

“Saying ‘I Do’ in  
Korea”: Reverend  
Sun Myung  
Moon’s Theology  
of Marriage

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PAPER 9

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On, Sunday, February 14, 2010, Unification Church founder, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, simultaneously married approximately 7,000 couples. Across the globe, another 22,000 couples took part in the ceremony via satellite. Because some of these were arranged marriages, a substantial number of the couples did not know one another until Reverend Moon joined them in union.<sup>1</sup> Since the inauguration of the Unification Church, single Korean men and women have so trusted Reverend Moon that they have handed over to his church their choice of a future spouse.

There is nothing new, however, about arranged marriages in Korea. In her book, *Getting Married in Korea*, anthropologist Laurel Kendall describes the transition in Korean marriages from “old-fashioned matrimony, in which children were forced by the wills of their elders to marry strangers, to more enlightened practices,”<sup>2</sup> in which contemporary men and women have more input in the choice of their potential spouse. Despite the flexibility in how Korean matches are made in contemporary marriages, importance is still placed in the consultation of both family and matchmaker.

Although the Unification Church has its roots in Korea, one wonders if the Korean culture concerning marriage has been retained in the church’s practices. In what follows, I will compare Laurel Kendall’s analysis of traditional Korean arranged marriages with the marriages arranged by Sun Myung Moon. To do this, I will first summarize traditional Korean marriage customs according to Kendall’s anthropology and then compare the theology and practice of these traditional Korean marriages with marriages in the Unification Church.

In Kendall's *Getting Married in Korea*, the following three questions are answered: (1) Why get married? (2) How is the marriage arranged? and (3) What constitutes the ceremony? Marriages in the pre-industrial era were once exclusively, according to Kendall, "a family matter that regarded a potential bride as a source of labor and sons."<sup>3</sup> The wedding initiated men and women into adulthood. Traditionally, Korean Confucianism dominated in marriage preparation. According to Confucianism, the performance of rituals develops social status, moral integrity, and character so that after experiencing nuptials, a man and woman are able to enter responsible adulthood.

Against cultural encroachments from the West, Korean weddings attempt to establish Korean identity. New-style (*sinsik*) weddings, with their focus on individual freedom and westernized rituals, are held in less esteem due to a rise of Korean national pride and anti-American sentiments.

Regarding traditional courtship, if a woman's family cannot identify a proper groom (*sillanggam*), an elder matchmaker arranges the marriage. Couples themselves are paired based on age, family background (*kamun*), education (*hakpŏl*), and status. The initial step in arranging a potential union is a meeting (*massŏn*) between a prospective bride and groom. After this meeting, both the man and woman must confer with the matchmaker and say "yea" or "nay" to the match. Traditionally, matchmakers and parents critically evaluate candidates for matrimony and the arranged meeting is a matter of discerning acumen rather than an opportunity for romance.

Because of the influence of the west, contemporary Koreans enter marriage by "personal choice and mutual understanding in the name of individualism and free will."<sup>4</sup> Arranged meetings are seen as friendly exchanges with a possibility of marriage.

It is important to note that in recent studies of urban Korea, in the midst of a steady rise in love marriages, matchmaking is still present. “In its modern transformation, (matchmaking) is very much a part of the contemporary Korean scene.”<sup>5</sup> Immense influence is placed in the hands of the matchmaker in order to bring a couple together.

In order to understand the evolution of the Korean marriage ceremony, Kendall divides marriages into “old-style” and “new-style” weddings. “Old-style” (*sinsik*) weddings observe Confucian rituals. For ceremonial dress, the bride is adorned in the traditional white jacket and embroidered jacket, whereas the groom is outfitted in antique civil official dress. The ceremonial setting occurs in the courtyard (*madang*) of a Korean family member’s country home.

The spoken language of choice for the ceremony was classical Chinese, the language of scholarship. Following the ceremony, the custom of the father-in-law and mother-in-law, *P’yaebaek* is the only surviving rite of the old-wedding. Here the bride pays dues to the parents and relatives of her husband with full kow-tow bowing and offerings of wine and meat.

Kendall describes the new-style wedding as “both western and at least mildly iconoclastic.”<sup>6</sup> The ceremony takes place within a public hall, where the bride wears a white dress, and the groom, a black suit. Similar to the old-style wedding, an elder master of ceremonies, entitled the *churye*, officiates and speaks modern Korean. Thus, this ceremony transitioned from being “old, rural, intimate, and Korean (to) an image of contemporary, commercial, urban, and to Korean’s eyes, ‘western.’”<sup>7</sup>

In examination of Korean marriages within the Unification Church, the same questions will again be studied: (1) Why get married? (2) How is the marriage arranged?

and (3) What constitutes the ceremony? On May 10, 1952, Reverend Sun Myung Moon composed the final draft of the Unification Church's authoritative text, *The Divine Principle*. The teachings of the text offer the church's theology of marriage. First, marriage fulfills God's purpose of creation, which is the production of good free of sin. This in turn promotes the greatest happiness in God and can be understood through the "Four Position Foundation"—God, husband, wife, and children. According to this model, there will be a finalized foundation "when a perfected man and woman become husband and wife, with God at their center."<sup>8</sup> Similar to traditional Korean ideology, there is importance placed on the wife for the procreation of children.

Primarily, according to *The Divine Principle*, "Adam and Eve should have become husband and wife, eternally centered on God."<sup>9</sup> God created Adam and Eve to become ancestors of a superlative humanity, which was defiled by original sin. Thus, conceding to *The Principle*, the First Lord of the Advent, Jesus, came as the perfected version of Adam with a mission to restore humankind. But because Jesus did not choose marriage, he failed to fulfill the Four Principle Foundation.

There is, therefore, a necessity for a Second Lord of the Advent, which the Unification Church hails to be Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the "Second Messiah."<sup>10</sup> Reverend Moon's mission is to ensure physical and spiritual salvation for humankind. In order to do so, "he must do what Jesus was unable to accomplish, namely restore the Fall by marrying and giving birth to children who are free from original sin."<sup>11</sup> It is left up to Reverend Moon to cleanse all couples through marriage, a union that Adam, Eve, and Jesus failed to attain.

Second, the teachings of the Unification Church “reflect the influence national and ethnic pride have on Korean religions in modern times.”<sup>12</sup> Originally known as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, the Unification Church proclaims that God ordained Korea, Japan, and the United States to lead humanity into a new era of universal religious peace. However, in birthing the Lord of the Second Advent, Korea executes the leading role. According to *The Principle*, “the nation of the East, where Christ will come again, would be none other than Korea.”<sup>13</sup> Korea, in the institution of the Unification Church, identifies its superiority in being the locus of the Second Advent through the uniqueness of its marriage ceremony. Through marriage, the people of Korea formulate a near-perfect human lineage within their nation that will be pleasing to God.

Third, for members of the Unification Church, “marriage is a serious, holy, and obligatory sacrament.”<sup>14</sup> The primary purpose of marriage in the Unification Church is to give joy, glory, and honor to God.<sup>15</sup> Marriage is a mandate from heaven that condemns single life. Once an official member, people of the church have a vocation to matrimony. If they do not follow through with nuptials, their salvation will be forfeited. One has a vocation to “populate the earth with spiritually perfect individuals to help bring salvation to a sinful world.”<sup>16</sup>

Attaining marriage solidifies one’s position in heaven. Unification doctrine affirms that only couples married inside the church by the Messiah, who eternally binds the couples together during the marriage ceremony, can proceed beyond paradise into the kingdom of heaven.<sup>17</sup> Although the theology is unique, the Unification ceremony is

culturally coherent because, as seen above, traditional Confucian rites also symbolize existential transition through the marriage rite.

The Unification Church ceremony is divided in two main parts: the matching or engagement ceremony and the blessing ceremony, popularly known as the mass wedding. In the engagement ceremony, the candidates for marriage submit their names for matchmaking and place their marriage into the hands of Reverend Moon and his wife, Hak Jan Ha, known as the first official True Parents, free from sin. Members of the Unification Church “have an abiding trust in Moon as the voice of God.”<sup>18</sup> This parallels traditional Korean custom, where, in search of a spouse, Korean men and women put God’s will before their own. In Confucian rites, the family decides their future. Here, Moon, as the True Parent, makes this choice.

In earlier years with smaller numbers of couples, Reverend Moon personally knew members and matched them. Recently, with significantly larger numbers, there is a Blessing Committee that considers candidates for marriage and makes recommendations to Moon, who has the final authority in selection. The standard demographic for a potential marriageable candidate includes the following: someone who has reached their mid-twenties, a church member for three-years, and has submitted a marriage application.

The members of the Unification Church are not permitted unions outside of the church family. Couples are paired based on their ancestral lines, where a man and woman with similar lineage are believed to possess the same sin and compatibility in terms of spiritual development. The arrangement itself commences in a large room, where “Reverend Moon points alternatively to a male and female within the congregation.”<sup>19</sup>

After the engagement, a couple is led into an adjacent room. Similar to traditional Korean rites, they must decide whether or not to accept the matchmaker's decision. Because of the importance placed on the input of the matchmaker, as it is in tradition, the couple usually accepts the decision of the matchmaker. In opposition to westernized ideas of individual freedom, it is considered unacceptable for a Unification Church member to make a request for a specific marriage partner. Today, due to the large numbers of Unification members requesting blessings from Reverend Moon, pairings are made via photographs of potential spouses, who are matched by Moon before the blessing ceremony.<sup>20</sup>

The blessing ceremony has five steps, two of which take place before the actual wedding ceremony. The chastening ceremony invites God's forgiveness and grace through chastisement of both man and woman. This ritual is believed to bring Satan out of the bodies of the couple. The holy wine ceremony, similar to the *P'yaebaek* in traditional weddings, involves the exchange of wine and kow-tow bowing, but holds a different meaning. The consumption of wine represents the cleansing of blood from sin and the transition from an iniquitous couple to True Parents.

The ceremony is a "culmination point of Unification membership, and a vital event in the restoration."<sup>21</sup> Similar to new-style weddings, the observance of the official ceremony, the holy blessing ceremony, usually occurs in public venues with guests invited according to space. Similar to both old and new-style weddings, the proceedings are choreographed and formal. First, couples from previous blessings ceremonies form an aisle through which the True Parents, Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Hak Jan Ha emerge, preceded by the engaged couples themselves. The man and woman,



representing the influence of the new-style wedding, are dressed in westernized black and white respectively. The language of choice for the ceremony is modern Korean, also similar to new-style weddings. The holy blessing ceremony concludes with the exchange of vows and rings.

There are two church ceremonies that are exceptionally different from both old and new-style weddings. The thanksgiving ceremony is a separation period between the husband and wife for forty-days to represent the forty-days of fasting Jesus encountered in the desert. It is a time of spiritual transformation and renewal. “The brother-sister relationship that existed for each couple before the matching shifts now to the prospective husband-wife relationship.”<sup>22</sup>

The couple is subject to this test in order to substantiate a spiritual relationship, as opposed to a romantic attachment. This separation is distinctly different from old and new-style weddings, where the bride and the groom remain and live together immediately. Following the thanksgiving is the consummation of the blessing, a three-day ceremony that marks the completion of sanctification. Complementary to the old-style wedding that established social and moral qualities to the couple, the three-day ceremony offers “the couple a new conjugal life.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite its rise in the midst of the modern consumerist culture, the marriage ritual of the Unification Church retains both traditional and modern Korean ideology. The purpose behind getting married is transformed in the Unification Church based on the theology outlined in Moon’s *The Divine Principle*. The text has Christian overtones, but its theology of marriage differs considerably from mainline Christian interpretation. According to *The Principle*, humanity is bedraggled with original sin and the only

purification is through a blessed marriage performed by Moon, the messiah. Only through this marriage can human beings procreate a pure lineage of children. In doing so, humanity can finally, as a family, obtain permission to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the arrangement of marriages, the process differs from traditional Korean custom. In the Unification Church, paper applications are analyzed and photographs are submitted. This creates a detachment between the matchmaker and the prospective couple, in opposition to a closer relationship found in Korean custom. There is also an emphasis on ancestor lineage rather than a concern for evolution in social status. However, the meaning behind the arrangement remains the same. Ultimate importance of the family and matchmaker in matrimonial decision-making parallels old and new-style weddings.

The Unification Church ceremony retains several elements of new-style weddings. The white westernized dress of the bride and the black tuxedo of the groom depict an affluent, modern Korea. Similar to new-style weddings, the holy blessing ceremony, because of its beauty and anticipation, fashions an elegant attraction for the prospective couple. Even though it retains aspects of the old-style Confucian wedding, such as kow-tow bowing and the wine exchange, the Unification Church's mass wedding within the holy blessing ceremony reflects the influence of the new-style westernized wedding. As can be seen, the theology and practice of the Unification Church, though significantly different from the Korean old and new-style weddings, manages to retain elements of both.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "Unification Church Woos a Second Generation," National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123805954> (accessed October 8, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Laurel Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>8</sup> Sun Myung Moon, *Divine Principle*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, 1977), 39.

<sup>9</sup> Moon, *Divine Principle*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> On declaration that he was messiah, Moon was not declaring he was God, but messiah-like in bringing about spiritual salvation to humanity; other people could be messiahs as well. (Don Baker, "Rites of Passage in the Unification Church," in *Religions of Korean in Practice*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 499.

<sup>11</sup> George D. Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs and Practices of the Unification Church* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Professional and Academic Ltd, 1991), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Don Baker, "Rites of Passage in the Unification Church," in *Religions of Korean in Practice*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 497.

<sup>13</sup> Moon, *Divine Principle*, 520.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Fichter, "Vocation to Marriage," in *The Holy Family of Father Moon* (Kansas City: Leaven Press, 1985), 69.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>16</sup> Moon, *Divine Principle*, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Fichter, "Vocation to Marriage," 70.

<sup>19</sup> Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon*, 136.

<sup>20</sup> "Unification Church: Happily Ever After?" British Broadcasting Corporation News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special\\_report/1997/unification\\_church/35377.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/1997/unification_church/35377.stm) (accessed October 8, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon*, 138.

<sup>22</sup> Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon*, 136.

<sup>23</sup> Baker, "Rites of Passage in the Unification Church," 505.