

Religion and Happiness in Korean Higher Education

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<Abstract>

The purpose of this study is to examine the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education. To review this paper logically, three research questions are addressed. First, is religion able to provide happiness for people? Second, what is the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education? Last, what are the implications of religion for happiness education in South Korean universities? In order to defend these questions, a descriptive content analysis method will be utilized with a cross cultural approach. As for the limitations of this study, religion is limited to four major religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, which historically influencing Korean society and culture. In particular, the study is focused on The Great Learning in Confucian Classics, Dhammapada in Buddhist Sutras, Tao Te Ching in Taoist Sutras, and the Proverbs in the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. Additionally, education is mainly centered on South Korean higher education. The significance of this study is to provide not only basic theories but also useful resources regarding happiness education related to religion for educational theorists and practitioners. One of research results is that Buddhism and Christianity in contemporary Korea as two major religions not only have contributed to Korean society and culture, but have led Korean private tertiary institutions. In addition, Korean elite/higher education on the basis of religion has been a significant means to come up to the way of happiness as well as to open the door of social success.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education. To discuss the paper logically, three research questions are addressed. First, is religion able to provide happiness for people? Second, what is the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education? Third, what are the implications of religion for happiness education in South Korean universities? In order to defend the three questions, a descriptive content analysis method will be utilized with a cross cultural approach. As for the limitations of this study, religion is limited to four major religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, which historically influencing Korean society and culture. In particular, the study is focused on The Great Learning in Confucian Classics, Dhammapada in Buddhist Sutras, Tao Te Ching in Taoist Sutras, and the Proverbs in the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. In addition, education is mainly centered on South Korean higher education. The significance of this study is to provide not merely basic theories but also useful resources regarding happiness education related to religion for higher education theorists and administrators.

A good many of studies related to religion and happiness have been researched by numerous theorists and scholars (Diener & Myers, 2011; Golmakani, Rexael, & Mazloum, 2018; Kashdan, 2015; Lee, 2017a; 2017b; 2018b; Marshall; 2019; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Ngamaba, 2018; Ritschel, 2019; United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, 2019). Most of these studies show that religion is a significant determinant or factor of happiness, and that religious people are typically happier than people who either do not practice a religious life or do not have any religion.

In addition, a number of studies concerned with higher education and happiness have been researched by numerous theorists and scientists (Chen, 2012; Crowford, 2017; Cunado & Gracia, 2012; Elwick & Cannizzaro, 2017; Flynn & MacLeod, 2015; Gibbs, 2014; 2017; Hartog & Oosterbeek, 1998; Jongbloed, 2018; Lee, 2009a; 2009b; 2011; 2012; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2018a; 2018b; Seligman & Adler,

2019; Wolff, 2019). Most of these researchers found that higher education as a significant determinant had influence on happiness or better life.

As shown in the majority of these studies, both religion and higher education are shown as significant determinants or factors of happiness. According to the results, religion was directly correlated with happiness, and there was a significant relationship between religion and happiness. Most of them were researched the relationship between religion or higher education and happiness from the Westerners' viewpoints. However, this paper as a contribution to the field of "happiness" research will explore the relevance between religion and happiness from the angles of several major religions, and from the standpoint of Korean higher education

II. Religion and Happiness

Is religion able to provide happiness for people? In the history of human culture, religion and happiness have been an inseparable relationship. The former has been regarded as an essential means for seeking and keeping the peace of human spirituality or mentality, while the latter has been considered as an ultimate goal for pursuing and possessing the comfort of the mental or physical world. Religion in the history of the world has been a core factor to enhance the spiritual world religiously and ethically as well as an important tool to dedicate the pragmatic world practically and educationally. From a religious standpoint, the concept of happiness has been differently defined according to each religion.

In the Confucian Classics, the terminology of happiness is not clearly shown in the texts, but the utmost moral good is the closer meaning of happiness. The Great Learning, one of Confucian Classics, emphasizes the values of moral self-cultivation and family concordance to establish a virtuous person, a harmonious society, and a righteous nation as the following:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy (The Great Learning, Ch. 2, trans. James Legge).

In spite of unclear illustration about happiness in the Confucian Classics, two major factors, self-cultivation and social success, have been esteemed as the way of happiness. With a family concordance, the former has been a fundamental value to achieve a virtuous man, a harmonious society, and a righteous nation, while the latter has been a significant value of filial piety as well as education in the history of Korea.

In the Buddhist Sutras, happiness is a core theme of Buddhist teaching, and is only achieved by conquering *tanha* (all forms of desire, craving, thirst, wanting, and yearning), such as life or death, fame or infamy, material or mental, physical or metaphysical, and biological or emotional (DN 15, Thanissaro, trans., 1997a; Lee, 2009a; 2017b). Nirvana (*Nibbana*) as happiness is emancipation and freedom for human beings from all forms, and is able to become possible through indwelling Buddha Nature in all beings, and being rid of the delusion of ego (SN 56.11, Bodhi, trans., 2000; Lee, 2016, 2017b).

Buddha (6th century B.C.) describes happiness (*sukhavagga*) in Dhammapada, Canto XV (197-204) as the following:

197. *Happy indeed we live, friendly amidst the hostile. Amidst hostile men we dwell free from hatred.*

198. *Happy indeed we live, friendly amidst the afflicted (by craving). Amidst afflicted men we dwell free from affliction.*

199. *Happy indeed we live, free from avarice amidst the avaricious. Amidst the avaricious men we dwell free from avarice.*

200. *Happy indeed we live, we who possess nothing. Feeders on joy we shall be, like the Radiant Gods.*

201. *Victory begets enmity; the defeated dwell in pain. Happily the peaceful live, discarding both victory and defeat.*

202. *There is no fire like lust and no crime like hatred. There is no ill like the aggregates (of existence) and no bliss higher than the peace (of Nibbana).*

203. *Hunger is the worst disease, conditioned things the worst suffering. Knowing this as it really is, the wise realize Nibbana, the highest bliss.*

204. *Health is the most precious gain and contentment the greatest wealth. A trustworthy person is the best kinsman, Nibbana the highest bliss.*

-Buddharakkhita (trans.,1996), Dhammapada-

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.intro.budd.html>.

Happiness (*sukhavagga*) in Dhammapada, the succinct expression of the Buddha's teaching, is related to three major aims: human welfare in this life, a favorable rebirth in the next life, and the attainment of the ultimate good (Bodhi, 2000; Lee, 2016; Lee, 2017b).

In the Taoist Sutras, happiness is the achievement state of the Way (*Tao*) and virtue (*Te*) (Lee, 2016; 2017b). In Tao Te Ching, "*Tao*" and "*Te*" are significant happiness concepts and principles in Laozi's happiness theory. "*Tao*" has variously complex meanings, and is considered as 'a spiritual state of cultivated mind', or 'harmony and happiness', whereas "*Te*" is viewed as *Tao's* inner nature virtue that is the active living or cultivation of the *Tao* (Bodde & Fung, 1997; LaFargue, 1992; Lee, 2016; Marinoff, 2014; Maspero, 1981). The Tao Te Ching highlights "doing nothing" and "nature". Laozi (6th-5th Century B.C.) illustrates the way of pursuing the *Tao* in the Tao Te Ching as follows:

In Chapter 48: Doing Nothing; Pursuing the Tao

He who devotes himself to learning (seeks) from day to day to increase (this knowledge); he who devotes himself to the Tao (seeks) from day to day to diminish (this doing). He diminished it and again diminishes it, till he arrives at doing nothing (on purpose). Having arrived at this point of non-action, there is nothing which he does not do (trans. James Legge).

In Chapter 81: The Way of Heaven

Sincere words are not fine; fine words are not sincere. Those who are skilled (in the Tao) do not dispute (about it)... The more that he gives to others, the more does he have himself. With all the sharpness of the Way of Heaven, it injures not; with all the doing in the way of the sage he does not strive (trans. James Legge).

The Tao Te Ching emphasizes that a human being is the fundamental of cosmos, and that anyone should live in sympathy with nature according to the natural law to achieve the "Tao" (Lee, 2016; Lee, 2017a).

In the Christian Bible, happiness, as the ultimate end of human beings, is able to come from a close relationship with God and from following the teaching of Jesus Christ (Lee, 2012). The Proverbs in terms of happiness shows not only the instruction of religious and daily life, but the precious wisdom as the main principle of happiness (Lee, 2017a). The Proverbs points out if anyone follows and practices this instruction and wisdom, everyone can be ensured success and happiness in one's life. In particular, to seek wisdom is the essence and goal of religious or worldly life. In brief, the essential principle of happiness in the Proverbs is to fear God as well as to seek wisdom in God.

Several verses of the Proverbs in the Old Testament show the principle of happiness as follows (<https://biblehub.com/erv/>):

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding....Length of days is in her right had; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths

are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her (Prov. 3:13; 3:16-18).

Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors (Prov. 8: 32-34).

Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief (Prov. 28: 14).

As the author reviewed in this paper, happiness has been a main theme in various major religions. Each religion has different concepts and principles regarding happiness, according to various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the major religions have pursued happiness as an ultimate goal of human beings in the aspects of theology, philosophy, ethics, or anthropology.

III. Religion and Happiness: The Aspect of Korean Higher Education

The relevance between religion and happiness is closely related to the life of human beings. In this vein, happiness has been a major theme in terms of education and religion. Both are significant factors that take imperfect humans closer to perfection and meaningful beings between the spiritual and the practical worlds.

In the history of Korea, Buddhism and Confucianism in the early era were two major religions which dominated Korean society and culture. Elite educational institutes in the old era had been carried out dichotomously: one was related to Buddhist institutions which cultivated the elite monks who espoused Buddhist dogmata not only to establish an aristocratic nation controlled by Buddhist rulers but also to disseminate Buddhism as a national religion (Lee, 2002b, p. 53), while the other was related to Confucian elite institutions which fostered future statecrafts

or bureaucratic scholars who learned Confucian teaching and Chinese classics to settle Confucian moral values and political systems (Lee, 1998, p. 44).

For instance, the *Hwarang*, as a kind of social, military, and educational institute or group for the elite Silla youth, in the Silla Kingdom period (57 BC - AD 935) was trained in Buddhist doctrines, Confucian values, Taoist philosophy, Silla's folk belief, and military techniques (Lee, 1998, p. 41). Buddhist teaching and dogmata based on Buddhist Sutras provided a true way of salvation or happiness as well as ethical and political guidance to the Korean people in the old age. In addition, Confucian teaching based on the Confucian Classics stressed Confucian moral ethics not merely to make a man of perfect virtue but also to establish political ethics to support and obey royalty.

Buddhism had a great impact on the Koreans in the ancient age religiously, culturally, and socially. Confucianism has also dominated Korean culture ethically, spiritually, and practically in the pre-modern period. From the beginning of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), Confucianism was a national cult and ideology to cultivate bureaucrats to lead the people and to edify those who can follow Confucian ethics and values (Lee, 1998, p. 49). Confucianism in the Choson Dynasty was a golden rule as a national religion. Thus, Confucian education based on the Chinese Classics was a main axis. *Seongkyunkwan*, as a national Confucian Academy or the highest national Confucian institute, defended on the *Kwa-keo* system, that is, the examinations for selecting the civil and the military services. In the Choson period, the *Seongkyunkwan* was a main pillar, and the *Kwakeo* system was a backbone of Confucian education (Lee, 1998, p. 56).

Elite or higher education in the pre-modern era has been a valuable means or an effective tool to become a leader as well as to obtain social success, with amplifying one's name famous (Lee, 2017c). Social success has been regarded as an important value or element of happiness in the traditional Korean society. In other words, Koreans have generally esteemed social success to be a way of happiness as well as to be a ladder of improving their social position. Furthermore, social success has been not merely the final goal of education but also the end of filial piety (Lee, 2018b).

In the Choson Dynasty era, Confucianism was a traditional key institution, but Christianity was integrated into the traditional religions after the 18th century (Lee, 2002a). Although Roman Catholic mission activity started in the early 17th century, it was officially persecuted several times for approximately 100 years because of disharmony with Confucian principles and norms (Lee, 2002a). On the other hand, the foreign evangelical Protestant missionaries began their mission in 1884, but Protestantism attempted to harmonize with Confucian sociopolitical ideologies and traditional Korean religious culture, with embracing the lower classes and commoners (Lee, 2002b, pp. 54-55). Christian missionaries mainly stressed medical and educational missions to disseminate Christianity to the Korean people. In addition, Christianity gradually adopted not merely Koreans' superstitious and secular elements, but planted Christian humanism and western knowledge.

In the educational history of pre-modern Korea, elite education on the basis of Buddhism and Confucianism had been monopolized by the upper class, while Christian education was welcomed by the Korean populace who had intense aspiration toward education, especially commoners, women, and the lower class people (Lee, 2002b). Buddhism and Confucianism as primary or secondary institutions planted ethical and religious moralism as well as greatly contributed to Korean elite/higher education in the pre-modern era, whereas Christianity as a new adopted religious and cultural mediator planted egalitarianism and democracy as well as rendered great services to post-secondary education in modern Korea.

In contemporary Korean society, Confucianism and Taoism have not become main educational institutions in higher education, but impressed on Koreans social custom and moral code as major cultural factors. On the other hand, Buddhism and Christianity as two major religions not only have contributed to Korean society and culture, but have led the private tertiary institutions (Lee, 2002b). In the history of Korea, elite/higher education on the basis of religion has been a significant means to come up to the way of happiness as well as to open the door of social success.

IV. The Implications of Religion for Happiness Education in South Korean Universities

Religion and higher education have been proved as important factors or significant determinants in numerous happiness studies. In Korea, as mentioned in the above chapter, education has traditionally been regarded as an important means to access the path of social success as well as to open the door of happiness.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, both Korean Christianity and higher education have greatly expanded with the development of modern politics and economics (Lee, 2002b). South Korea as a democratic country is holding the 11th position in the world by nominal GDP as of 2018 (Statistics Times, 2018). According to the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking, South Korea was 0.903 HDI value points in 2018, leaving it in 22nd place among 189 countries published, and it was 12.1 mean years of schooling and 16.5 expected years of schooling (UNDP, HDR, 2019).

Based on the result of “2015 Population and Housing Census in Korea” (Statistics Korea, 2016), the rate of religious people comprising the total Korean population (about 49,710,000 persons) was 43.9% (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2018, p. 5). The Condition of Religion in Korea (2018) shows that three major religions--Buddhism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism—have occupied 98.3% of the total number of Korean religious people (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2018, p. 5). As of November 1, 2015, Buddhists were 7,619,332 persons (15.3% of the Korean population), Protestants 9,675,761 (19.5%), and Roman Catholics 3,890,311 (7.8%) (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, The Condition of Religion in Korea 2018, p. 85).

According to The Condition of Religion in Korea (2018) and The Statistical Yearbook of Education (Ministry of Education & KEDI, 2018), there were 145 religious-founded schools among 431 higher education institutions in 2015: 10 Buddhist, 109 Protestant, 15 Roman Catholic, and 11 others (including 5 Won-Buddhist). Among 124 Christian-founded institutions, 109 schools were Protestant-founded (87.9 %): 61 universities or colleges, 23 junior colleges, 23 graduate schools, 2 miscellaneous schools; and 15 Roman Catholic-founded (12.1%): 14

universities or colleges and 1 junior college. In 2015, Christian-founded tertiary education institutions were 28.8 percent of all formal higher education schools, and were 85.5 percent of all religious-founded tertiary institutions. On the other hand, 10 Buddhist related tertiary schools -- 5 universities or colleges, 3 graduate schools, and 2 virtual universities-- were 6.9 percent of all religious-founded institutions, and 2.3 percent of all formal higher education institutions.

As reviewed in this paper, religion has played an important role in the development of modern higher education. Christianity and Buddhism are two representative religions in contemporary Korean society and lead private Korean higher education (Lee, 2002a; Lee, 2002b). The role of religion is undeniable as an essential mediator for the development of national economy and higher education in contemporary Korea.

In the aspect of happiness education, Korean public tertiary institutions have not offered their students the exclusive curricula of happiness education and spiritual development related to specific religion. In addition, both subjects are not actively understudied topics in Korean public higher education. Although Korea is a multi-religious country, it has a mono-ethnic background. Korean post-secondary institutions have pursued the ‘Teaching or Research Excellence Framework’ (Wolff, 2019). However, neither do they design the ‘Research Happiness Framework’ nor the ‘Teaching Happiness Framework’.

According to the result of World Happiness Report 2019, the Ranking & Index of World Happiness 2016-2018 is as the following: three East Asian countries, South Korea (54th, 5.895), Japan (58th, 5.886), and China (93rd, 5.191); and two North American countries, Canada (9th, 7.278) and the United States (19th, 6.892). “The World Happiness Report is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness that ranks 156 countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be” (<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019>). The World Happiness Report 2019 indicates that Korea is not a high level happiness country in spite of maintaining a higher educational level and a religious inclination. If higher education and religion are regarded as important factors to access the path of happiness, Korean higher education institutions need to design the Research Happiness Framework as well as

the Teaching Happiness Framework to enhance the level of happiness and religious spirituality.

Then, what are the implications of religion for happiness education in South Korean universities? The findings of several studies (Kashdan, 2015; Marshall, 2019; Wolff, 2019) showed that happiness had a significant relationship with religious activities and spiritual intelligence. Thus, higher education practitioners and administrators, especially in religious affiliation institutions, should improve euphoria for the college or university students by designing happiness oriented curricula with the aim of promoting spiritual intelligence and religious activity.

For instance, the religious tertiary institutions can provide online courses like ‘the Science of Happiness’ from the University of California Berkeley which promise to use the knowledge of modern science to teach university students how to be happier (Crawford, 2017). In addition, the religious affiliation colleges and universities can offer their students happiness teaching and religious activity as well as activate the field of happiness research. The results of a number of studies (Bowman & Small, 2010; Crawford, 2017; Elwick & Cannizzaro, 2017; Gibbs, 2017; Jongbloed, 2018) revealed that higher education was positively correlated with happiness. Furthermore, as Wolff points out, religious activity can be accompanied with higher happiness and educational achievement, while happiness teaching and research can revitalize the higher education sector clear to be happier (Wolff, 2019).

Although each student is able to have individual difference in religious faith and spiritual development, administrators and practitioners in the religious colleges and universities would be good to offer their students various opportunities to access religious participation and activities. These experiences can be helpful to enjoy a good life as well as to develop spiritual intelligence for their future life. Furthermore, the experiences can be ultimately opened the door of happiness.

With opening the 4th Industrial Revolution era accompanied by emerging megatrends technology and new intelligence, the field of higher education needs to think strategically regarding technology and method to use their experience and

innovation to offer new services (Mezied, 2018). Moreover, higher education leadership should put an emphasis on ethical and moral education not only to cope with newly disruptive change, but to manage various socio-ethical issues or risks happening in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era (Lee, 2017d).

Therefore, Korean higher education needs the implications of religion for happiness education. In particular, educational policy makers and administrators in Korean private higher education can preferentially design the ‘Research Happiness Framework’ and the ‘Teaching Happiness Framework’ as well as consider what the significant factors and norms for building happiness and religious intelligence. They can do much to help boost students’ well-being and life satisfaction, with providing various “happiness curricula” and “religious development programs” for their students.

V. Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education. To review the study logically, three research questions are addressed. First, is religion able to provide happiness for people? Second, what is the relevance between religion and happiness in the aspect of Korean higher education? Third, what are the implications of religion for happiness education in South Korean universities? The questions were defended through a descriptive content analysis method, with a cross cultural approach.

The research results of this paper are as the following:

First, as the author reviewed in this paper, happiness has been a main theme in the four major religions. Each religion has different concepts and principles regarding happiness, according to various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the major religions have own dogmata to pursue happiness as an ultimate goal of human beings in the various aspects such as theology, philosophy, ethics, or anthropology.

Second, in the history of Korean culture, Buddhism and Confucianism as primary or secondary institutions planted ethical and religious moralism as well as

greatly contributed to Korean elite/higher education in the pre-modern era, whereas Christianity as a new adopted religious and cultural mediator planted egalitarianism and democracy as well as rendered great services to post-secondary education in modern Korea. Confucianism and Taoism in contemporary Korean society have not become main educational institutions in higher education, but impressed on Koreans social custom and moral code as major cultural factors. In contemporary Korea, however, Buddhism and Christianity as two major religions not only have contributed to Korean society and culture, but have led Korean private tertiary institutions (Lee, 2002b). In the history of Korea, elite/higher education on the basis of religion has been a significant means to come up to the way of happiness as well as to open the door of social success.

Third, educational policy makers and administrators in Korean private higher education can preferentially design the ‘Research Happiness Framework’ and the ‘Teaching Happiness Framework’ as well as carefully consider what the significant factors and norms for building happiness and religious intelligence. They can do much to help boost students’ well-being and life satisfaction, with providing various “happiness curricula” and “religious development programs” for their students. In addition, Korean higher education leadership should put an emphasis on ethical and moral education not only to cope with disruptive change, but to manage various socio-ethical issues or risks happening in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era (Lee, 2017d).

In conclusion, based on the results of this paper, the author of the study strongly suggests that Korean colleges and universities should design the ‘Research & Teaching Happiness Framework’ under the name of ‘religious education’ or ‘happiness education’ to develop religious intelligence and happiness. Additionally, in order to build a happy life, a harmonious society, a righteous country, and a peaceful world, policy makers and practitioners in Korean higher education should strengthen ‘happiness education’ or ‘religious education’.

For future research, it is recommended that cross-cultural research be undertaken to explore the merits and demerits of religious education and happiness education in the sector of higher education with various research methodology. Finally, the

author asserts that the emerging megatrends technology and new intelligence of the 4th Industrial Revolution era may be seriously impoverished or threatened human beings unless we strengthen religious intelligence and human happiness, with building a morally healthy individual and society.

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