

"Unbroken Darkness"

Christian Missionary Conceptions of Blindness in Early 20th
Century Korea

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore Christian missionary conceptions of blindness in early 20th century Korea. This period of history is characterized by drastic changes to Korean society due to an increase in external influences on the peninsula, changes which also affected the social position and perception of blind people. Christian missionaries played a central role in the changes to the lives of these blind people, which is why this thesis aims to highlight missionary conceptions of blindness in Korea. To accomplish this, some tools from critical discourse analysis are used to examine how blindness is conceptualized within several texts from Protestant missionary publications, using a disability studies framework to analyse the texts. The analysis showcases the religious imagery and religious conceptions of blindness present in the texts, how these interact with medical conceptions, and distinctions in the portrayal of blind people between the different texts.

Keywords: Christian missionaries, blindness, blind diviners, Korea, disability, disability studies, critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

Korea experienced many changes in the late 19th century and early 20th century. With an increasing amount of influence from outside actors, Korea was affected by several wars between these outside forces fighting over control of the peninsula, which culminated in the Japanese annexation of 1910. However, Christian missionaries had already established themselves on the peninsula before the Japanese colonial government's arrival. These Christian missionaries were naturally interested in spreading Christianity but were also involved in educational and medical missionary work. One of the targets of this missionary work was blind people, who engaged in fortune-telling as one of their primary occupations before the Christian missionaries' arrival.

Fortune-telling has long been a practice engaged in by blind diviners in Korea, and although their numbers are shrinking, they have received some attention from South Korean researchers. These researchers have primarily focused on the cultural and historical value of blind diviners, as well as their place in contemporary society (ex. Im 1987, Kim 2008, Pak and Chŏng 2019, Son 1948). Although research on this topic is available in Korean, when looking outside of Korea, this is not a well-discussed topic, and very little research is available in English. However, one group who did write about blind diviners in English was the Christian missionaries active in Korea in the early 20th century.

The meeting between these blind diviners and Christian missionaries is at the centre of this thesis, as it is a point of drastic change in the social position and everyday life of many blind people in Korea (see Appelgren 2021). Previous research into the role Christian missionaries had in this change does exist, with some discussion of the attitudes towards these blind people (Chu 2008, 2020, Kim 2009, Oak 2010), but less attention has been paid to how this relates to

the particular ways in which these Christian missionaries understood and conceptualized blindness.

1.1. Aims and purpose

This thesis aims to use textual analysis to examine the Christian missionary narratives constructed around blind people, and what the portrayal of these blind people says about the way the Christian missionaries conceptualized blindness. To gain an understanding of the dominant conceptions of blindness amongst these missionaries, this thesis will focus on Protestant missionaries, who made up the majority of the missionaries in Korea during this time period. The questions that will be examined in this thesis are:

- How did Protestant missionaries in early 20th century Korea conceptualize blindness?
- Are there any distinctions in these conceptions based on denomination and when the texts were published?

The purpose behind these questions is to examine the shifting and sometimes contradictory ideas that often surround disability and gain a better understanding of the underlying factors behind the Christian missionaries' treatment of blind people during the early 20th century in Korea. This is particularly relevant due to the significance of this specific time period for the social position and treatment of blind people in Korea, and the Christian missionaries' role in how these were changed.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four main chapters, followed by a bibliography that includes the primary material and secondary sources. The first introductory chapter delves into the specific

aims of the thesis, as well as the particular approach chosen, laying out the methodology and theoretical framework. The second chapter provides the necessary background for understanding the social context of early 20th century Korea and the significance of this period for blind people. This chapter outlines the history of blindness in Korea in relation to native religious practices and goes into the specifics of how Protestant missionaries entered and established themselves in Korea. The third chapter contains the actual analysis of the primary material. Initially, the texts are described, followed by four thematically organised sections. The final chapter encompasses a discussion of the analysis from the previous chapter and concludes with some thoughts surrounding the significance of the research and further research possibilities.

1.3. Material

1.3.1. Primary material

The historical material used in this thesis is primarily articles from a Christian missionary publication called *The Korea Mission Field*. This magazine was first published in 1904, ran until 1941, and was filled with articles and reports containing various information, news, updates, and stories relevant to missionary work in Korea. This particular publication was primarily chosen due to availability, and because it is a long-running and wide-reaching publication aimed towards all Evangelical missions in Korea, thus covering a broader audience than any denominational or otherwise more specifically targeted publication.

One article, “The Korean Mudang and Pansu” belongs to a different publication, *The Korea Review*, a monthly journal published by the Methodist Publishing House in Seoul, that ran between 1901 and 1906. The journal was edited by Homer B. Hulbert, a prominent journalist, researcher, and activist for Korean independence, who also wrote the article included from

this publication. The reason for the inclusion of this article despite it coming from a different publication is because of the relevance of its contents; the article contains detailed descriptions of blind diviners and folk religion in general. This article was published serially in six parts and is significantly longer than the other articles, encompassing around 30 pages, whilst the other articles average around 2 pages each. Not all these pages are relevant to the analysis in this thesis, as the article is not only concerned with blind diviners but also details other practitioners of folk religion.

The articles from *The Korea Mission Field* included in this thesis were accessed in two different ways. Volume 2 and 4 were accessed through a digital copy from the Internet Archive, uploaded by *Han'guk Kidokkyosa Yon'guhoe*¹. The remaining volumes (29-30, 32-34) were accessed through the Royal Danish Library, where they were viewed in the Research Reading Room at the Black Diamond in Copenhagen. Both access methods required transcription of the articles, with the volumes accessed digitally requiring slightly more work to transcribe, as the digitalisations were somewhat blurry and unclear. The article from *The Korea Review* was available digitally² in PDF form and did not require any transcription.

Due to the limitations of a master's thesis, and the large scope of material, with several issues of *The Korea Mission Field* published each year for over 30 years, it was not feasible to go through all the material to find all articles that could possibly relate to the topic at hand. Instead, a bibliography of European-language materials relating to disability in East Asia, compiled by Miles (2007)³, was used to find any articles from *The Korea Mission Field* related to blind people or blindness in general. This does mean there might be more material

¹ <https://archive.org/search?query=K%CA%BBoria+misyo%CC%86n+p%CA%BBildu%CC%86> [Accessed 2023-03-29]

² <http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/KoreaReview/> [Accessed 2023-05-23]

³ This bibliography has its origins with a Dr. Henk van Setten of the University of Nijmegen, who hosted the original version on a (now defunct) website called "History of Education". The cited version was further revised by Miles and found its home on the current website after structural changes meant it could no longer be hosted on the University of Nijmegen's website.

available within the publication that could be relevant to the thesis topic. However, because of the limited time frame for finishing this project, it is not clear if there would have been sufficient time to analyse any additional texts found in the publication, as the task of searching for materials would have required significant time and effort. I have thus chosen to focus on the articles which already have bibliographical information available, allowing more time to be spent on actual analysis. However, one of the articles from *The Korea Mission Field* found using this bibliography, “The blind man hears something new” was excluded, as it contained the retelling of a Korean story translated by a Korean Rev. Lee Hong Noh⁴, and thus falls outside the scope of this thesis.

As will become clear in the Background section, the Korean mission field during the period covered by this thesis was largely dominated by Protestant missionaries, with a large part of these belonging to two US mainstream denominations, Presbyterian and Methodist. Although this is the reason for the focus on Protestant missionaries, this does mean that this thesis does not cover every denominational variation within the early 20th century Christian missionaries in Korea, and is limited to those deemed most relevant.

⁴ In this thesis Korean names are rendered in the Korean order, with the last name preceding the first name. Note also that due to how Korean names are transcribed within the primary material there is not always a clear division between the first and last name. This particular name was written as Hong Noh Lee, but after some research it was clear that the Korean name is 이홍노 [I Hong-no], as this is how name appears when mentioned as an elder within this Presbyterian church <https://cylooks.co.kr/cross/01/143> [Accessed: 2023-07-31]

Table 1. Denomination and country of origin of the writers of the primary material.

	<i>Publication year</i>	<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>
<i>Homer B. Hulbert</i>	1903	Methodist	USA
<i>Rosetta Sherwood Hall</i>	1906, 1908	Methodist	USA
<i>ANON</i>	1933	N/A	N/A
<i>Roscoe C. Coen</i>	1934, 1936, 1937	Presbyterian	USA
<i>Mary Ross Hill</i>	1937	Presbyterian	N/A
<i>Henry M. Bruen</i>	1938	Presbyterian	USA
<i>Allen Clark</i>	1938	Presbyterian	USA

Source: Created by author

All the texts for analysis were written by foreign missionaries, and of those missionaries where information was available, all belonged to Methodist or Presbyterian denominations and hailed from the US. Exact information on where the different missionaries were stationed is not available in most cases, but the schools and missions described in the texts were primarily situated in Pyongyang, Seoul, and Daegu.

Most of the texts are descriptions of missionary work centred on blind people, both educational and evangelical, including missionary schools, Church gatherings, and financial and other aid provided to blind people, with the texts also often including the stories of individual blind people. The two exceptions to this are Hulbert (1903) and Anon (1933). The anonymous text from 1933 is similar in that it details missionary work, but the work is not centred on blind people, and instead describes medical help given to the child of a blind woman, and the moral quandary the missionary finds when considering if the child would do best returning to their mother or being adopted into another family. The 1903 article by Hulbert is concerned more generally with Korean folk religion, focusing on female shamans

and blind diviners, but diverges from the other texts in that it is written in a more academic style, not focusing on personal experiences and anecdotes.

1.3.2. Secondary sources

This thesis uses a number of Korean and English language sources, but the distribution of these sources is not equal throughout the chapters. The Korean sources are primarily used in the background section, in particular the parts surrounding blind diviners, as there is a lack of research available on this topic in English. The sections concerned with Christian missionaries contain more of a mix between English and Korean language sources. Although more sources are available on this topic, there is still the issue of finding sources that take a critical lens towards these Christian missions and focus on issues related to this thesis. A great help in this endeavour was a collection of critical readings on Christianity in Korea edited by Donald Baker (2014), which contained several articles employing a critical perspective and covering topics relevant to this thesis.

Additionally, a doctoral dissertation from the East Asian Studies department at Harvard University, “Church over Nation: Christian Missionaries and Korean Christians in Colonial Korea”, written by Motokazu Matsutani was particularly useful, providing a critical perspective on previous research on Christian missionaries, as well as giving an overview of the notable events of the Christian missionaries’ arrival to the Korean peninsula.

Among the various Korean language sources, the three sources written by Chu Yun-jōng are of particular relevance to the topic of this thesis. Chu has devoted much of her research to the history and living conditions of blind people in Korea and has done extensive research on the colonial period in particular. Her 2008 paper “Chasōn-gwa chahye-ŭi kyōnghap: singminji ki ‘maengin’ sahoe saōp-kwa t’ajahwa kwajōng” (Competition between charity and benevolence: The social work surrounding, and process of othering, the blind during the

colonial period) is especially important for this thesis. This paper takes a critical approach to previous perspectives on social work and focuses on the societal role and effects of the Christian missionaries and Japanese colonial government's social work aimed at blind people, and thus holds an important role in informing the social context for the analysis in this thesis.

1.4. Theoretical framework: Disability studies

Disability studies as an academic discipline first emerged from the disability rights movements of the 1970s, primarily in the UK and US. With the aim of challenging prevailing ideas of disability and studying disability from a non-medical perspective, the disability studies movement instead put the focus on the social aspects of disability. Part of this reframing of disability as something socially constructed was the emergence of disability models as a framework for understanding and challenging hegemonic conceptualizations of disability. The term *disability model* is used to refer to different frameworks for how disability is conceptualized and is generally meant to be used as a theoretical framework for research and activism, acting to redefine understandings of disability. However, certain models are also used more descriptively, to explain how disability is handled within a text, a specific context, or within society as a whole. The term was first coined by the UK disability rights activist and researcher Mike Oliver, who in 1983 introduced the terms for the individual and social models of disability. The *individual model* of disability is based on an understanding that the individual person is the source of disability, as opposed to the *social model* of disability, which conceptualizes disability as socially constructed, something enacted onto a person by society (Siebers 2008: 25).

When introducing the individual model of disability, Oliver describes it as the prevailing understanding of disability among many of those who work with disabled people. He

introduces the social model as an alternative understanding of disability, specifically as a tool for bettering the lives of disabled people (Oliver 2013: 1024-25). After its introduction, the social model gained traction, but also became the subject of many debates surrounding the model's viability, and how it should be utilized (ex. Berghs et al. 2019, Riddle 2020, Thomas, Gradwell, and Markham 1997). Although the social model is the dominant theoretical framework in many places, there are other prominent models of disability, different ways of conceptualizing disability within different disciplines, theoretical traditions, and social settings.

Before moving on to further descriptions of disability models, it is relevant to consider that this thesis is focused on historical conceptions of disability and that many of the disability models used today are a product of the specific time and place in which they were developed. Consequently, the use of disability models within this thesis is restricted to those that describe a historical framework of thinking. Although it can be beneficial to compare historical conceptions of disability to contemporary ones, this thesis focuses specifically on the historical context of these conceptions of disability. Therefore, any comparisons made will mainly be in relation to frameworks of understanding disability relevant to this specific time and place, except for cases when the use of contemporary conceptions of disability aids the understanding of a particular concept.

The most relevant models to introduce for this thesis are the moral model and the medical model. The moral, or religious, model of disability is, as the name suggests, found in a number of different religious practices. This often represents an understanding of disability as a form of punishment or consequence for transgressing some social or religious moral code, attributed to the individual themselves or the actions of their parents or ancestors (Retief and Letšosa 2018: 43). Creamer argues that the core of this model is the moral weight put on a disabled person (2012: 340), meaning a disability does not necessarily have to have purely

negative connotations within a moral framework, and that the central aspect of the moral model is that disability is viewed and evaluated from a moral or religious perspective. The exact form of this can vary depending on the specific religious context, but from a Christian perspective this can manifest as disability being seen as a punishment from God, a test of faith, or an opportunity for character development (Retief and Letšosa 2018: 43). In certain cases, disability is also seen as a granting of some ability, which can be framed as losing one sense leading to the heightening of another, or as being given a special purpose tied to one's disability (Retief and Letšosa 2018: 43).

The medical model of disability is primarily associated with the medical field, and can be explained as a form of medicalisation, a reduction or representation of disability as a purely medical phenomenon. This way of viewing disability has been the target of criticism from disability activists and academics, specifically regarding how the reduction of disability to only a medical concern can limit the agency of disabled people, instead putting medical professionals in a position of power over the interventions afforded to disabled people (Grue 2011: 540). Under this frame of thinking, medical interventions are generally meant as curative, meaning that they are intended to remove illness and disability and restore health, and Kim argues that the focus on medical interventions and curing disability, regardless of if a cure exists or not, closes the possibility for other types of solutions (2017: 6).

Also note the commonality between the individual model and the medical model; the medical model also ascribes the source of disability to the individual. The difference between the two is that the individual model is a more general description, whilst the medical model is connected to more specific discourses and conceptions of disability. The moral model is a more complex case, as the way disability is conceptualized is highly dependent on the specific religious beliefs and practices one is examining. Even though the source of disability is

generally seen as existing outside the individual, emanating from some higher power or other entity, it can still be seen as a consequence of the actions of the individual or their family.

Although the simplicity of the concept of disability models makes it a useful tool for explaining and understanding different conceptions of disability, this simplicity can also work against it. Among those scholars who oppose the division of disability into distinct models, Grue argues that strict adherence to these models could restrict researchers' room for new thought and innovation, as any single model is too limited to be able to explain an issue as complex as disability (2011: 541). Oliver (2013) does state that his intention when creating the social model was never to explain all the intricacies of disability in all its forms, and that he proposed it as an effective tool for collective action and solidarity amongst disabled people. However, the original intentions behind the concept do not change how the prevalence of disability models affects the way research on disability is conducted. Grue argues that different disability models work well in different situations and that if there was not a tendency to view different disability models as mutually exclusive, researchers would be able to use these different models as appropriate, and they could combine in a congruent way (2011: 543).

To summarize, the phenomenon these models are trying to define is in essence a deviation from a norm, a deviation from what is considered a "normal" body or a "normal" mind, and the key difference between these models is how this deviation is characterized. My thought is that the reason for the large number of different ways of conceptualizing disability is that disability as a concept is complex, and the people covered under the category of "disabled" are a very diverse group. With a concept that effects so many different people in so many different ways, and exists in a variety of social, cultural, and political contexts, it is not surprising that researchers have been able to find so many different approaches to conceptualizing disability.

With this in mind, the goal when examining the ways that blindness is conceptualized within the material is not to neatly fit it into one of these models, especially not since the primary material is concerned with descriptions of an East Asian culture and society from a distinctly Western perspective. The ways in which disability is conceptualized within the West is still highly relevant, since this is the social context the Christian missionaries are coming from, but these views on disability interact with already existing ideas and concepts within Korean society, which provides additional context. The aim is rather to use disability models as reference points for understanding the different ways in which people and societies interact with blindness as a concept and how this affects the lives of blind people.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1. Critical discourse analysis

Paltridge states that the purpose of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to identify and examine those norms and values in a text that might be hidden and not immediately apparent (2012: 186). Grue argues that the complex nature of disability makes discourse analysis a particularly helpful approach to the topic. By focusing on the discourses surrounding disability, researchers can examine the social context in which society creates disability, and give a more nuanced picture of how disability is conceptualized (Grue 2011: 534-35). In this pursuit, the focus is not only put on the text itself, but on the discourses and the social context surrounding it.

Although the analysis in this thesis does not aim to perfectly replicate a CDA approach to textual analysis, Fairclough's (2003) framework for CDA was used to inform the methodological approach, and some tools for CDA laid out by Huckin (1997) were utilized in the analysis. The aim of using CDA to inform the textual analysis in this thesis is not to do a

purely linguistic analysis, but to use the tools and approaches laid out by Fairclough to assist in the analysis of the texts, especially in connecting the textual analysis to the discourses and social context surrounding the primary material. The main text used as a basis for this approach, Fairclough's (2003) book *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, was chosen due to its focus on using CDA for research within the social sciences and humanities.

As with applying any research approach, there will be both benefits and limitations. Discourse analysis in general is focused on language as the primary purveyor of meaning, which leads to less focus being put on other aspects, such as materiality. One reason for borrowing some tools specifically from CDA is that the focus is not solely on the text on its own, but instead also includes an analysis of the social context surrounding the text.

The analysis was performed systematically using some of the tools laid out by Huckin in his guide to CDA (1997: 82-84). These tools refer to specific textual features which are interesting and relevant from a critical perspective and might reveal something about the text and its surrounding discourses and social context. The general strategy for approaching the analysis is also similar to that described by Huckin, first applying these tools on a larger scale, focusing on the entirety of the text, and subsequently honing in on a sentence- and text-level analysis (1997: 81). Although all the tools were included when running the analysis, some tools were not as relevant for these particular texts, and the specific tools that appear within the analysis are the ones that yielded the most relevant results. As Huckin includes a large number of tools, only those relevant to the analysis in this thesis will be presented here. The rest of the tools were generally excluded because they relate to an aspect of the text already sufficiently explained by another tool, are not relevant to the type of analysis performed in this thesis, or because they simply did not yield results relevant to the issues raised in this thesis.

1.5.2. Relevant terms for analysis

One of the most important tools borrowed from Huckin is *framing*, which relates to how information is presented. Framing refers to how different people, issues, and ideas are contextualized within the text. The framing of a text is a way of connecting the information presented into a coherent whole that makes sense to the reader, forming the text's perspective, and thus also how the different issues covered in the text are intended to be perceived (Huckin 1997: 82). For example, this means that an actor can be presented in a more negative or positive light depending on the framing; how their actions are described, the level of agency afforded to them within the text, and the connotations of the words used in relation to them all affect how an actor is perceived by the reader. Framing is thus an important tool for understanding the various underlying values, norms, and assumptions put forth by the text.

Relevant to the question of framing is *foregrounding*. This term relates to the level of textual prominence certain information is given within a text, where foregrounding refers to information being emphasized (Huckin 1997: 82).

Assumptions, as the name suggests, refer to those things in the text that are assumed, that do not need to be spelled out but are implicitly accepted as true in the text. When Fairclough uses this term, he is primarily referring to presuppositions, when certain ideas are taken for granted within the language of a text, but it can also refer to other features of a text that communicate an assumption without it being explicitly stated, such as logical implications or entailments, and implicatures (2003: 59). In this thesis the general term "assumptions" will be used, and what type of assumption it is referring to will be specified if necessary. Additionally, Fairclough lays out three main types of assumptions: *existential assumptions*, concerning what exists, *propositional assumptions*, concerning what "is or can be or will be the case",

and *value assumptions*, concerning what is considered "good or desirable" (Fairclough 2003: 55), with value assumptions being the most relevant within this thesis.

Moving on to how *agency* is distributed within a text, Huckin identifies the *agent-patient relations* of a sentence as central for getting at this issue (1997: 83). This is concerned with who is placed as the initiator of actions in a sentence, and who is placed as a recipient. When these placements turn into patterns throughout a text, they act as indicators of who is depicted as having power and agency within the text, and who is depicted as more passive (Huckin 1997: 83).

Word connotations refers to the way in which words and phrases can carry a particular meaning or value based on the context in which they are commonly used (Huckin 1997: 83). A word can thus carry additional meaning beside the literal definition, a meaning the reader can recognise if they have the requisite background to understand the context of the word usage. These underlying connotations can be both positive and negative and can also appear as figures of speech, such as metaphors (Huckin 1997: 83).

2. Background

2.1. Blindness and traditional Korean religious practices

It is not clear when or how the connection first emerged, but there is a long history of blind people engaging in different traditional Korean religious practices. This includes practices such as fortune-telling, sutra chanting, and performing rituals meant to, among other things, assuage misfortune, cure illness, or bring happiness and good fortune (Son 2019: 876-877). Mentions of these blind diviners first appeared in the *Koryŏsa* (고려사, 高麗史: History of Koryŏ) (Pak and Chŏng 2019: 116), referred to as *maengsŭng* (맹승, 盲僧) which can be translated as “blind (Buddhist) monk”. However, because of the lack of clarity surrounding the origins of these practices, there are different interpretations of the development of this tradition. Some researchers (Kim 2009, and Chu 2008) have questioned the tendency within certain research works to emphasize the “uniqueness” of this Korean practice, specifically the efforts to distinguish its origins from similar practices in China and Japan. Kim points to 8th-century documentation of Japanese blind people being referred to as *mōsō* (K. *maengsŭng*) and engaging in similar practices to those seen in Korea to argue that there is a common origin between the practices of blind people in China, Japan, and Korea (2009: 38). Kim does effectively question the established assumptions surrounding this issue, although there is not enough evidence to come to any conclusions regarding a possible shared origin, and more research into this issue is still needed.

Moving into the Chosŏn dynasty, more descriptions of blind diviners can be found in various historical materials, then referred to as *p'ansu* (판수, 判數), which roughly translates to “one

who judges fortunes" (Kim 2008: 258). This period also saw a shift from Buddhism towards Confucianism, both in general society and amongst blind diviners (Chu 2020: 86), whose practices also saw a boom during the Chosŏn period (Son 2019: 875). These blind diviners could engage in a variety of fortune-telling practices, but they are particularly associated with a type of fortune-telling called *poksŏ* (복서, 卜筮) (Son 2019: 876) a systematic way to tell fortunes based in texts such as the Book of Changes (Im 1997: 92). These practices being based in Confucian texts meant they were more institutionally accepted in the Confucian Chosŏn society than other practices (such as shamanism). Among other things, this can be seen in documentation showing there were specific posts created for blind diviners in the government office concerned with astronomy, geography, meteorological observation, and divination, called *Kwansanggam* (관상감, 觀象監) (Son 2019: 879). Additionally, there existed a government-created organization for blind diviners, called *Myŏngt'ongsa* (명통사, 明通寺), which was later replaced by a private organization called *Maengch'ŏng* (맹청, 盲廳) (Son 2019: 877). Son emphasises how these different government efforts showcase a level of independence afforded to blind diviners during this period that was not seen amongst other disabled people at the time, but also points out that this did not necessarily apply to all blind people equally, as those who practiced the specific type of fortune-telling valued by the government were benefited the most (2019: 880).

Here it is relevant to emphasize that these above mentioned *p'ansu* were men, and although there is extensive documentation of blind men engaging in fortune-telling and similar practices during this period, the same cannot be said of blind women. It is unclear if this is because blind women did not engage in similar practices to the same extent, or if they simply engaged in other practices such as shamanism⁵, which are more closely associated with

⁵ During the 2023 CIVIS-KF e-School Consortium Summer School, I took the opportunity to ask Prof. Antonetta Bruno from Sapienza University Rome about this issue. Prof. Bruno has done extensive research on the topic of

women (Oh 2016) and did not receive the same amount of institutional recognition.

Additionally, fortune-telling was not only practiced by “professionals” such as blind diviners but could be practiced in a non-professional capacity by others, which further muddies the water around the issue.

Although there is a lack of historical material on this issue during the Chosŏn period, there is evidence of blind women engaging in shamanistic practices during the colonial period. Chu Yun-jŏng references at least one Korean news article from 1932 which mentions blind women engaging in shamanistic practices, as well as listing *munyŏ* (무녀, 巫女), “female shaman”, as one of the occupations held by blind people according to statistics published by the Japanese Government-General of Korea (2020: 90-91). Additionally, mentions of blind girls engaging in Korean religious practices appear in the historical material analysed in this thesis, specifically the two articles written by Hall, where both blind boys and girls are referred to as being “made vile sorcerers of in Korea” (Hall 1908: 78).

Looking at these materials, it is clear that blind women engaged in shamanism, or some other religious practices, during the colonial period, but it is still unclear to what extent. With this information in mind, it is also possible to assume these practices did not suddenly begin during this period, but the lack of historical material presents an issue in gaining any more insight into how far back these traditions might reach. However, considering there is record of blind men participating in fortune-telling as far back as the Koryŏ period, it is not unreasonable to assume blind women might have engaged in similar practices for a longer time as well.

shamanism in Korea but had not heard of any research or historical material relating to blind women engaging in these practices, indicating that more research is needed into this topic.

Looking at how blindness specifically was viewed during the Chosŏn period, the Japanese scholar Murayama Jijun (村山智順), who wrote about Korean folklore during the Japanese colonial period, proposed some theories as to why blind people became associated with divination. Murayama claimed there existed a folk belief that blind people see things others could not due to their lack of eyesight, meaning that their lack of eyesight was connected to seeing the spiritual instead. He argued that this, in combination with the lack of other suitable occupations for blind people, is what led them to divination (Chu 2020: 86). However, further research is still needed into this issue, and although he collected much information about Korean folklore, Kim (2018) argues that it is important to remember that Murayama was operating within the Japanese colonial system, and to take a critical stance to his research.

2.2. Christian missionary history

Although Christianity was first introduced to Korea through the import of translations of Catholic literature from China, and Catholics were the first missionaries to arrive in Korea, because of the focus of this thesis, this background section focuses on the history of Protestant missions in Korea.

2.2.1. Protestant missions

Some Protestants had managed to come in contact with Koreans and spread their religion before this point (Lee 2002: 88-89), but the Protestant mission began in earnest when Korea opened its ports to the United States with the 1882 US-Korea treaty, with the first missionaries arriving after the treaty was ratified in 1884 (Matsutani 2012: 58-59). The first Protestant missionaries to arrive in 1884 were sent by the Northern Presbyterian Board of Missions (U.S.) (Lee 2002: 89), but other mission agencies subsequently sent out missionaries to Korea, including the Northern Methodist Episcopal Board of Missions (U.S.) in 1885, as

well as Canadian Baptist, Church of England, Southern Presbyterian (U.S), Canadian Presbyterian and Southern Methodist Episcopal (U.S.) missionary bodies (Kim 1995: 39).

Not all these protestant missionaries were American, but missionaries from the United States vastly outnumbered any other group, accounting for over two-thirds of the Protestant missionaries arriving in Korea between 1884 and 1910 (Ryu 2008: 373). This is further illustrated by data collected in a 1909 survey by the Japanese Regency-General government counting the number of foreigners in Korea (as cited in Lee 2017: 53). Excluding Chinese and Japanese people, the survey counted 777 foreigners. Out of these, 478 were missionaries and their families, with 338 of them being American missionaries and their families. British missionaries and their families accounted for around 85 people, and French missionaries and their families numbered around 50. Looking at these numbers, American missionaries held a large majority, which held true until the 1940s, when the number of US and British citizens residing in Korea saw a dramatic decrease due to World War II and subsequent changes in foreign relations (Lee 2017: 53-54).

Looking more closely at the protestant missions, most belonged to either Presbyterian or Methodist denominations, with 95% of the American missionaries who arrived between 1884 and 1910 belonging to one of these two mainstream denominations (Ryu 2008: 373).

Additionally, according to Hwang and Ki, 83% of the 280 medical missionaries who arrived in Korea from 1884 to 1941 belonged to Protestant missions, with 82% of these (68% of the total number) belonging to US Methodist or Presbyterian denominations (1994: 2)⁶. This demonstrates how the Korean mission field was largely dominated by specifically American and mainstream Protestant missions, which in turn shaped the specific theology, worldview,

⁶ The other Protestant missionaries belonged to the Canadian Presbyterian Church (7%), the Australian Presbyterian Church (4%), and the Seventh Day Adventist Church (3%). Additionally, 4% of the total number were Catholic missionaries, and the rest belonged to other denominations. There were also an additional 31 medical missionaries who were not affiliated with any missionary society (Hwang and Ki 1994: 2)

and beliefs of the mission field in Korea and the Korean Protestant Church (Ryu 2008: 372, Lee 2017: 52).

When the first missionaries arrived in Korea, Dr. Horace Allen found success as a court physician (Matsutani 2012: 62), and was able to open a hospital in 1885, which is widely known as the first Protestant missionary enterprise in Korea (Lee 2017: 5, Kim 1995: 39). However, Matsutani notes that it is important to remember this success was as a physician and did not suggest an acceptance of Protestant missionary work from the Korean court (2012: 62). In fact, the US-Korea treaty did not allow outright proselytizing of Christianity at all at this time. These restrictions did gradually weaken, especially in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 (Matsutani 2012: 186), when Christian missionaries in Korea saw some increases in their freedom of religion. Some Protestant missionaries did still try to spread their religion before this point by traveling outside the foreign settlements and preaching to and baptizing some Koreans, even though the Korean Government ordered them not to (Min 2009: 183-84). It might seem rather bold of these missionaries to go against the orders of the country they are residing in, but the risks of these actions were mitigated by their extraterritoriality rights, meaning these American missionaries would not be tried by a Korean court even if they were caught proselytizing (Matsutani 2012: 69).

Although this direct approach was still attempted by some missionaries in the early years of the Korean Protestant mission, the missionary work at this time was generally characterized by “indirect evangelism”, where Western medicine and scholarship was used to spread a Christian message, primarily through educational and medical work (Matsutani 2012: 149). These actions were not as controversial in the eyes of the Korean government, but they were met with anti-Christian and anti-foreign sentiments, with rumours about Americans kidnapping Koreans and Western doctors making medicine from babies’ eyes spreading among the general population (Matsutani 2012: 71-72).

2.2.2. Distinctions in missionary policy

Despite the anti-Christian sentiments in Korea, Protestant missionaries were able to establish several educational and medical ventures. Although direct evangelism became a more viable option with the greater Japanese intervention on the Korean peninsula after the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 (Matsutani 2012: 209), the medical and educational missionary approaches continued. There were however some differences in the approaches to the educational mission in Korea between the different denominations. Focusing on the two main Protestant denominations active in Korea, it is noteworthy that the Presbyterian and Methodist approaches to education differed in some key ways.

Succinctly put, the Presbyterian missions' attitude towards education has been summarized as "the gospel for the heathen and education for Christians" and "no institution before church." (Baird 1968, as cited in Matsutani 2012: 150). This meant the Presbyterian mission policy was focused on a more direct route of proselytizing, providing education only to those who already converted. However, as mentioned above, the situation on the Korean peninsula did not allow for this type of missionary work when these Protestant missionaries first arrived. Thus, the Presbyterians had to adapt their mission strategy to include educational efforts for non-Christians. This meant the Presbyterian mission had to open a school before they could officially establish any church, but their early educational ventures were shut down before the turn of the 20th century. Matsutani argues that this was due to several factors, including the lack of English-language education, anti-Christian sentiments, a lack of experience and the Presbyterian missionaries' general unwillingness to teach (2012: 151-59). However, the closure can also be attributed to the relaxing of restrictions on direct evangelism, which meant the Presbyterians could focus more on their preferred missionary tactic (Matsutani 2012: 160-61).

Contrary to the Presbyterian attitude towards education, the Methodist mission in Korea embraced general education, emphasizing the importance of learning subjects such as science and literature (Matsutani 2012: 172). The goal was not to simply convert Koreans through education, or to only educate Christians. This does not mean that the Methodist mission did not intend to spread Christianity through their educational missions. Instead, the Methodist attitude was that education was a “pathway to salvation”, and education often had to come before any attempt at conversion (Matsutani 2012: 173-74). In this way, the Methodist educational mission was also conceived as a way to spread Christianity, but without the education in itself having to be focused on that goal.

Although there were these types of denominational differences, the Korean mission field was marked by collaboration between these different denominations. In fact, during the 1890s through the 1910s, the practice of “territorial division”, where the Korean peninsula was divided up into different geographical areas assigned to different Protestant denominations, was maintained to make sure no evangelization efforts overlapped and to deter any potential rivalry between the denominations (Matsutani 2012: 143). This does not preclude the existence of conflict and differences of opinions between these denominations, but it is still important to remember there was enough commonality amongst the Protestant missionaries to allow for interdenominational cooperation.

2.2.3. Missions targeted at blind people

According to data collected by the Japanese Government-General, there were 11,085 blind people in Korea in 1927, accounting for 0,06% of the population (Chu 2020: 92). The question then becomes, why were blind people, who made up such a small portion of the population, of interest to Christian missionaries?

As laid out above, when Protestant missionaries first arrived in Korea they were not allowed to freely proselytize to the Korean people, and these Christian missionaries generally adopted a missionary strategy more focused on education and medical treatment than direct missionary work. This social work was not targeted towards the upper echelons of society, but towards those who were socially disenfranchised, such as women, poor and disabled people (Chu 2018: 66-67). Blind people fit into this target demographic, but in addition to this, Chu also argues that blind people's position in society made them particularly attractive targets for the Christian missionaries' social work, as they represented a type of folk beliefs that stood against the furthering of Christianity (2008: 148-49).

Looking a bit closer at the attitudes towards Korean folk beliefs, the Protestant missionaries who arrived in Korea clearly condemned these practices. This can be attributed to iconoclasm being a feature of 19th century evangelical mission theory (Oak 2010: 97), meaning the rejection and attacking of indigenous religious practices was par for the course in Protestant missions such as those in Korea. Oak further argues that the attacks on Korean Shamanism by missionaries was intimately connected to the distinction between Christian monotheism and Korean religions' polytheism, as well as Western conceptions of rationalism as opposed to the "superstitions" of Korean folk beliefs (2010: 97).

Thus, the Christian missionaries' interest in blind people was twofold: they were a disenfranchised group the missionaries could target for social work, but blind diviners also held a role within Korean folk beliefs, which made them an even more significant target for conversion to Christianity. This is exemplified in some of the material analysed in this thesis, such as Rosetta Sherwood Hall, who opened the first school for the blind in Korea, who stated that the aim of her school for blind girls was to "make the blind girls of Korea happy, useful members of Christian home circles instead of vile sorceresses" (1906: 175-76).

It was indeed Hall who initiated much of the missionary work concerning blind people in Korea. Hall notes that she encountered blind people in her role as a medical missionary, but that there was usually nothing to be done for these blind people in a medical sense (1908: 78). She instead focused on developing the resources needed for an educational mission aimed at blind people. In 1898 she adapted the N.Y. Point system⁷ for the Korean alphabet and began teaching this writing system to the child of a Christian family, a blind girl named “Pong-nai” [Pong-nae]⁸ (Hall 1908: 79). This work evolved into a school for blind girls in Pyongyang, which Hall characterized as “the mother of the two schools for [blind] boys” which would later open (1908: 78). Although this missionary work began as largely educational, other missionary efforts targeted at blind people began after direct evangelism became more viable on the peninsula. One example is the gatherings of blind Christians in Seoul organized by the Presbyterian mission, which are extensively covered in all the texts by Coen (1934, 1936, 1937).

2.2.4. Japanese influence

To fully understand the context of this social work, it is also relevant to explore the other actors within this field. Just as the Protestant missionaries had shown an interest in blind people when they arrived in Korea, the Japanese colonial government quickly established themselves within the realm of education for blind people. After the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, the colonial government established a school in 1911 called *Chesaengwŏn* (제생원, 濟生院), aimed at providing specialized education for blind people. *Chesaengwŏn* provided both academic education and vocational training, and the school also introduced

⁷ A tactile writing system made up of 1-4 raised dots to form letters. Although this was the first tactile encoding of hangŭl, it was later overtaken by a 6-dot braille-like system developed in 1926 by a teacher named Pak Tu-sŏng.

⁸ 봉래 (蓬萊). Refers to the mythical Mount Penglai, one of the three sacred mountains in the east sea, which is important within Taoist beliefs.

massage as a modern occupation for blind people (being a traditional occupation for blind people in Japan) (Chu 2008: 156-57, see also Appelgren 2021)

There is no definitive answer as to why the Japanese colonial government showed this immediate interest in the blind population of Korea, but Chu suggests that this interest might have arisen because of an awareness of the Christian missionary interest in the blind people of Korea (2008: 153). This common interest led to a kind of competition between the colonial government and the Christian missionaries, where they were both trying to extend their own modern institutions, and their own agendas, within this field of social work (Chu 2008: 158, see also Appelgren 2021).

One important distinction in the Japanese colonial government and the Christian missionary approach to blind people in Korea are the ways in which they tried to control the activities of blind diviners. According to Chu, the Christian missionaries used more moralistic means, decrying the practice as superstition, and emphasizing how these practices were “morally wrong”, whilst the Japanese colonial government had the authority to use the law and police force to control the practices of blind diviners (2008: 166). The primary example of this are the policies enacted for “breaking superstition”, which suppressed blind diviners and their practices. These were first enacted during the 1910s, were relaxed during the 1920s, but were implemented again at the end of the 1920s due to a scandal involving Korean religious healing practices (Chu 2008: 166-67). Chu argues that this othering of blind diviners led to a decline in their numbers, instead paving the way for the introduction of massage as a profession for blind people (2020: 82).

3. Analysis of Primary Material

After a short section describing the primary material in more detail, the analysis is divided into four main sections. The first section, “The people that sat in darkness”, introduces the light/dark dichotomy in which blind people are framed, exploring the relationship established between blindness and darkness, and how this relates to the positioning as in need of help. The second section, “Vile sorcerers”, focuses on distinctions within the portrayal of blind people, particularly how Hall’s and Hulbert’s texts differ in their portrayal of Korean folk religion in relation to blindness, and how this relates to the time period the texts were written in and the position of the person writing it. The third section, “Instruments of light”, continues to examine the light/dark dichotomy, focusing on how blind people are associated with light and are positioned as in particular need of Christianity, also covering some denominational differences in how this work relating to blind people is portrayed. The fourth section, “The healing hand of the Christian physician”, focuses on medical conceptions of blindness within the material, and how these interact with the already established religious conceptions. The analysis is then summarised and discussed in the final chapter.

3.1. Descriptions of texts

The 1903 article, “The Korean Mudang and Pansu”, written by Homer B. Hulbert is concerned with Korean folk religion, focusing specifically on female shamans and blind diviners. This text goes into great detail when describing different rituals, ceremonies and fortune-telling practices, also providing concrete examples of when they have been implemented. The content of Hulbert’s article is rather different from the rest, as it is not

concerned directly with missionary work. Because much of the analysis is concerned specifically with descriptions of missionary work, the different framing and content of this article means not all the observations made in the analysis are applicable, but it still provides valuable insights, as will be demonstrated below.

The two articles from 1906 and 1908 were written by Rosetta Sherwood Hall, a medical missionary and educator who was sent to Korea in 1890 by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Both the articles focus on the education of blind people, but the 1908 article "The Clocke class for blind girls" is largely autobiographical, detailing the events which led Hall to begin teaching blind people in Korea and some specifics of these teachings. The text from 1906, "Education of the Blind", does not carry the same autobiographical framing, and more clearly focuses on the events and progress of the school for blind girls opened by Hall, which means it does not centre the author's experiences to the same extent as the 1908 text, focusing more on the collective experiences of the school/mission.

Looking at the text published in 1933, "What would you have done?", there is not the same amount of information about the author present. The text was submitted anonymously, so it is hard to know for certain who it was written by, but looking at the text's content, presenting a moral quandary in the form of a story of the child of a blind woman being treated at a missionary medical facility and how the mother was convinced to give up her child for adoption, it is possible to infer that the author is either a medical missionary themselves, or is at least working in connection to a missionary medical facility.

The texts written by R.C. Coen, a Presbyterian missionary, are concerned with blind Christians in Seoul, their stories and some of the events and activities they participate in, but with a particular focus on Mr Oh, a blind evangelist who, under the supervision of the author, preaches to and conducts other work for the blind people of the city. The text from 1934, "Go,

bring hither the blind”, gives an overview of the activities these blind Christians are engaged in, and gives a general idea of the demographic makeup of these Blind Christians, giving a few specific examples. The text from 1936, “Out of the depths”, tells of a few anecdotes concerning some blind people who had overcome difficulties and subsequently come to the Christian faith, but also includes the story of how Mr Oh got severely injured falling into a newly dug ditch near his home, and how that affected his faith. Lastly, the text by R.C. Coen published in 1937, “The blind came to him in the temple”, tells of the blind Christians’ Annual Christmas meeting, recounting the stories told at the meeting.

The 1937 text, “Lord that I may receive my sight!”, written by Mary Ross Hill, a missionary teacher working in the city Pyongyang (McAnlis 1929: 319), describes the situations of some blind boys the author has encountered, and uses these to emphasize the importance of the planned expansions to the school for blind boys in Pyongyang, noting the need for funding for this school, and for similar projects in Korea and in the readers’ own countries.

The last two texts were both published in 1938 and were both written by Presbyterian missionaries. The text written by Henry M. Bruen, “Blind Whang and his tin-type”, is centred around Mr Whang [Wang], a blind man who invents his own tactile writing system using a combination of cut up metal tins and wood, marked to represent different characters and strung up on string to form sentences. The text also details some other particulars of Mr Whang’s life, recounting how, when the author arranged a spot for Whang at the Japanese Government school for the blind in Seoul, he forwent the train trip and instead walked the long distance so that he could give the money meant for his train ticket to his family.

The text by Allen Clark, “The people that sat in darkness”, details a visit to a school for the deaf and blind in Pyongyang and the history of this school, but the text also makes mention of the story of a man who is most likely Mr Whang. Although the exact details differ somewhat

(which could be chalked up to it not being a first-hand account, as well as the events taking place over 20 years in the past), it describes a man who invents a tactile writing system just like the one described in Bruen's text, and also includes the same details of the means of traveling to reach one of the Christian schools for the blind.

3.2. "The people that sat in darkness"

Throughout the texts, certain words are used to denote the particular situation of blind people, with an overarching tendency to connect the physical darkness these blind people experience with a moral/mental darkness, and juxtaposing this darkness with light (in the Christian sense).

“dying would be an escape from this world of *darkness* and pain and and entrance into a better world with Christ where there is *light* and joy.” (Coen 1937: 59, emphasis added)

Darkness within these texts is associated with the material world and with a lack of Christian belief, as in the quote above, where darkness is connected to “this world” and “pain”, juxtaposed with light, which is associated with “Christ” and “joy”. There is an associated value assumption in this juxtaposition, as the connotations of the words used in consort with darkness and light makes it clear that darkness should be viewed negatively and light positively. Although there is this negative connotation to darkness within the texts, the way in which darkness is incorporated into the overarching discourses surrounding blindness is a bit more complex than a simple transference of this connotation onto blind people. Instead, blind people are generally framed as victims particularly vulnerable to the darkness that surrounds them.

“Yet there are scores of blind children in every province and for these blind who walk in real physical darkness amidst so much mental and moral darkness, for more than for the seeing, Christian education is the only help and the only hope.” (Hall 1908: 78)

In this quote, Hall clearly connects physical darkness with mental/moral darkness, but specifically positions blind people as in need of help because of this connection, emphasizing that blind people are in more need of Christianity than non-blind people. This framing of blind people as victims or particularly vulnerable from a religious standpoint can be seen as part of the complexities of the discourses surrounding disability within many Christian traditions. Schuelka argues that within the Old and New Testament disability is conceptualized as connected to sin, something that should be cured, but also as something pitiable, deserving of the compassion and charity of Christians (2013: 504). Within the primary material, the understanding of blind people as in need of help is clearly dominant. However, throughout the analysis of the texts there have been no clear indications of a connection between blindness and sin/punishment. This can be connected with the act of doing missionary work and spreading Christianity, which is framed within the texts as acts of helping people. But how are the targets of this help portrayed within the texts?

When examining the blind people who are featured in these texts, those who have converted and those who have been targeted by the missionaries' educational and medical mission are foregrounded, but there are instances where blind people in general and those who are not involved with the Christian mission are mentioned. These blind people are not framed as rejecting the help or proselytizing of the Christian Missionaries. The only exceptions to this are in Hall's 1908 text, where she voices a fear that the motives behind her missionary work might be misunderstood, and in Coen's 1937 texts, where a blind person is described as actively resisting conversion, but it is told that this person later ended up converting. The reasons given that more blind people have not received help from the Christian missions and

are not converting to Christianity is instead largely put on a lack of resources and money. This allows these missionary texts to frame the general population of blind people in Korea as targets for conversion and missionary work, who are in need of the missionaries' help, without this point being muddled by including any complicating doubts around if the general blind population in Korea want their help or not.

“CERTAIN PICTURES flash through the mind of a Korea missionary at the mention of blind boys;-the haunting hopelessness of faces too often pale with ill health, the unfeeling glances of the crowd as the boy with his staff comes tap, tapping along the busy street.” (Hill 1937: 60)

Within this framing as in need of help, these blind people are portrayed as unfortunate and deserving of pity. In the excerpt above a connection is also drawn between blindness and an overall poor health condition, further emphasising an image of physical weakness which parallels the portrayal of blindness as deserving of pity. Another aspect of this portrayal is the contrast made between the Christian missionaries' attitude and the general population in Korea. Although not presented as overtly in all the texts, in the example above, the general population is framed as uninterested in helping blind people. This framing continues in Hill's text, emphasising the generosity of Christians in contrast to the “unfeeling glances of the crowd”. Except for Hill's text, the most explicit use of this framing is within Hall's texts, which will be discussed further below.

3.3. “Vile sorcerers”

The earlier texts, written by Hall and Hulbert, distinguish themselves in how they portray the darkness set up in this light/dark dichotomy. In the texts written by Hall especially, this darkness takes on a much more specific form. As discussed within the previous chapters,

blind people were of particular interest to Christian missionaries due to their connection to Korean folk beliefs. Within the two texts written by Hall, the light/dark dichotomy present in the other texts explicitly becomes a distinction between Christianity and Korean folk religion.

“Our object to make the blind girls of Korea happy, useful members of Christian home circles instead of vile sorceresses, is being surely, if slowly, accomplished” (Hall 1906: 175-76).

Looking at the word connotations connected to Christianity and Korean folk beliefs within this statement, there are some clear value assumptions. Christianity is associated with blind people being “happy” and “useful”, whilst the term sorceresses is clearly given a negative connotation with the use of the word “vile”. Here, Hall places Christianity and Korean folk beliefs within a good/evil framework, giving more specificity to the light/dark dichotomy present within the rest of the texts.

As already established in the above section, blind people are framed as particularly vulnerable to this darkness, but in Hall’s texts this again becomes linked specifically to Korean religious practices. Hall specifically decries that blind children “*are made* vile sorcerers of in Korea” (1908: 78, emphasis added). Take note of where the agency is placed within this excerpt; these blind people do not choose to become diviners but are made to. Although Hall is referring to children here, which might affect the agency they are given within the text, she is still framing them as not having a choice. As in this case, blind people are positioned as victims of Korean religious practices within Hall’s texts. This ties back to the above-mentioned framing of the treatment of blind people by the Christian missionaries versus that of the general population of Korea. This framing creates a contrast between Koreans making these blind children “vile sorcerers”, and the Christian missionaries rescuing the blind children from this faith.

Hall is much more explicit in this juxtaposing between Christianity and Korean folk religions, but there is a similar throughline in the 1903 text written by Hulbert. Hulbert never explicitly mentions Christianity within the text, but his missionary background still shines through in the way he describes Korean folk religions. Although the descriptions of Korean religious practices are written in a more formal and academic style compared to the other texts, some value assumptions still shine through.

“She *pretends* to be a sort of spiritual medium” (Hulbert 1903: 145, emphasis added)

“We will give only one or two short stories showing what confidence the *ignorant* Koreans have in these *senseless superstitions*” (Hulbert 1903: 302, emphasis added)

Here, Hulbert frames these Korean folk beliefs as involving pretence. As exemplified in the first excerpt above, Hulbert uses words such as “pretend” and “supposed” (as in his “*supposed* occult power” (1903: 388, emphasis added)) to frame the female shaman and blind diviner’s actions as based not in actual belief in their practices, but in trickery. Additionally, as in the second excerpt, words such as “ignorant”, “credulous” and “superstitious” are used to describe those who believe in these practices⁹. Thus, the framing of Korean folk religion within this text is that its beliefs are not true, that its practitioners are engaging in pretence, and that its followers are ignorant for believing in these practices.

Although this is also a negative portrayal, Korean folk beliefs are not framed as a danger in the same way they are within the texts written by Hall. This could be a simple question of difference in the purpose and content of the two texts, as Hulbert’s text is focused on describing Korean folk beliefs, whilst Hall’s texts are describing missionary work relating to

⁹ Within Hulbert’s text, the word “pretense” appears four times, and “supposed” and “supposed to” appear 13 times (in the type of usage indicated above). The words “ignorant”/“ignorance” appear three times, “credulous”/“credulity” appear twice, whilst “superstitious”/“superstition” appears five times.

blind people. Hall's framing of Korean folk beliefs as more dangerous to blind people could be informed by how her work is more directly tied to educating and converting blind people to Christianity, and the role Korean folk beliefs might play in blind people not wanting to engage with Christian missionaries.

This ties back to the note made above about how Hall's texts include mentions of Korean people misunderstanding the intentions of Christian missionaries. Hall specifically attributes this to rumours that western doctors use the eyes of Korean children to make medicine. These rumours, mentioned briefly in the Background chapter, are a part of the anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiments that were prominent when the Protestant missionaries first arrived in Korea. It is likely that the missionaries who wrote the earlier texts had more experience with these types of sentiments, which would have affected the general population's willingness to engage with these Christian missionaries. A more detailed examination of the history behind these sentiments lies outside the scope of this thesis, but they might have affected the perspective of these earlier texts. For instance, the more hostile attitude towards missionaries from the Korean people could have influenced the portrayal of Korean folk beliefs as dangerous within Hall's texts.

Another distinction can be found in how Hulbert portrays blind people compared to the other texts, including Hall's. As mentioned above, blind people are generally framed as in need of help within the texts being analysed, but this is not the case within Hulbert's text. Since his text is focused on Korean folk beliefs and not on missionary work relating to blind people, his text only mentions blind diviners, and not the general blind populace of Korea. This focus on blind diviners results in the framing of blind people not as victims of these religious practices, as in Hall's texts, but as facilitators of them. Although this is a rather different portrayal of blind people from the other texts, it is not foregrounded, and is mainly implied through the connotations of words such as those mentioned above.

This difference could once again be attributed to the different purposes of the text and the work the writers behind the texts are involved in. As Hulbert's text is the only one not directly concerned with missionary work relating to blind people, this could be a factor in this difference. The positioning of blind people as in need of help could be attributed to the fact that these texts are descriptions of missionary work intended to help blind people. The positioning of blind people as in need of help would justify the work being described, which could be a factor in its prominence within the texts. As mentioned above, the portrayal of disabled people as deserving of Christians' charity and compassion was already a part of general Christian conceptions of blindness, so it could be a case of these sentiments being amplified within the texts specifically concerned with helping blind people.

Coming back to the distinction between the texts written by Hall and Hulbert and the rest of the primary material, there are other relevant differences. As already mentioned, the other texts do not establish the same connection between darkness and Korean folk religion. Only the two texts published in 1938 actually mention anything related to folk beliefs, and even then only making brief asides. Clark simply notes in an anecdote that a blind man (who is most likely Mr Whang) was previously a village sorcerer. Bruen also makes the same aside, noting that Mr Whang was a sorcerer, but goes into a bit more detail, although it is not foregrounded in the same way and does not contain the same framing of Korean folk beliefs as dangerous as in Hall's texts.

Looking at these differences in the missionary discourses surrounding blind people, some explanations can be found by connecting them to the surrounding social context. The texts written by Hall and Hulbert were all published in the years 1903-1908, whilst the rest of the texts were published in 1933-1938. This constitutes around a 30-year gap, with many changes occurring during these years. As mentioned in the Background chapter, within this period the Japanese colonial government established a school for blind people, and enacted their

“breaking of superstition” policies, which led to a decline in the number of blind diviners, and the presence of Korean folk religions in general. With these factors in mind, the differences in the presence of these practices and their portrayal within the texts published in the 1900s could be because of the higher presence of blind diviners during this period compared to later years.

This does not necessarily mean later missionaries did not hold these views on Korean folk religions. The lack of mention of these practices could be due to their lessening presence within Korean society, and that the Korean Protestant Church had a bit more of a foothold on the peninsula, both of which could be reasons for perceiving Korean folk religions as less of a threat, which in turn could mean these Christian missionaries did not feel the same need to mention it.

3.4. “Instruments of light”

The above sections have already showcased how blind people are framed in relation to darkness, but blind people are also linked to light within these texts. This might seem contradictory, but it can be explained by Christian discourses and symbolism surrounding conversion and salvation. Yong showcases how the Old and New Testament uses the imagery of “coming out of darkness into the light” (2009: 31) to represent the process of reaching salvation. This is reflected in the discourses surrounding Christian education and conversion to Christianity that appear within the texts, but takes a particular form when relating to blind people. The associations with darkness frames blind people as particularly vulnerable, which also translates into the framing of blind people as in particular need of light, of Christianity. Just as Hall states that “Christian education is the only help and the only hope” (1908: 78), blind people are framed as in need of specifically Christian help.

“Yes, he has heard the Good News, and as you speak, a beautiful light breaks over his face.” (Hill 1937: 60)

Looking further into the ways in which blind people are connected to light within the texts, it is partially through their own belief in Christianity, such as in the excerpt above. The emphasis here is put on the positive effects Christianity has had on the lives of those blind people who have converted, and how it has helped them find joy and happiness.

“The object of our school is to make the blind girls of Korea intelligent, *happy* useful members of Christian home-circles. Already, in several instances their own and other families have been won for Jesus through them. What more encouraging work can we undertake than to rescue these poor blind ones from their darkness and make them *instruments of light* to others!” (Hall 1908: 80, emphasis added)

Looking at this example, Hall does emphasize the blind girls’ happiness, but included in this is also the focus on these blind girls’ ability to lead others to Christianity. Blind peoples’ ability to bring others to Christianity is frequently foregrounded within the texts, putting the focus on the usefulness of blind people. This ability to act as purveyors of the Christian faith, to “go as living firebrands into the dark places.” (Hill 1937: 61), is emphasized in most of the texts.

Here it is relevant to point out the actual purpose of these Christian missions. Although they engaged in medical and educational missions, at the end of the day, their goal was to spread Christianity. Maybe it is not so surprising then that what they choose to foreground in these texts is the ability of blind people to assist in this goal. This does not mean the missionaries did not think they were helping these blind people through their actions, on the contrary, as mentioned above, within the texts the act of bringing them to Christianity is framed as an act of helping them.

Now, the foregrounding of blind people's capabilities does not end with their ability to assist in converting others. Within these texts, learning to and being able to read is also foregrounded, particularly in relation to reading the Bible. All the texts except for Hulbert's 1903 text and the anonymous 1933 text frame reading and Bible study as an important part of the lives of the blind Christians mentioned.

"If only he could learn to read, and thru' His Word have close fellowship with the One who opens blind eyes!" (Hill 1937: 60)

As showcased in this excerpt, reading the Bible is framed as a way to connect to God. This can be seen as a reflection of the emphasis on reading the Bible within Protestantism, and this focus on allowing believers to read the bible can be found in the missionary strategies of these Korean missions. For instance, the Presbyterian mission strategy emphasizes the importance of quickly giving the Korean believers a translated bible to be able to read "God's word" (Min 2009: 210). In this way, blind people were able to engage in an important aspect of the Protestant way of practicing Christianity, which could have affected the way they were treated by the missionaries. It would require further research into these Christian missionaries' views on other disabled people to make more definitive claims, but blind people's ability to engage in this part of Christian life, and thus also partake in "Christian fellowship" (Coen 1934: 216), likely affected the way these blind people were perceived, and one could imagine a disabled person who was not able to read or to engage with the Bible would be perceived and treated differently.

Most of the texts feature reading the Bible as an important part of Christian life, but some distinctions can be made in how reading is emphasised within these texts. Hall's texts in particular frame the value of reading in a somewhat different way. Although these texts also mention reading the Bible, the act of learning to read is not framed as valuable because it

enables you to read the Bible, but as valuable in and of itself. When Hall describes the act of first teaching Pong-nai to read, the focus is put squarely on the development of the writing systems, and the particulars of how Pong-nai learned it.

“It was slow and tedious work at first—press of other work prevented me often from giving the necessary time to it, but little by little she mastered the alphabet, then the syllabary, and then it was plain sailing. In one year time’s she could read readily all I had been able to prepare, and then the necessary implements having arrived from New York she learned to write in point and to make her own lessons from dictation.” (Hall 1908: 79)

Contrast this excerpt with the one from Hill above: where Hill puts the emphasis on reading as a means to connecting with God, Hall is focused on the act of reading in itself. This is indicative of a denominational difference mentioned in the background section. Hall is a Methodist, whilst the rest of the texts that mention reading the Bible were written by Presbyterians. The focus on the value of education within Hall’s texts reflects the Methodist mission’s interest in general education, with the Presbyterian mission focusing on direct evangelism and education for those who have already converted. Hall also mentions other aspects of the education the students at her school receive, such as geography, arithmetic, physiology, music, and industrial work (1908: 80), which further puts the emphasis on education as valuable not only through its use as a tool for conversion. In fact, Hall puts particular focus on usefulness, on turning these blind girls into “intelligent, happy useful members of Christian home-circles” (1908: 80). The focus in Hall’s texts is not on reading the Bible as a vector for inclusion into Christian life, but the focus is instead put on the blind girls’ general abilities, which has a similar effect of framing blind people as capable of being included. This framing as useful might seem contradictory to the positioning as in need of

help explored above, but the important thing to note here is that it is through the missionaries' help these blind people are framed as being able to be included.

3.5. “The healing hand of the Christian physician”

Although the focus so far has been on the religious aspects of these Christian missionaries' views on blindness, these did also interact with medical notions of disability. There are some indications of medical conceptions of blindness within the texts, but these are not nearly as explicit as the religious ones. One reason for this could be attributed to limitations within the primary material. Only three of the texts were written by medical missionaries (Hall 1906 and 1908, ANON 1933), and since the primary goal of these missions was the spread of Christianity, the texts are primarily concerned with religious narratives surrounding disability.

One way to identify the presence of medical conceptions of disability is the use of medical terminology and other words with associations to medical descriptions. Hall stands out in her use of words overtly connected to medicine, such as “hygiene” and “physician” in the excerpt below, as many of the other texts do not have clear examples of medically associated words. This can again be tied back to Hall being a medical missionary, and so it is not surprising that her texts contain more medical terminology. However, this does not preclude the existence of medical notions within the other texts, as there are more aspects to examine.

“Owing to the healing hand of the Christian physician and the better Hygiene that is beginning to prevail I am convinced there is less blindness in Korea than twenty years ago.” (Hall 1908: 78)

Another factor to consider is that medical conceptions of disability are largely concerned with medical intervention and curing disability, as in the above excerpt, where Hall frames medical intervention as the solution to preventing blindness. However, many cases of blindness cannot

be prevented or are rarely curable even today, and certainly were not in the early 20th century. Therefore, in many cases there were no medical interventions that would help, and no cure to be had. Instead, other interventions had to take this place, which in this case was mainly education.

These interventions were not medical in nature, but the way in which they were organized and implemented can be tied to an increased medicalisation of disabilities. In fact, the organization of disabled people based on diagnosis can be tied to a medical model of disability (Smart 2009: 4-5). Looking at the history of this phenomenon within the US, Groce notes that a gradual change occurred during the 19th century, where disabled people went from being treated as an indiscriminate group, as “the lame” or “the crippled”, to being separated into distinct groups, such as “the blind” or “the deaf”, which Groce argues was a manifestation of a growing interest in gaining more precise scientific knowledge of these groups (1992: 15-16). This language is present within the primary material, as the phrase “the blind” appears a total of 41 times throughout all the texts, excluding all cases where it appears with an accompanying noun, such as “the blind girls”. However, this tendency for delineation is most clearly reflected in how the texts that deal with missionary work centre on blind people specifically, and not on disabled people as a whole. Even the one text that discusses a school that caters both to blind and deaf children (Clark 1938) makes a clear distinction between the two groups, only describing them as separate entities that never interact, and never as a whole. In this way, the increased medicalisation of disability is identifiable even within the texts that are not explicitly concerned with medical missions.

Although the positioning as in need of help has already been covered in the above sections, relating to perceptions of disability as something deserving the compassion and charity of Christians, this can also be connected to medical conceptions of disability. Grue ties the medicalisation of disability to charitable organizations and the power given to medical

professionals to determine who is in need of help and what help they should receive (2015: 89). In this particular case, this issue is complicated by the social context the missionaries are working within, as they are not representing the medical establishment in the country they are operating in. Additionally, it is difficult to determine exactly how much of the positioning as in need of help can be attributed to a medical conception of disability. The interaction between medical and religious conceptions means that although the positioning as in need of help is central to a medical conception of disability, it is unclear how much can be ascribed to religious conceptions, and how much can be ascribed to medical conceptions.

4. Conclusion

When looking at these Protestant missionaries who were active in Korea in the early 20th century, there are some common traits within the conceptions of blindness, but the social context and background of the writer behind the texts contributes to distinctions within these conceptions.

The presence of religious conceptions of blindness and the use of religious imagery is perhaps the least surprising, considering that these writers were Christian missionaries. Looking at the particulars of the positioning of blind people in relation to a light/dark dichotomy, the positioning as vulnerable to darkness and in particular need of Christian help both feed into a positioning as in need of help, but with a particular religious undertone. The positioning as in need of help can be connected both to a particularly Christian version of a moral model of disability, as well as a medical model. The Christian framing within this positioning as in need of help does point to this as an aspect of a more religious conception of blindness, but it is possible that the positioning of blind people is being affected by the increased medicalisation of disability in more subtle ways.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the medical missionary is the writer who veers closest to a medical understanding of blindness, as the medical model of disability is primarily associated with the medical establishment. However, what is of particular interest is how this medical understanding of disability is reflected in the other texts. The delineation of disabled people into distinct categories can be connected to the increasing presence of medicalisation in the general understanding of disability within non-medical contexts, and the texts capture a specific moment in the history of this process of medicalisation. The fact that the texts written by these Christian missionaries, who if anyone would be surrounded by religious narratives of

disability, also show signs of medical conceptions of disability, showcases how these conceptions were being integrated into general understandings of disability within the US, and the West more broadly. As these missionaries established many of the first “modern” schools for blind people in Korea, and influenced the Japanese interest in the issue as well, these conceptions were also transferred to how social work was organized in Korea at the time, and could thus also have implications for the history of social work in Korea after the colonial period.

Looking more closely at the distinctions in the portrayal of blind people within these texts, differences can be seen based on denomination, the focus of the work, and the time period the missionaries were active in. Although these all played some part in shaping the discourses surrounding blindness in each of the texts, time stands out as a particularly relevant factor. The larger presence of blind diviners, and Korean folk religion in general, within Korean society at the turn of the 20th century is reflected in the framing of blind people in the texts published in the 1900s. This showcases how the understandings of disability prevalent in the US at the time were influenced and shaped by the specific context these missionaries operated in to create the specific narrative present in these texts.

There are however some additional factors not covered by this thesis that could aid in understanding how these missionaries' conceptions of blindness differed and complied with larger understandings of disability. A comparative analysis looking at the Christian missionaries' treatment of blind people compared to their treatment of other disabled people in Korea could provide more insights into if blind people's ability to read the Bible and engage in “Christian fellowship” affected how they were treated and perceived. Additionally, further research could aid in gaining a deeper understanding of these conceptions by considering factors such as Orientalism and the relationship between these missionaries and the Korean, and Japanese colonial, government, and the Korean people in general.

These missionaries' conceptions of blindness and subsequent treatment of blind people also have implications for the understanding of how blind people's social position and role in society changed during the early 20th century. As mentioned in the Background chapter, there exists some previous research on the particulars of this change in social position, but these changes could be examined further and more in depth with the added understanding of the particular way Christian missionaries viewed blindness and blind people in Korea.

In conclusion, the most pervasive characteristics of these missionaries' conceptions of blindness are that these conceptions aligned with the work they were doing, and were influenced both by the particular social context of the Korean peninsula, the time period, and reflected the ideas of the society they came from. This resulted in a somewhat varied understanding of blindness, but an understanding that was still deeply religious, with some hints of the increasing influence of the medicalisation of disability.

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