“THE WOMEN, THE MOTHERS MOULD THE NATIONS”:
THE CHRISTIAN HOME, KOREAN WOMEN,
AND WFMS MISSIONARIES

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Twelve years after Robert S. Maclay, the superintendent of the Japan Mission, visited King Gojong’s court in 1884 and received royal permission for Protestant missionaries to conduct medical and educational work in Korea, Esther Kim Pak studied abroad at the Woman’s Medical College in Baltimore in 1896 and returned to Korea in 1900 to become the first Korean woman physician. In her first year in Korea as a physician, “she treated nearly three thousand cases.” In Seoul’s Bugu Nyogwan infirmary where she was transferred, she saw more than 3,300 patients during the year.

Pak, who died in 1910 at only 34, was one of Korean Protestantism’s most illuminating and fascinating figures. She was one of first graduates of Ehwa Academy (later College and University), the first Western school for girls in Korea that was started by Mary F. Scranton who was sent to Korea by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (hereafter WFMS), a missionary-sending organization within the Methodist Episcopal Church. After earning a reputation as a stellar student, Pak apprenticed with Rosetta Sherwood Hall, M.D., a WFMS medical missionary, who took Pak under her wing and assisted her in studying abroad and receiving a medical education in the United States.

The fact that WFMS missionaries encouraged Korean women to pursue professional and career interests reflects the outlook of the WMFS that aroused passions beyond religious concerns. They took as its starting point the “Christian Home,” the nucleus from which the development of social reform and active citizenry proceeded. In the History of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (1920), the author wrote, “The large number of educated

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2 For a comprehensive overview of Korean Christianity from the first contacts with Catholicism in the late sixteenth century to contemporary challenges, see Sebastian C.H. Kim and KIRSTEEN Kim, A History of Korean Christianity (NY: Cambridge UP, 2015). Also, see the anthology, Christianity in Korea, that has some of the leading Koreanists in the field of Korean Christianity (Robert E. Buswell and Timothy Lee, eds., Christianity in Korea [Honolulu: U Hawai’i P, 2006]).
4 E. ERNSBERGER, “Report IV: Woman’s Hospital and Dispensary, Chung Dong, Seoul,” Third Annual Report of the Korea Woman’s Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (May 9-14, 1901), 6-11.
Christian girls who have gone both from the instruction and influence of our missionaries, establishing Christian homes, becoming teachers, some entering commercial life in the cities, will attest that the money contributed by the church for the cause of missionaries has been well invested.”

Unfortunately, however, attempts to explain the meaning of the Christian home must confront the fact a systematic examination of this significant mission theory has, according to Dana Robert, “scarcely been undertaken.” Robert continues, “Yet despite its ubiquity in missionary thinking, this most enduring and successful aspect of mission theory has been forgotten in the scholarly discussion of Anglo-American mission thought.”

The reason can partly be attributed to the critique of the Christian home as an instrument of an outdated Victorian ideology of domesticity that imposed an imperialist and oppressive agenda. Indeed, the parallel between the engagement of women missionaries with Korean women and the development of modern womanhood in Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries merits close attention. However, attempts to explain the meaning of these developments must confront the fact that the Korean women’s movement toward modernity originates overwhelmingly under the guidance of women missionaries. The Christian home provided the narrative for women missionaries but contemporary studies of their work do not render the complexity of their understanding as American women viewed the home as the catalyst for not only Christian renewal but also social transformation. In fact, the missionaries’ interpretation reveals latent meaning of gendered empowerment that allowed Korean girls and women to reinvent themselves continually in the modernist formation and to find ways to exercise authority and agency that was nurtured from a religious grounding, to fulfill their Christian and social calling. For women missionaries, the “Christian home” represented many-sided dimensions to their mission that

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7 Hyaeweol Choi argued that women missionaries “firmly believed the domestic sphere to be the ideal province for women, whose moral and spiritual strength was expected to nurture the family and the community” (Hyaeweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea* [Berkeley, CA: U California P, 2009], 3). Choi acknowledges the positive contributions of women missionaries but at the same signals the racial and power-relations that defined their relationship. Using a binary interpretation, the relationship between women missionaries and Korean women is defined by modern vs. backwards, power vs. powerless, superior race vs. inferior race, and dominant vs. oppressed. Choi also counters the notion that women missionaries introduced modernity to Korean women. She wrote: “Yet, despite their sense of freedom and gender equality vis-à-vis the oppressed status of Korean women, American women missionaries often felt tensions with “modern” or New Women in the United States at the time. Nonetheless, the hierarchical relationship between women missionaries and Korean women in terms of class and race in the West-dominant world order was an important backdrop for the rather simplified understanding of women missionaries as “modern.” This understanding largely stemmed from the prominent image of the West as the central power in the modern era” (13-14).
encompassed not only religious and spiritual development but also the empowerment of women to challenge social conventions, to model autonomy and self-determination, and develop alternative models of womanhood from traditional contexts. The newly Christian women claimed legitimacy and, in some cases, even authority in the wider society, ranging from developing and expanding their local context to leading educational, medical, and nationalistic movements. For the common woman, conversion to Christianity offered a vehicle of personal transformation and a means of transcending conventional social norms by awakening them of the possibilities beyond domestic duties.

Despite its universal appeal and practice from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the significance of the Christian home, according to Dana Robert, has been “forgotten” as a missional strategy, denominational heritage, and scholarly discussion. The WFMS missionaries considered the home as the starting-point and they expected women’s roles to expand beyond the purview of a domestic agenda. In uncoupling the traditional concepts of womanhood of premodern Korean society, WFMS missionaries introduced a discourse analysis that allowed Korean women to conceptualize strategies and models and challenge the status quo. In doing so, WFMS posed a dialectical conflict between the social, economic, and cultural possibilities offered by the introduction of the modern era and the political, institutional and attitudinal superstructure inherited from the premodern era. By mapping power relations and multiple subject positionings of class, religion, and gender, Korean women transitioned to modernist formations and found ways of exercising agency in their particular context.

For women missionaries, the “Christian home” was the epicenter where women cultivated and practiced moral agency based on the belief that they are empowered to challenge social conventions, expected to model autonomy and self-determination, and develop alternative models of womanhood in the context of religious transformation. The newly Christian women claimed legitimacy and, in some cases, like Esther Kim Pak, even authority in the wider society, ranging from developing and expanding their local context to leading educational, medical, and nationalistic movements. For many Korean women, conversion to Christianity offered a vehicle of personal transformation and a means of transcending social norms by awakening their responsibility to reform their homes and society. The ideal of the Christian home was not limited to women missionaries but was a “cornerstone of Anglo-American missionary thought and practice” from the early


nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century.¹⁰

The role that the Christian home can play in fueling women’s activity propelled women’s potent influence that according to Dana Robert “began with one’s own family, and from there could radiate throughout the world.”¹¹ In “The Place of Women in the Church on the Mission Field (1927),” the report stated that “Home interests widen easily into community and then into national interests, and we find women finally bringing to international questions a deep concern for human well-being.”¹²

The passionately held belief in the nation-building potential of women likewise motivated women in the creation of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society in 1869.¹³ The WFMS was not the first women’s foreign missionary organization with a global presence but by 1910 the WFMS was, according to Helen Barrett Montgomery, the pioneer Christian social activist who became the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1921, “the greatest Woman’s Missionary Society in the country.”¹⁴ During its seventy years (1869–1939), the WFMS sent out 1,559 missionaries to the world before merging along with five other women’s organizations to form the Woman’s Society of Christian Service during the Uniting Conference

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¹² International Missionary Council, The Place of Women in the Church on the Mission Field (London; New York: International Missionary Council, 1927), 16. Dana Robert wrote that “Missiologies of the Christian home continued to be advocated by mainline missionary women at least until World War II, with a firm connection drawn between women’s education and Christian home life as the basis for church and a just society” (Robert, American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice, 286).

¹³ Six Methodist women gathered at the Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church in the South End Boston on March 23, 1869 as the founding meeting of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society. For a background on the start of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, see Russell R. Richey, Kenneth Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, American Methodism: A Compact History (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 113-116; and Dana Robert, American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice.

(1939) that created The Methodist Church. However, during the years when it thrived, the WFMS operated with “a high degree of local autonomy” in fund-raising, organization, and appointment of missionaries. While the other Protestant missionaries in Korea reported to their respective Foreign Mission Boards of their denominations, the WFMS missionaries reported to the WFMS Board and were accountable to the mandates of the WFMS.

The reality that the WFMS aspired for both Christian home and social reform was not lost on the missionaries who traveled abroad carrying their vision around the world. The close juxtaposition of spiritual and professional pursuits was expressed by Jane Bashford, a WFMS missionary in India, who remarked, “The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society is rendering a great service in making a Christian home for a score of young women who are students in the Government Medical School in Agra.”

The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church but it exercised considerable autonomy: they raised funds for and appointed its own women missionaries. They estab-

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15 Despite opposition from the parent Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, WFMS started on March 23, 1869, at the Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church when eight women voted to form a Society of women to minister to women in foreign countries. The 1964 General Conference re-structured the Woman’s Division, resulting in the transfer of administration to other divisions of the missional board. With the merger of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968, the women’s organizations of the two denominations merged to create Women’s Society of Christian Service and Wesleyan Service Guild. The administrative responsibility was assigned to the Women’s Division of the Board of Missions. The 1972 General Conference approves of the formation of one inclusive organization, the United Methodist Women. The 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church approved of making United Methodist Women (UMW) an autonomous organization within the Church, separating UMW from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) for the first time in more than 70 years.

16 “By 1870, a system of branch organizations was worked out whereby Methodist women across the country could run their own regional operations and pay for their own mission projects and personnel, coordination of the enterprise being left to an Executive Committee. The branch system provided for a de-centralized organization with a high degree of local autonomy and grassroots participation in the local churches. Each branch had its own corresponding secretary who communicated with the missionaries appointed by that particular branch. In effect, major decisions were made by the consensus of volunteers at the home base rather than by denominational officials” (Robert, American Women in Mission, 139).

17 “This Society [Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society] shall work in harmony with and under the supervision of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The appointment, recall, and remuneration of missionaries, and the designation of their fields of labor, shall be subject to the approval of the Board of Managers of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and annual appropriations to Mission fields shall be submitted for revision and approval to the General Missionary Committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church” (Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, Annual Report, 1884, p. 97). In addition, it was further agreed that the WFMS should be under the direction of the Missions or Conferences in which they were located, and that funds of the Society were not to be raised by any means which would conflict with contributions to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Other than these stipulations, the women of WFMS exercised a large degree of autonomy.

lished auxiliaries across the United States and organized a network whereby local chapters were formed to build grassroots support and recruitment of future missionaries. They sent the first female physicians to India, China, Japan, and Korea. They opened the first women’s hospitals in India, China, and Korea. They founded many schools, hospitals, and colleges, including Ewha Women’s University that became the world’s largest college for women.

However, in the beginning, the development of Korea’s Ewha College was met with strong opposition, even from the mission board and majority of missionaries in Korea.19 As the WFMS missionary in charge of Ewha, Lulu Frey, in spite of the opposition, fulfilled her dream of giving “Korean women nothing less than the best” and initiated plans to start Ewha College in 1910.20 In 1914, during the ceremony of the first graduating class of Ewha College, Helen Kim, the future first Korean president of Ewha University who at the time was a Ewha high school student, sat in the audience, watching three women graduate for the time in Korea. As the emotional Kim watched “breathlessly” the graduates marching in their caps and gowns, she wrote: “Everyone was proud of these potential leaders in the nation. The audience rose and stood in silence. It was a scene that had never before taken place in Korea . . . tears rolled down my cheeks. I looked around and saw that others were crying, too, even some men.”21 Among the “firsts” of Ewha graduates include the first female Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Minister of Gender Equality and Family, lawyer, doctor, nurse and many

19 “Fearing that college-educated Korean women ‘would be spoiled for service to their own people’ and thus would be rejected by the Korean community, the majority of missionaries opposed the idea of offering a college education to women” (Hyaeweol Choi, “Women’s Work for ‘Heathen Sisters’: American Women Missionaries and Their Educational Work in Korea,” Acta Koreana 2 [July, 1999]: 11).

20 Marie E. Church and Mrs. R. L. Thomas, “Lulu E. Frey: Who Went to Korea,” The One Who Went and The One She Found, Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, 1929, pp. 150-157. Of all the WFMS missionaries, Alice Appenzeller credited Lulu Frey with the vision to develop Ewha Academy into Ewha College. Alice Appenzeller wrote: “To Miss Lulu Frey, who for twenty-seven years built her life into the school, Korea owes its only college for women. It was her vision that made possible the addition of all the higher departments of the school, when as yet there were no teachers, buildings or equipment. Through her influence special teachers for the college and preparatory departments were secured, until now the faculty consists of American women from Columbia, Northwestern, Ohio Wesleyan, Wellesley, Smith and Baker, as well as Korean and Japanese teachers of high scholarship and training” (Alice Appenzeller, “Ewha Haktang: Woman’s College of Korea,” Korea Mission Field 18.5 [May, 1922]: 102). “At a critical time in the life of Ewha Miss Frey was placed at its head, and the larger Ewha [i.e. College] that we know today is the product of her faith and leadership . . . She wanted to see a college for Korean women fully organized, and her dream was of this for a number of years” (C. D. Morris, “In Memoriam—Miss Lulu E. Frey,” Korea Mission Field 17.5 [May, 1921]: 96, 97).

others. Kim’s reference regarding the graduates as “potential leaders in the nation” captured the imagination of many young Korean women, eager to exercise leadership in a new era for women.

By 1919, the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society had the “largest budget, the most teachers, the most Bible women, the largest number of schools and colleges, and the most contributing members of any woman’s missionary organization in the United States.”23 In 1869, a writer for the magazine of the WFMS explained to fellow Methodist women that “We know too how inestimable is the value, and how incalculable the influence of a pure Christian home, and if the influence of such homes are so indispensable in a Christian land, what must be their importance among people, the depth of whose degradation is, as we are often assured, altogether beyond our realization?”24 The writer’s call to action has an urgency that would be familiar to its audience: the unmistakable sense of freedom and power derived from the Christian home that symbolized powerfully not only its proven efficacy but also its potential to transform other lands starting from the home. The inspiring message of affirmation of their belief in the Christian home combined with her empowering words to export it to women beyond the United States resonated with American women and they responded to the clarion call.25

Supporters of the WFMS have long defended the linkage between the Christian home and the nation’s regeneration on religious and developmental grounds; how the Christian home liberates women from social and cultural restrictions. Women, according to Kate Ogborn, a WFMS missionary in 1908 working in China, “enjoy the freedom of mind and body which only the Christian home can give to womanhood.”26 At its fundamental level, the Christian home served as a model to outsiders, a microcosm of Christianity emanating from the behavior and practices of family members. In a WFMS magazine in 1891, the author distinguished the “pure, sweet life that surrounds the girl reared in the Christian home.”27 In her autobiography, Louisa Yim as a young girl in Korea observed the differences in a Christian home when she visited a Korean pastor’s home. Yim saw “a warmth here that spread over all the members of the family and I knew at once what it was—

22 Ewha was also “the first educational institution for women in Korea in 1886: first formally recognized university by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in 1946; the first medical school for women in Korea in 1945; the first law school for women in Korea in 1950; and the first College of Engineering among all the women’s universities/colleges in the world in 1996 under the leadership of President Yoon Hoo Jung” (Eun Mee Kim, “The First Footsteps Across the Frontier,” in Footsteps Across the Frontier: 120 Years of Globalization at Ewha Womans University, ed. Heather Willoughby [Seoul: Ewha Womans UP, 2007], 27).
23 Robert, American Women in Mission, 137.
24 “Appeal to the Ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church," The Heathen Woman’s Friend 1.1 (June, 1869): 1.
27 “Uniform Study of June (Supplement No. 5),” Heathen Woman’s Friend (May, 1891).
the girls and Pastor Kim’s wife were not people apart from the sons and Pastor Kim. They were together, one, a single unit.”28 Astonished, Yim remarked, “It was the first time I had ever seen family life like this.”29

The Christian home was elevated to a sacred status and symbolically marked as a moral world where women acted as guardians of the pure values that could counteract the destructive tendencies of society. Christian values laid the foundations of the Christian home but the concept of the Christian home was understood as having a wider implication; as a social and political commentary on how women exercise moral agency in a domestic context as well as with national concerns.

The struggle to transform the home had its parallel in the battle for the soul of the nation. At stake was nothing less than the nation’s salvation. The knowledge of impending tragedies upon nations and peoples spurred the great impetus among American Christian single women to travel to potentially hostile environments. In The Lure of Korea (1910), Jennie Fowler Willing, corresponding secretary for the WFMS and a frequent writer for missionary periodicals, and Margaret Jones, a Methodist missionary in Korea, understood the necessity of the Christian home as “the first step toward a nation’s salvation.”30

Diverging from the Victorian notion that everyone and everything had its place in which routine and hierarchy reinforced the social order, WFMS missionaries’ embrace of the Christian home illuminated subversive implications regarding the reproduction of an activist state that valued their voices and roles in the transformation of the home and beyond. Embracing the Christian home—and all of its implications—meant questioning their gender positioning and challenging the dominant ideology of womanhood. The inner struggle produced a powerful means to outwardly express their newly-found gender identities.

In Woman’s Missionary Friend, a WFMS publication, a story titled “Wedding in Kolar” is recounted in which a converted woman in India was to marry in 1911 and live in a “mud hut” with “a strip of matting” to sleep. Despite its humble condition, it will be nevertheless, according to the author,

28 Louise Yim, My Forty Year Fight for Korea (Seoul: Chungang UP, 1951), 57.
29 Yim, My Forty Year Fight for Korea, 57. Demonstrating the Christian home to outsiders was certainly one purpose of the Christian home. Hyaeweol Choi wrote, “The missionary home was an object lesson for ‘heathens’ on the domestic ideal. Missionary women used their homes as a platform where they could engage in evangelical persuasion from their own private space by turning it into a public pulpit. Teaching the gospel went hand in hand with teaching domestic arts because the opportunity to learn those practical domestic skills was what attracted local women” (Choi, “The Missionary Home as a Pulpit: Domestic Paradoxes in Early Twentieth-Century Korea,” Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific, eds. Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly [Canberra, Australia: Australian National UP, 2014], 54). While the Christian home was indeed exhibited like a “public pulpit,” the true purpose of the Christian home was the transformation of the private lives. And, as Yim observed, the inner transformation of the Kim family made a profound impression upon her.
30 Jennie Fowler Willing and Margaret Jones, The Lure of Korea (Boston: Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, 1910), 53.
“The Women, the Mothers Mould the Nations”  55

“a Christian home.” She continued, “and in just such is the hope of India. Some of these wives will become Bible women and teachers in the villages in which they live.” The story illustrates the process of regeneration routinely expected in the creation of a Christian home. The writer ended “The Wedding Kolar” with a jubilant anticipation: “And oh, what a difference to them because they lived and were taught in a Christian home!”31 A part of the mystery and excitement that a Christian home generated to WFMS missionaries was the unforeseeable possibilities that lay ahead for those in a Christian home. “Every newly established Christian home,” according to Mary B. Barrow, a WFMS missionary, “is a strong force for the coming in of the Kingdom of God.”32 Once the seeds of the Christian home were planted, WFMS missionaries knew the fruits would be borne but its particular manifestations were to be determined. In 1907, Luella Rigby, a WFMS missionary stationed in Burma, expressed the sentiment when she asked “who can measure the influence of a Christian home in a heathen land?” She answered, “Eternity must do that for us.”33 In describing the influence of the Christian home upon Japanese children, its “fragrance,” according to Frances Phelps, a WFMS missionary in 1908, “can hardly be lost in a lifetime.”34 Writing for the 1913-1914 Woman’s Conference in Japan, a WFMS missionary wrote, “surely the work of our [Woman’s Foreign Missionary] Society is the best work on earth” when considering that “the best work of the church is establishing good homes, the best work of education the elevation of the home, and the best work of philanthropy the protection of the home.”35

The passionately held belief in the nation-building potential of women likewise motivated missionaries in Korea. In The Story of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1898), The Christian household, in reference to a report on Korea, “is an innovation which revolutionizes the very basis of society. This is inevitable. Christian homes are a prime essential of the Christian Church, and the Christian home involves much at variance with Korean views.”36 In 1891, Louisa Rothweiler reiterated this sentiment very well when giving her report on Korea. She stated, “The women, the mothers mould the nations.”37 “No nation rises higher

37 Louisa Rothweiler, “Korea,” Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1890-1891 (Boston: Heathen Woman’s Friend, 1891), 65. Louisa Rothweiler daughter of a German Methodist preacher attended the bilingual German Wallace College in Ohio and after her term in Korea served as the General Secretary of the German Work in Europe for the WFMS.
than its mothers,” Kate Moss insisted in 1908 in the *Woman’s Missionary Friend,* a WFMS journal, “and that no nation can become Christian without Christian mothers.”38 The link between the Christian home and national reform served as a vehicle undergirding the mindset of women missionaries.

The ideals of the Christian home were translated into norms of behavior, expectations about the advancement of society through social regeneration. The transformation of cultural mores, beginning in the home, developed into social practice that involved the social context in which they were applied. The women missionaries had not only embraced the home with uniformity but had also used the home as the crucial staging point in the national transformation of Korea. “The very foundation of a Christian nation is,” the Woman’s Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, explained, “its homes . . . Your homes are the secret of the foundation of your civilization.”39

The fact that women missionaries traveled abroad and worked in foreign lands as single women, at times operating in the field alone, provide a stark contrast to the Victorian construction of women as confined to the local space of the home. D. A. Bunker, a male missionary in Korea in the early twentieth century, learned a startling fact when he visited what he thought were remote islands untouched by the Christian message. Traveling to an island, he discovered Christians were already residing there. When he asked them if he was the first foreigner on the island, they replied, “There has been a woman preacher here by the name of Hess,” evidently, a woman missionary from the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society. Bunker remarked, “Whatever direction I went, my way had been pioneered by someone under the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society.”40

Women missionaries often operated independently from the oversight of male missionaries and the mission work earned her a space in the public world, especially on the mission field where Koreans witnessed behavior unbecoming of traditional womanhood. In her autobiography, Louise Yim wrote that her father came home excited and said, “There is a strange lady in Kum-san [Geumsan] from far, faraway Yang Kook [America] . . . She is a large lady. Her face is covered with chalklike powder. Her nose is large and of different shape than ours and her eyes are blue and her hair golden. She is going to tell us about her God and all of us shall go down and listen to her.” In the brief encounter, the woman missionary made a profound impact on the young Louise who “cried” as the woman missionary “disappeared down the road” after her visit. The transformative experience with the woman missionary endowed Louise with a sense of her own awakening powers and aspirations. Still crying from watching the missionary leave her village,

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38 Kate E. Moss, “What We May be To-Morrow,” *Woman’s Missionary Friend* 4.4 (1908): 126.
she said to herself, “I wanted more than anything else in the world then to be just like her, to go from place to place telling the wonderful stories that made people happy.”

Their cause, women missionaries insisted, was not only God’s cause but the cause of civilization. Their description of the struggle that societies faced suggests a different understanding to the problem of domesticity than was previously presented. The argument that women missionaries reinforced the domestic sphere appears incomplete especially when weighed against the example and statements made by WFMS missionaries. In 1910, Fowler Willing and Jones wrote, “The home shapes the civilization. Women make the home.” The prominence of such sentiments in public discourse established the home as the fundamental idiom of missional identity. For women missionaries, the home represented the greatest battleground for the soul of a family, society, and nation. Women missionaries on the field, according to Fowler Willing and Jones, “are doing a direct work within that stronghold of civilization, the home.”

WFMS missionaries believed that the transformation of society first begins at home. As Fowler Willing and Jones (1910) declared, “the measure of the gospel’s power in the homes of the people is the measure of the nation’s regeneration.” By making the Christian home the preeminent center for social and national reform, WFMS missionaries analyzed the home with larger implications, particularly its cross-fertilizing effect to the local family, community, and beyond. WFMS missionaries asserted that conversion to Christianity “emancipates women” from the spiritual and cultural absolutism that imprisons and diminishes inherent value.

Contrary to a docile image of domesticity, women missionaries acted upon an unwritten understanding of feminism that accepts and celebrates the self-determination of women. The independent and noncomformist spirit that marked the women of WFMS was translated to Korean girls and women. At a mission school for girls where Louise Yim enrolled, she learned, passively or actively, of gender empowerment and equality. Through her education at the mission school, Yim felt “that a woman could succeed in a man’s world, and that a girl child was not thought to be less than a boy child.”

WFMS missionaries started schools and colleges, built clinics and hospitals, and other institutions but underlying their work was the rhetoric of Wesleyan holiness: the inward regenerative process from converting to Christianity unquestionably finds outward expression in an improved moral character. From the perspective of women missionaries, the transformed outward life of a Christian can best be seen as the manifestation of a regenerative effort on a convert’s part to cultivate the centrality of the Christian

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41 Louise Yim, *My Forty Year Fight for Korea*, 24, 27.
42 Jennie Fowler Willing and Margaret Jones, *The Lure of Korea*, 7, 15.
43 Jennie Fowler Willing and Margaret Jones, *The Lure of Korea*, 53.
44 Louise Yim, *My Forty Year Fight for Korea*, 15.
home. The women missionaries’ expectation of Christian women to start from the Christian home and to exert influence beyond it cut to the very core of pre-modern gender roles in Korea by attacking the habit of deference to the domestic sphere.

WFMS missionaries, such as Rosetta S. Hall, M.D., who entered Korea in 1890, disrupted the social order by upending conventional mores that existed for centuries. For example, blind girls were viewed as dregs of society and relegated to the underclass, often working as beggars or sorcerers. In starting the Clocke School for Blind Girls, Rosetta Hall was “a pioneer in the education of sight- and hearing-impaired persons in Korea . . . [and] devised a braille-like system of embossed printing for the Korean alphabet.”45 By equipping and training blind girls, Hall not only challenged the ubiquitous notion of womanhood as inextricably bound up with the idealization of the domestic but also conferred dignity to a marginalized segment of Korean society and empowered them to meaningfully contribute to society. Hall wrote, “The object of our school is to make the blind girls of Korea intelligent, happy, useful members of Christian home circles.”46

A pioneer woman in a modern career was Esther Kim Pak, a child Rosetta Hall trained as one of her “dispensary assistants.”47 Despite the fact that Pak was an illiterate child from the poorest class, she was given an opportunity to study at Ewha, a WFMS school for girls. In addition to recruiting and training Pak, Rosetta Hall sponsored “a dozen more” Korean women in medical schools, “a dozen or more preparing [for medical school], two studying pharmacy, one dentistry, and scores of nurses, actual and preparing.”48 In a state ceremony honoring the work of Rosetta Hall in 1915, an official likened her as Korea’s “Florence Nightingale.”49

The professionalization of Korean women as a workforce, an unprecedented phenomenon during Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), accelerated with women missionaries educating and training girls and women for a career. Women missionaries transformed women into participants in the larger cultural, economic, and political development. In the missionary periodical The Korean Mission Field, a Korean woman in 1923 observed the opportunities before women as she wrote, “Now there are several large stores managed altogether by women. There are also several woman bank clerks, and a great number of girls are taking commercial courses. The increase in the number

48 Quoted by Mrs. John M. Cornell, the Honorary Corresponding Secretary of the New York Branch of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society in Caroline Mason, ed., A Crusade of Compassion for the Healing of the Nations, 131.
of women newspaper writers is remarkable.’’

WFMS missionaries believed the influence of the Christian home extended well beyond the home as the social reform and activism naturally followed the course of spiritual development. In 1907, Amy Lewis, a WFMS missionary in Japan, described Ninomiya, a convert, whose ‘‘Christian home, her life and work, have been among the strongest forces for good.’’ Lewis then cited her work: president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, one of the managers of the Young Women’s Christian Association, Charity Hospital and Orphanage. Lewis concluded that she ‘‘is known far beyond the Christian circle.’’

Women missionaries celebrated with pride when converted women proclaimed the power of liberation from darkness or from a debilitating image of womanhood that rendered them irrelevant. Helen Kim, one of the most illustrious products of WFMS, observed the stunning change of women who became Christians: ‘‘Middle-aged women who had been formerly about half asleep, suddenly transformed into Christian live wires, surprised their husbands with their new knowledge and determination. They claimed their rights and asserted with finality that their daughters were going to school too.’’ Through their conversion, women became conscious of their power, especially through gender. Converted Korean women used their newly-discovered awareness to exercise authority over their home. Kim attributed her unconventional path toward education in the United States and later her path-breaking career to her mother who determined that she would receive a Western education. Kim wrote, ‘‘My mother is a striking example of this point. Father could do no better than to let her have her way, for it was the right way.’’ Kim attended Ewha as a kindergartener and went through every grade-level. After graduating from Ewha College in 1918, Kim earned a B.A. from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1924. After receiving a M.A. from Boston University in 1924, Kim became the first Korean woman to receive a Ph.D. when she graduated from Columbia University in 1931. She returned to Ewha and became Ewha’s first Korean woman dean in 1931 and first Korean woman president in 1939.

Not surprisingly, the Korean women influenced by the WFMS pioneered new trails in Korean society. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the work of WFMS in Korea, Ju Sam Ryang, the General Superintendent of the Korean Methodist Church, wrote:

It was the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society that gave to Korea the first Korean woman M.D., the first Korean woman Ph.D.; as well as the first trained nurse and the

50 Pil Ley Choi, ‘‘The Development of Korean Women During the Past Ten Years,’’ Korea Mission Field 19.11 (November, 1923): 222.
52 Helen K. Kim, ‘‘Methodism and the Development of Korean Womanhood,’’ in Within the Gate, ed. Charles A. Sauer (Seoul: Korean Methodist News Service, 1934), 78.
first trained kindergarten teacher. For years it has been true that the only college for
women in all Korea was maintained by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society,
and their sisters of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.54

Conclusion

The activism of Korean Christian women suggest much about the ways
in which they broke traditions and social conventions and exercised moral
agency in providing leadership in order to create, build, and the maintain the
momentum of women’s movements. Women missionaries believed in the
centrality of the “Christian home” as the fundamental necessity to determine
the responses of women’s social and religious condition. While scholars
have made arguments about the conservative vision of women missionaries,
the home represented for women missionaries a manual for creating social
change.

Awakened to see distinctive insights into how women represented their
religious values to themselves, newly Christian women were expected to be-
come the “chief minister” of their homes and were trained into the contested
world of women’s activism and leadership—contested because it was largely
prohibited by social conventions and hardly existed in the case of Korea in
the late nineteenth century. Given these restrictions, Christian women chose
a path of leadership and organization that used her moral agency powered
by Christian faith as a strategy for social change. They used tools provided
by their specific vantage points for challenging long-standing limitations im-
posed on women. Korean Christian women refused to remain constrained
by out-moded social construction of women’s role and identity and helped to
undermine a system of gendered hierarchy.

With the Christian home as the locus for change and in its emphasis on
transformation of women as an influential and potentially unsettling force
there appeared a movement that redefined and expanded the cultural and
political space in which they exist. The promotion of the Christian home
can appear retrogressive, especially in contemporary perspective. Even so,
examining the Christian home reveals how women broke convention and
threatened to establish and advance new standards thereby requiring the
development of new rhetorical strategies. As Dana Robert mentioned, the
Christian home was the cornerstone of mission theory in nineteenth century
America. Understanding the Christian home is important therefore because
it represents a significant marker in the United Methodist Women’s heritage
as well as the United Methodist Church, because it demonstrated very spe-
cifically a broad-based activist movement that started from the grassroots,
and because it helps us to understand how they modeled spirituality, congre-
gation development, evangelism, and mobilization for social and political
power as lessons for today’s church.

54 Fifty Years of Light, Commemoration of the Completion of Fifty Years of Work in Korea by
the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (Seoul: YMCA Press, 1938), preface.