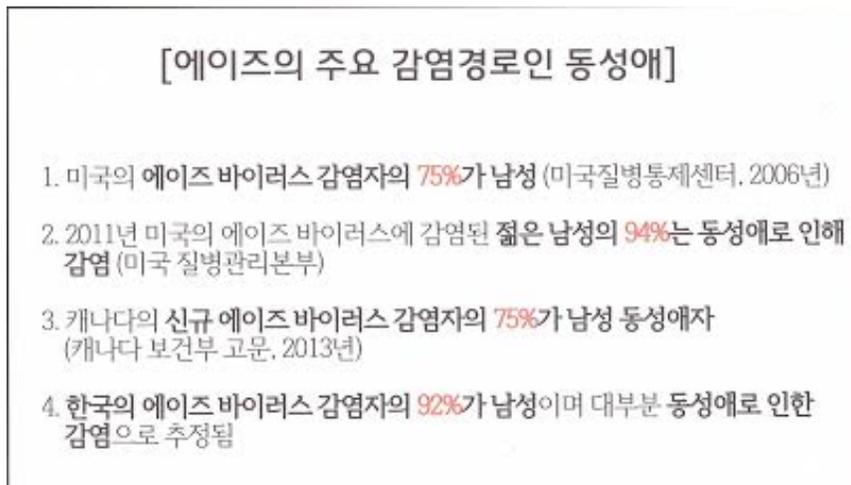
Synonymous with results of research online, the clergy of Korean Presbyterian Churches is very outspoken against homosexuality, and they use persuasive and melodramatic rhetoric to convince their congregation to denounce homosexuality in light of KQCF (Korea Queer Culture Festival) that would take place in various parts of the country, including Daegu for the first time. These are the claims made by pastors in Presbyterian churches in Daegu:

1. Homosexuality will affect the economy.
2. Homosexuality defies fundamental Christian values.
3. Homosexuality is disrespectful.

The first claim states that homosexuality will impact the economy. The church immediately associates homosexuality with AIDS as a result of moral depravity. Economically, they claim that tolerance of homosexuality will lead to increase in number of people infected by AIDS. Because majority of health care fees are paid for by the government (ultimately tax money), they estimate that rise in number of people infected by AIDS will also increase government spending in health care-ultimately forcing Korean citizens to pay more taxes.

The second claim states that homosexuality defies fundamental Christian values because it is a sin and a disease. Pastors often make an argument that heterosexuality is what is truthful by the scripture. Therefore, homosexuality goes against what is written in the bible, in both old and new testament, and 'committing' homosexual acts is going against God's will. In the Old Testament, it is written: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." (Leviticus 18:22) "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their heads." (Leviticus 20:13) These passages are often invoked by the church; however, there is a unique context that must be considered when Leviticus was written. Scholars believe that when Leviticus was written, Israelites were living as nomads after the Exodus, and was roaming around the desert for the Promised Land. Without a proper prison system, a strict rule was necessary to maintain order. Others speculate that homosexuality was associated to pagan tribes, and it was a way to order Israelites to worship only the Jehovah. Similarly, In 1Corinthians, Paul gives instructions concerning sexual immorality-"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men....will inherit the Kingdom of God." (1Corinthians 6:9-10) Many scholars have studied and consistently found that the early church was 'hostile to all forms of sexual pleasure, including homosexuality' (Greenberg, 523). After the disintegration of Roman Empire, Europe was slowly moving towards asceticism. Clergy was horrified at all forms of sexuality, and some even wrote that married people were doomed. In such an environment, it may be argued that Paul's condemnation of homosexuality is almost natural.

Moreover, the church is willing to help homosexuals who wish to ‘heal’ from homosexuality. Pastors are willing to provide help and education, so they can start a ‘healthier and normal’ life where they are committed to a relationship with the opposite sex. But what is ‘normal and healthy’? The church speculates that heterosexuality will rid of major societal problems such as AIDS. These are statistics available online and often cited both by the church and many other groups that are opposed to homosexuality.



They are translated:

- 1) 75% of people infected with HIV in the United States are men.
- 2) Of all the men in the United States who are infected with HIV in 2011, 94% of them are infected from homosexual relations.
- 3) 75% of newly infected HIV patients in Canada are male homosexuals.
- 4) 92% of HIV patients in Korea are men, and most of them estimated to have become infected through homosexual relations.

There is one inherent logical flaw to these claims: none of these studies mention women. Women

are also at risk of being infected with HIV by being in a relationship with men who are infected with HIV. By shunning gay relationship between men, men are more likely to keep their sexual orientation a secret while they are committed to a relationship with women, thereby infecting women. HIV is a threat to both genders, through both homosexuality and heterosexuality, and this fact must be addressed by the church.

The last claim states that homosexuality is a disrespectful culture. This argument was fueled by Korea Queer Culture Festival (KQCF), which was to take place 6 months after a national tragedy, Sewol ferry disaster. The country was still shaken up by the incident, and a commemoration event for victims and families of victims were to be held while a parade for the KQCF would be held on the other side of Seoul. Many citizens of Seoul, especially the church, accused LGBT people for being disrespectful to families involved in the tragedy, and described the participants in the festival to be insensitive and selfish people. Moreover, the church criticized the city of Seoul for letting the 'panty parade' take place in the streets of Seoul. The Korea Queer Culture Festival (KQCF) is a festival that celebrates LGBT rights. The pride parade is always a big part of the festival, participated by both Koreans and foreigners. The KQCF of 2014 was different compared to previous festivals. For the first time, the festival was supported by Google. However, many Korean citizens and conservative Christians became very vocal about their opposition to the festival due to recent Sewol disaster. Sewol Ferry Disaster was a very tragic event that involved deaths of hundreds of middle school students. The ferry started to sink on its way to Jeju Island, and the captain told the students to wait for his signal to abandon ship and immediately left the scene with his crews. Waiting for a signal that never came, many students drowned as the ship continued to tilt towards the water and trapped them. Only 172 students were saved by commercial ships. The whole country was stricken with grief,

and the incident caused a political and societal upheaval in Korea. The Korean government did not ban the festival, but they also did not ban protesting that would be held during the festival. During the festival, any people protested and appealed to the emotions of rest of the public by dressing in mourning among the crowd.

Lastly, the annual Korea Queer Culture Festival (KQCF) was met with opposition from both the church and the citizens of Korea. During the parade, negative emotions that lingered among protestors manifested in outbursts of violence. For instance, an old man saw two foreign girls kissing and tried to stop them. When they didn't, he slapped them. A middle aged man dressed as a bishop walked into the parade and slapped the drums out of someone's hands.

I read articles in current literature to learn more about group emotions, and surprisingly, little research exists on effects of anger in a community/group. On an individual level, anger blinds people to 'see themselves as exceptional, more capable and insightful, and less biased than others' (Pettigrove, 363). In general, negative emotions influence group dynamics; in a study of students working toward a group project, 'mean group envy had a negative influence on group cohesiveness and group potency' (Barsade, 120). Both articles suggest that more and specific research needs to be conducted to learn about effects of negative emotions in certain groups. From these results, I can only extrapolate the long-term effects of hostility and anger shown among Christians during the KQCF. I speculate that it may end up being a dividing force between members of the congregation. Polarization will occur; devoted members will firmly advocate evils of homosexuality, while people who support tolerance will become more active in promoting their beliefs. Both groups will be strongly adhered to their own beliefs, leaving little room for compromise or conversation.

What can we do to resolve the conflict in churches of Daegu? I believe open discussion of the issue is necessary before extreme polarization of perspectives occur. Churches already tend to dehumanize homosexuals as morally depraved people who are ridden with diseases such as HIV. Moreover, the congregation is easily shielded from 'evil homosexuals' by a tight community, and is prone to trusting the authoritarian voice of the clergy.

Therefore, I believe Presbyterian churches in Daegu should work towards accepting 'the Third Way'. It is a unique concept of accepting all people regardless of their sexual orientation despite differences on issues such as gay marriage, and focus on unity in faith rather than differences in beliefs. Although it is a relatively new idea, more churches in the Southern Baptist Convention are starting to incorporate the policy. It would be a step towards re-humanizing homosexuals.

Citations

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