



Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese Occupied Korea

Albert L. Park

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Why and how did Korean religious groups respond to growing rural poverty, social dislocation, and the corrosion of culture caused by forces of modernization under strict Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945)? Questions about religion's relationship and response to capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and secularization lie at the heart of understanding the intersection between colonialism, religion, and modernity in Korea. Yet, getting answers to these questions has been a challenge because of narrow historical investigations that fail to study religious processes in relation to political, economic, social, and cultural developments. In *Building a Heaven on Earth*, Albert L. Park studies the progressive drives by religious groups to contest standard conceptions of modernity and forge a heavenly kingdom on the Korean peninsula to relieve people from fierce ruptures in their everyday lives. The results of his study will reconfigure the debates on colonial modernity, the origins of faith-based social activism in Korea, and the role of religion in a modern world.

Building a Heaven on Earth, in particular, presents a compelling story about the determination of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Presbyterian Church, and the Ch'ndogyo to carry out large-scale rural movements to form a paradise on earth anchored in religion, agriculture, and a pastoral life. It is a transnational story of leaders from these three groups leaning on ideas and systems from countries, such as Denmark, France, Japan, and the United States, to help them reform political, economic, social, and cultural structures in colonial Korea. This book shows that these religious institutions provided discursive and material frameworks that allowed for an alternative form of modernity that featured new forms of agency, social organization, and the nation. In so doing, *Building a Heaven on Earth* repositions our understandings of modern Korean history.

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