

RELIGION IN KOREA

I. MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD RANKED BY NUMBER OF ADHERENTS

- Q: Which organized religion has the largest number of adherents?
- 1. Christianity: 2.1 billion (2005)
 - Catholic & Near Catholic (Catholic, Orthodox, High Church Anglican) - 64%
 - Protestant (Pentecostal, Independent, Low Church Anglican) - 34%
 - Other - Mormon, Christian Scientists etc. - 2%
- 2. Islam: 1.5 billion
- 3. Hinduism: 900 million
- 4. Buddhism: 376 million
- 5. Sikhism: 23 million

- 6. Judaism: 14 million
- 7. Baha'i Faith: 7 million
- 8. Confucianism: 6 million
- 9. Jainism: 4.2 million
- 10. Shinto: 4 million

- **Other Major Religions:**
 - - Chinese traditional religion (inc. Taoism & Confucianism): 394 million
 - - Tribal Religions (Shamanism & Animism): 300 million
 - - African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million
 - - Cao Dai: 4 million
 - - Zoroastrianism: 2.6 million
 - - Tenrikyo: 2 million
 - - Neo-Paganism: 1 million
 - - Unitarian-Universalism: 800,000
 - - Rastafarianism: 600,000
 - - Scientology: 500,000

- * Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 1.1 billion

II. RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

- In spite of rapid industrialization and urbanization, a strong religious impulse remains intact in contemporary Korea.
- “Religious population” has increased steadily in the last four decades.
- Traditional religions and Christianity as well as new religious movements remain vibrant.

- South Korea has no “official” religion—like the Anglican Church in England—nor is there one dominant religion.
- Shamanism, Buddhism, and Christianity as well as new religious movements co-exist peacefully in one of the most religiously pluralistic countries in the world.
- Buddhism is the largest religion with 10.7 million followers.
- Protestantism is a close second with 8.6 million adherents, followed by Catholicism with 5.1 million followers.

Table 1. Religious Population (in thous.)

| | <u>1995</u> | <u>2005</u> |
|---|-------------|-------------------|
| • Buddhist | 10,321 | 10,726 (22.8%) |
| • Protestant | 8,780 | 8,616 (18.3%) |
| • Catholic | 2,951 | 5,146 (10.9%) |
| • Won Buddhism | 87 | 130 (0.3%) |
| • Confucianism | 211 | 104 (0.2%) |
| • <u>Others</u> | <u>268</u> | <u>247 (0.5%)</u> |
| • Source: National Census (2006). | | |
| • Other notable religions include: Daesoonjinhoe (68 or 0.14%); Chondogyo (30 or 0.06%); Daejonggyo (11 or 0.02%); and Muslims (40 or 0.07%). | | |
| • * 49.3% of the population is not affiliated with any religious organization. | | |

- Some of the notable findings in the table are the following:
- The proportion of Koreans with no religious affiliation, which has been around 50%, is quite high (the figures for most other countries are 15-20%).
- Between 1995 and 2005, while the proportion of Buddhists in the total population increased, their absolute number decreased.
- This happened due to the increase in the Korean population.

- Between 1995 and 2005, the absolute number of and the proportion of Protestants in the total population dropped, marking the first decline since the liberation in 1945, when full religious freedom was granted.
- There are more than 100,000 Koreans who identify Confucianism as their religion.

- These censuses have also shown that Buddhists tend to have relatively lower educational attainment than their Protestant and Catholic counterparts.
- For example, the 2005 census shows that one-third of Buddhists have less than high school diploma, while the figures for Protestants and Catholics were 14% and 8%, respectively.
- The same survey shows that while a quarter of Buddhists have high school diploma, the figures for Protestants and Catholics were 16% and 11%, respectively.

- Also, more Buddhists are found to be residents of rural areas than their Protestant and Catholic counterparts.
- According to the 2005 census, for example, 30% of Buddhists were living in rural areas, which is conspicuously higher than the figures for Protestants (14%) and Catholics (8%).

III. GROWING INFLUENCES OF RELIGION

- Secularization vs. growing influences of religion
- Q: If the influence of religion in Korea is said to be have grown stronger, in what ways can this be detected?
- Religious organizations as a whole are the most powerful non-governmental organization:
 - a major employer in the country (41,362 monks; over 110,000 pastors; nearly 2,000 priests);
 - operate schools at all levels of education (e.g., 1/5 colleges and universities);

- operate hospitals and research institutes;
- operate commercial enterprises like newspapers and printing houses;
- each of the three major religions operates its own nationally broadcast cable network and even radio station; and
- provide various social services, including orphanages, shelters for the homeless, childcare and counselling.