

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND A CONSTRUCTION OF NEW IDENTITY OF THE SOUTH  
KOREANS LIVING IN THAILAND

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
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การเปลี่ยนศาสนาและการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ใหม่ของชาวเกาหลีใต้ที่อาศัยในประเทศไทย



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วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาเกี่ยวกับปัจจัยและแรงจูงใจในการเปลี่ยนศาสนาของชาวเกาหลีใต้ รวมถึงศึกษาเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับอัตลักษณ์ของชาวเกาหลีใต้ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปภายหลังจากที่มีการเปลี่ยนศาสนา จากความสนใจเกี่ยวกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงศาสนาที่มีจำนวนเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างน่าประหลาดใจในหลายๆประเทศทั่วโลก โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งศาสนาคริสต์ในแถบประเทศทางยุโรปหรืออเมริกานั้น ประชากรเริ่มมีจำนวนผู้นับถือลดลงอย่างเห็นได้ชัด แต่ขณะเดียวกันคริสต์ศาสนาในประเทศเกาหลีใต้กลับมีแนวโน้มที่เพิ่มสูงขึ้น จากเดิมที่ประชากรส่วนใหญ่ไม่นับถือศาสนาพุทธ รวมถึงไม่นับศาสนาใดเลยเป็นจำนวนมาก อีกทั้งศาสนาเก่าแก่อย่างลัทธิขงจื้อ ก็นับเป็นแกนหลักสำคัญที่มีอิทธิพลต่อแนวทางการคิด แบบแผนการดำรงชีวิต และมีส่วนช่วยในการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ของชาวเกาหลีมาจนถึงปัจจุบัน ซึ่งการศึกษาได้ใช้วิธีการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ โดยการเก็บข้อมูลเอกสารทางวิชาการต่างๆที่เกี่ยวข้อง รวมไปถึงการสัมภาษณ์ชาวเกาหลีที่อยู่ในประเทศไทยจำนวนหนึ่ง เพื่อนำมาทำการวิเคราะห์ประกอบ จากการศึกษาพบว่า ปัจจัยและแรงจูงใจในการเปลี่ยนศาสนาของชาวเกาหลีใต้ที่อาศัยในประเทศไทย ส่วนใหญ่เป็นปัจจัยทางด้านสังคมและจิตใจ ตั้งแต่แรกเริ่มเดิมทีศาสนาคริสต์ได้เข้ามาในประเทศเกาหลีในลักษณะการให้ความช่วยเหลือในรูปแบบต่างๆ ในช่วงที่เกาหลีประสบกับความยากลำบากสมัยเสรีจิ้นสงครามและการแบ่งแยกประเทศ ซึ่งหลักความเชื่อต่างๆของศาสนาคริสต์นั้นค่อยๆซึมซับเข้ามาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสังคมเกาหลีเรื่อยมา อีกทั้งศาสนาคริสต์ยังสามารถตอบโต้และตอบสนองกับปัญหาส่วนบุคคลได้เป็นอย่างดี ซึ่งการเปลี่ยนแปลงศาสนาที่เกิดขึ้นนี้ พบว่าการเปลี่ยนศาสนามีผลต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงอัตลักษณ์ ทั้งทางด้านพฤติกรรม ความคิด ความเชื่อ รวมไปถึงประเพณีและวิถีชีวิตของชาวเกาหลีใต้ที่อาศัยในประเทศไทย

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ลายมือชื่อนิติ .....  
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WANMAI PIENMAI: RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND A CONSTRUCTION OF NEW IDENTITY OF THE SOUTH KOREANS LIVING IN THAILAND. ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. PAVIKA SRIRATANABAN, Ph.D., 97 pp.

This research aims to study factors and motivations that have influenced religious conversion among the South Koreans. This research also includes the further study of the change in religious identity among South Korean people after the religious conversion occurred. In addition, there has been the rising number of people around the world showing their interest in religious conversion especially the Christianity in European countries and USA, where their populations holding onto Christianity, were drastically reduced in numbers. At the same time, there has been a tendency of a larger Christian population in South Korea in which the major population was formerly Buddhists and non-religion. Moreover, the traditional religion like Confucianism has greatly influenced their ideologies, guided way of their living, and taken parts in establishing the Korean identity up to the present times. As the qualitative research, any related academic data was collected as well as the information gathered from in-depth interview sessions with Korean people living in Thailand. Accordingly, the obtained information became factored in order to approach the study analysis. From this study, it was found that the major factors and motivations of religious conversion among the Koreans in Thailand derived from social aspects and spiritual support of Christianity. Primarily, Christianity was first introduced to South Korea by offering help in various forms since the people underwent great difficulties during the post-war period and the country was divided. The Christian beliefs gradually spread throughout Korea and became part of the Korean society. Furthermore, Christianity had the potential to fulfill their needs and to provide the solutions best-suited to issues of the individuals. Regarding the emergence of religious change, it indicated that the conversion affected the identities in terms of behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, culture, tradition and lifestyles of Korean people living in Thailand.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Religion has basically played an important role in every society and has also shaped our way of life. Some people tend to think that religion is some kind of personal belief and faith which someone hold but actually religion is also a social institution, as it participate in patterns of beliefs and behaviors that help a society to construct its basic needs(Barkan, 2012). From the past to the present, religion has been an important place that gives the meaning of life, teaching and giving human life peace and salvation. Religion can be defined as the relationship between humans and a special power that man believes in.

Moreover, religion can eliminate questions which cannot be answered by science such as, What is the purpose of existence? Why are we here? What happens after death? What is the purpose of life? Religion helps to extend the view of an individual beyond our five senses. More specifically, religion is the set of beliefs and practices regarding sacred things that help a society understand the meaning and purpose of life.

In most countries, a single religion leads society's ideology and pattern of life. Most of the laws that we follow today have their basis in religious teachings. “Christianity leads Western countries, Islam holds absolute dominance in the Arab world, and Hinduism is the national religion of India. Confucian traditions still prevail in China, and Buddhism and Islam are the two most important religions in the Southeast Asian region. Japan is predominated by Shintoism and Buddhism, and Islam and Christianity are shared in South America and Africa”(Choi, 2007).

Obviously seen is that each country holds those religions as the national religion for many decades but in recent years, they are experiencing dramatic changes. Religious conversion has increased surprisingly in many countries in the world (See Table 1.) and it became an interesting issue. For example, the conversion of Christians in Europe and the United States to Islam has become a matter of debate in some Western countries(Shavit & Wiesenbach, 2009, pp. 3-14) Catholic states in Europe and American countries have been seeing sharp declines whereas the Church in Asian countries are thriving(Moon, 2011).

Table 1 Religious-Conversion Rates

Religious-Conversion Rates			
Countries	Conversion rate		
	ISSP 1991	ISSP 1991	WVS 2001
Austria	0.034	0.019	0.020
Belgium	--	--	0.043
Bulgaria	--	0.004	0.002
Czech Republic	--	0.024	0.013
Spain	--	0.004	0.006
France	--	0.018	0.020
Italy	0.006	0.027	0.005
Japan	--	0.021	--
Netherlands	0.077	0.092	0.044
Portugal	--	0.024	0.020
Russia	0.036	0.085	0.012
Slovenia	0.006	0.007	0.003
Sweden	--	0.015	0.076
Ukraine	--	--	0.043
United States	0.120	0.159	--

Religious-conversion rates are computed, as described in the text, from International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 1991 and 1998 and World Values Survey (WVS) 2001.

Source: Religious Conversion in 40 Countries (Barro & Hwang, 2007).

Point to South Korea and they seem to follow the same trend mentioned above. Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of people that changes religion, we can see that the religious population statistic can broadly report and present how they change (See Table 2.). In Korea we can find not just the conversion from one religion to another but from none religious to become religious also.

Because Koreans have no state religion nowadays, they have a chance and freedom to choose or not to choose a religion of their own. So almost half of the population present themselves as irreligious, but we can see some tendency from the statistic in the past decade that the number of religious people seem to be gradually growing. More people think and give importance to religion. This simply means that they have some factors that influence people to change their behavior and perception.

**Table 2 Religious Affiliation in Regard to Populations**

(Units: 1,000 and %)

	1995		2005		Growth	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
Total Population	44,554	100.0	47,041	100.0	2,488	5.6
Religion Indicated	22,598	50.7	24,971	53.1	2,373	10.5
Buddhism	10,321	23.2	10,726	22.8	405	3.9
Protestantism	8,760	19.7	8,616	18.3	-144	-1.6
Catholicism	2,951	6.6	5,146	10.9	2,195	74.4
Confucianism	211	0.5	105	0.2	-106	-50.4
Won Buddhism	87	0.2	130	0.3	43	49.6
Other	268	0.6	247	0.5	-21	-7.7
No religion	21,953	49.3	22,070	46.9	117	0.5

Source: KNSO (2006).

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution in South Korea. According to a 2005 social statistics survey, 53.1% of Koreans follow a specific religious faith. Buddhists account for some 22.8% of the total population, followed by Protestants at

18.3% and Catholics at 10.9%. In other words, it means that almost half of the population is unreligious(KNSO, 2006).

The majority of South Korea's religious population is either into Buddhism or Christianity nowadays, as it is presented in Table 2. In South Korea, there has been an explosive growth of the Christian population in the twentieth century, being recognized as the most successful case of evangelization in the world. In the era of pre-modern Korea, religious tradition had been dominated by Buddhism and then later by Confucianism, up until the nineteenth century. In modern Korea, Christianity is the foremost religion of choice displacing Buddhism which maintain 22.8% of the religiously affiliated population(KNSO, 2006).

Changes in religion belief are the most difficult among the process of cultural changes (Tienyoy, 1991) because it inherits tradition, but religious conversion can occur if they found that new religion is able to fulfill their needs better than the old one and religion must have an effect on their way of life, behavior and existing traditional beliefs which represent their own identity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the new identity after conversion of religion. It is interesting to point out that why would a person who took one religion or not for a long time decided to change to another, what kind of motivation or inspiration made them change and after conversion, has the new religion changed their identity or not. If so, how did religion construct their new identity because



conversion from one religion to another is a significant moment, not only for the person converting, but also for the religious community abandoned and the one adopted.

Thus this research conducted interviews with South Koreans residing in Thailand along with documentary data and research.

## 1.2 Background

South Korea is one of the interesting places that many countries keep an eye on. In 1960 it was one of the poorest countries in the world with per-capita income of less than \$100 a year, but it is difficult to comprehend how pitiful this country has been if you look through social surrounding and economic situations now. It is interesting that South Korea was able to turn their country into a well-developed country within 50 years after Japanese colonization in the period between 1910 and 1945(Haan, 2002).

Under the Japanese rule, in addition to the occupation, Koreans became worse off as time went on. Japan began to erase the Korean national identity by banning the teaching of the Korean language in schools and requiring all Koreans to adopt Japanese names and to speak and teach in Japanese language. A lot of Korean culture was destroyed and replaced by Japanese culture including religion(Miller). Koreans were forced to adjust to the Japanese god and to worship at Japanese shrines,

Shintoism spread throughout the country and every attempt at preserving Korean identity was discouraged(Y. W. Han, 2010, pp. 161-162).

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korea recovered its independence but once again in 1950, the South Koreans got into the period of the Korean War. Although this period was shorter than the colonial era, the impact of the Korean War on the civilian population was especially dramatic. Two nations view each other as enemy. North Korea became a communist government with the help of the Soviet Union and South Korea became a democratic government with the help of the United States(K. K. Han, 2013). War, of course, has exacted a heavy toll on civilians but moreover the Korean War split a land and separated people within the same country and the same blood. The long and painful history that Korea experienced still remain in their minds and they still remember the immense suffering and destruction that the war inflicted.

From this point, it can be one of the factors that led the Korean people, who suffered from many situations and disappointed at their religious traditions, thirst for peace, security, education, and culture. So they did not hesitate to adopt another religion that came into their country at that time, Christianity. The U.S troops came along with humanitarian aid, advanced technology and the American culture so it is not surprising that Korean attitude towards the U.S may be have influenced this change. Many Koreans may convert because of the images of the U.S that seem to be modernized and many Koreans rely on the church for food aid. Then the United

States came to be imprinted into the minds of Koreans as a “land of grace”(K. K. Han, 2013).

However, no matter how much South Korea has accepted Christian doctrines, the national identity of Korea still exist, the South Korean has a self-promoted reputation of being one of the most homogenous countries in the world. They are perhaps the most proud people among other countries about their identity. They view themselves as "Korean", same as the North Koreans do. After centuries under foreign rule, both sets of Koreans have reacted in a very proud fashion since gaining independence in the early 1950s. This identity is truly all encompassing of the South Korean lifestyle. South Korea still hold many unique things about the Korean culture, such as language, food, dress and rituals.

Moreover, it is very difficult to find a place that diverse religions of Asia and Europe coexist with equal amount of power like in Korea(Choi, 2007, p. 177). South Korea is a multi-religious society. "Some even say that Korea is a department store of religions"(Choi, 2007), these different religions coexist in Korea and traditionally combined elements from different belief systems such as Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Like many other countries, South Korea used to have a state religion, they used to be a country known in the name of "Hermit Kingdom", a country which isolated itself from the rest of the world and unknown(Strand, 2004). They closed off from the

outside world for a long period of time. In that era, it seems that Korea has developed their own traditional belief and pattern of life such as Taejong-gyo, the Korea's oldest religion or Shamanism, the ancient religion of belief in spirit. Confucianism and Buddhism also used to be a state religion which has satisfied the religious needs of the Korean people for a very long time(Tan, 2008). So these religions also shape Korean identity and is still stamped indelibly until now. Especially Confucianism and Shamanism, two religions which have a huge significance on a Korean's pattern of life.

Viewing Korea as a whole, Confucianism is supposed to be an outer layer which people follow to interact with others in their daily life and Shamanism is supposed to be an inner layer which people turn to when they want to escape from the stressful structure caused by Confucianism(Choi, 2007). It seems that both religions are deep-seated in a Korean's mind and identity, and they remain in many values hidden within Korean society(Kushner, 2013). Whereas Christianity is really new for the Korean people, Christianity has greatly differed from their traditional culture. Although the highest virtue of both Christianity and Confucianism is love, they differ in context. Confucian love emphasizes family and partisanship. They only give importance on their own group especially their own family. Looking at Korean people nowadays, they manifest a behavior of showing closeness with their friends and obvious indifference with people they do not know personally because they view them as an external group(Choi, 2007).

Contrast that with Christianity which at some point emphasizes love of God and fellow men, not just the people they know personally but everyone. The Bible says, “The foremost is, Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”. The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these”(Leitch, 1996, pp. 28-31). The 'neighbors' in this statement means all of mankind not just their own family or friends.

From this notice, it can be presumed that when people have conversion, they are supposed to have something different occur within which can lead to the change of identity because “Identities are constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences”(Kriesberg, 2003)including religion that seems to be of great importance because the new religion does not seem to conform with their traditional culture, then their identities should change or transform to fit with the new doctrines that they accepted and this is the point that this work has endeavored to find out.

Looking at several studies that were found, it is interesting to study about the conversion of Korean people to Christianity, a religion which has become a trend in Korean society nowadays and to study further the Korean identity which is presumed to change after conversion in some way.

### 1.3 Research Objective

- To understand the motivations of religious conversion among the Korean people.
- To contribute to our understanding of how religious conversion contributes to a construction of new identity.

### 1.4 Research question

- What were the motives and aspirations of the converted?
- How does religious conversion affect the construction of new identity?

### 1.5 Scope of study

The study focuses on religious conversion of the Korean people living in Thailand from any religious preference to Christianity to understand what motivates a person that is in some form of religion or none at all for a long time but suddenly changes later on. We presume that Christianity is not a traditional religion that lived in Korean society as long as the others so most of Koreans who rely on Christianity now are supposed to have changed from other religions.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Religion as a social institution

All religions are not the same, they have different sets of beliefs, doctrines, rituals and practices. However, in one structure or another, religion can be found in every known society (Crossman, 2013). Even the most ancient societies also have a record that show many traces of religious symbols and practices that can include ceremony. Throughout history, religion serves as the center part of society which play an important role by shaping pattern of lives. Religion has always been an important issue of individual and collective (Hammond, 2007).

Sociologists presume that religion is more than just beliefs so they view religion as both “a belief system” and “a social institution”. As a social institution, religion is composed of symbols, belief, value, and practices by which a group of people develop or comprehend to find answers about the meaning of existence. The patterns and practices of religious institutions are among the most important influences on people's lives. Religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized. “In using sociology to understand religion, what is important is not what one believes about religion, but one's ability

to examine religion objectively in its social and cultural context”(Andersen & Taylor, 2009).

The concepts of religion, the sacred and the profane provide the foundational concepts of Durkheim, the Sociologist. He found Religion to hold a most prominent place in society. Emile Durkheim defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” and Durkheim argued that “religion happens” in society when there is a separation between the profane and the sacred(Durkheim, 1976) (Gamble, 2003).

Durkheim believed that religion is about community. He stated that religion provided a sense of order and meaningfulness, and therefore brought about a sense of collective consciousness in the society. In other words, he meant that the function of religion was to bring solidarity to a society, by common beliefs, rituals, and symbols so he proposed that religion has three major functions in society(Durkheim, 1933). First, it helps maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs and binds people closely together (social cohesion). Second, it helps maintain conformity and control in society (social control), and third, it provides answers to existential questions (meaning and purpose).

By applying the methods of natural science to the study of society, he held that the source of religion and morality is the collective mind-set of society and that the cohesive bonds of social order result from common values in a society. He



contended that these values need to be maintained to maintain social stability. Religion functions to bind society's members by prompting them to affirm their common values and beliefs on a regular basis.

From this part, I have to review some basic religions in Korea to understand more about situations from the past and their religion's structure and function in Korean society.

### **2.1.1 Shamanism**

The traditional form of Korean religious life is shaman, and the system of beliefs is referred to as shamanism. In Korea, the shaman is called a mudang(C. Lee, 1972), this type of religion is based on the fundamental principle of powerful spirits residing in natural forces and inanimate objects. It started in ancient times and has stayed in existence, mixing with other religions such as Buddhism. Shamanism prospered during the time of the Three Kingdoms Period, Goguryeo, Baekje, Silla (B.C. 57-A.D. 676) and the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), but it was mistreated during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) and the Japanese Colonial Period (1910-1945).

In that time Confucianism became an official ideology. Confucian society did not allow the thriving of shamanism practice, but it was tolerated. All folk religions were prohibited under the period of Japanese rule. Shamanism in South Korea was more weakened during the time of modernization period. However, even with the

development of a technological society, shamanism still alive and influences many parts of Korean life in modern society where religious freedom is guaranteed.

### 2.1.2 Buddhism

Buddhism takes as its goal the escape from suffering and teaches salvation through escape from samsara, the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Buddhism was officially introduced to Korea during the period of the Three Kingdoms by the Chinese around A.D.372 in the Goguryeo Kingdom by a Chinese monk named Sundo. In A.D.384, Buddhism was brought to Baekje from the Eastern Jin State of China. A.D.535 in Silla, Buddhism was disseminated by a monk of Goguryeo. Buddhism seems to have been well flourished among the ruling people of the Three Kingdoms, contributed to the spiritual life of the Korean people by implanting their mind because it was suitable as a spiritual prop for the governing structure with Buddha, like the king, serving as a venerated symbol of authority(C. Lee, 1972).

Many temples were built and believers grew stably under royal patronage. Buddhism had spread throughout Korea by the first half of the sixth century. By the time Silla unified the peninsula in A.D.676, Buddhism reigned as the national religion until 1392. In that era, royal preference toward the state cult of Buddhism began to deteriorate as the nobility indulged in a luxurious lifestyle, though the government systems were along Confucian lines. After Yi Seong-gye staged a rebellion and had himself proclaimed king, he tried to remove all influences of Buddhism from the

government and adopted Confucianism as the state cult or national religion because his policy was both anti-Mongol and anti-Buddhist. All the temples were moved deep into the mountains and he banned Buddhist monks away from the capital city. Throughout the 500 years of Joseon Dynasty, any effort to revive Buddhism was harassed with strong opposition from Confucian scholars and officials. Until the time of the Japanese Colonial Period in 1910, Buddhism had some attempt to assimilate Japanese Buddhist sects with those of Korea but it failed and it even resulted in a revival of interest in native Buddhism among Koreans(Cummings, 1997).

However, today Buddhism is considered a religion that Koreans respect in amounts that are no different from Christianity. Although most temples are rarely visible in the city, many people are willing to take time to go to the temples although they are located on mountains outside the city to worship and do their rituals.

### 2.1.3 Confucianism

Confucianism entered Korea as a managerial tool from the old Han Dynasty of China. Confucianism has lived during the sixth century along with Buddhism and was adopted as an official state ideology in the Joseon Dynasty period. There are many records left that show how Confucianism has influenced among the Three Kingdoms especially during the time of Unified Silla. Confucianism interest rapidly increased although Buddhism was the state religion at that time.

Confucianism is more focused on conduct than religious belief. It is a system of ethical precepts which give importance on the construction of family relationships. Confucianism can be defined as a religious teaching with special emphasis on “filial piety”, which is a love of the son to the father that the son should respect. One’s own family must come first and foremost than other families. This one leads to the ideology of “familial collectivism” which certainly became the mainstay of Korean social culture. Another thing that follow this step is hierarchy which can refer to subordination of filial piety. It is a relationship between the younger brother and the elder brother. “Koreans feel uncomfortable unless they know who is older and younger when their first meet”(Choi, 2007, p. 21).

Today, Confucian ancestor worship is still exist in Korean society and filial piety is highly respected as a merit.

#### **2.1.4 Christianity**

Christianity, whether it be Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, hold a remarkable number of believers in South Korea. Since Christianity was introduced to Korea by the West in the late Joseon Dynasty after a Korean diplomat went to China and brought back the copied of Catholic missionary Matteo Ricci's Jesuit missionary books and they started to disseminate. In this books, apart from religious teachings, it also included aspects of Western learning such as the solar calendar and other matters that attracted the attention of the scholars in Joseon Dynasty. Somehow the

King in that era, Yeongjo viewed Catholic as an evil practice. Catholicism was again introduced in 1785 by Lee Seung-hoon. He was the first Catholic preacher who taught the doctrine and built a small church in Korea but the Catholic Church faced persecution because its doctrines opposed the beliefs revered by Confucian society but it still had several converts among the scholars and their families. The number of converts quietly continued to increase, although the spread of western religions in Korea was still technically against the law and there were occasional persecutions.

Protestantism followed Catholicism into Korea about 100 years later, about the 19th century or around 1884 when believers met Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in Manchuria and Horace N. Allen, an American medical doctor. The foreign missionaries contributed to Korean society by rendering medical services and education as a means of disseminating their beliefs but after Joseon Dynasty collapsed under Japanese occupation(Miller), all these religions including both Catholicism and Protestantism came to an end because the Japanese colonized the Korean territory and they also dominated religion and culture as well. Shintoism has spread all over Korea and forbade other religions.

However, Korea experienced religious freedom once again during and after the Korean War, the number of Catholic relief organizations and missionaries increased(Korea Culture and Information Services, 2013).

Numerous Christian churches can easily be found throughout Korea. In big cities, it's also possible to find churches that have English worship services. Christianity has taken a large foothold and now it comprises an enormous number of the population. The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul is a mega church with the largest congregation in the world,(Severson, 2012)claims to have more than 1 million members(Tomes, 2013). Some people go to churches as a social gathering place and a potential place to meet a wife or husband. (In the process they end up being converted). The Christian movement became stronger in South Korea from 1905 through 1945 when Japan occupied the country and persecuted Christians. Today, Korea sends more missionaries than any other country other than the United States.

According to our review of religion, we can see that South Korea has many situations that's supposed to be the cause of religious conversion such as political ideology, social changes, the war, and economic development. However, to find the facts about this issue, we need to study more from reliable sources.

## 2.2 Definitions of Identity

To explore the relation between the conversion and construction of new identity, it is essential to have an overview of the concepts of identity. A starting point when talking about what 'identity' should mean, is to view it as simply being able to 'know who you are'(Kidd & Teagle, 2012). Identity formation is a process that goes together in daily life without awareness. People are using it or are being used

unconsciously. Identity is produced within an interaction between one's self and the others by encounters with similarities and differences (Fearon, 1999). It is produced through your consideration of similarities and differences to others and it is also being created by how people construct you with the definition that society determined and that definition can explain a specific qualification of an individual and social norms or it may be something that can be self-represented or self-conscious, to know the self in terms of characteristic, lifestyle, idea, pattern of behavior and belief. Many identities can combine in one's self or one's society and they can also make change and develop in span of age, role, duty, belief and individual value (Chotechuang, 2011).

Identities are constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences (Kriesberg, 2003). In other words, identity is not something that exist naturally but they were constructed by society and is unstable, although certain aspects of identity are fixed and unchangeable such as our biological age, gender and ethnicity, however its depends on the definition in that moment, if social context have changed the definition of identity, then identity has to change as well and the process of identity definition not only relies on ethnic background but also includes culture, politics, occupation and religion (Goffman, 1963).

Many people often feel that the identity of someone or something is supposed to mean the properties of specific character of an individual but currently

in social science circle, this definition has changed. The individual became a matter of definition which can be transformed according to context. Due to globalization, the passage of time seems to be accelerated and the world seems to get smaller because of the advancement of communication technology and it also made cultural movement's diversity, complex and fast which has a profound effect on the feelings of the self. Everything that used to be a standard of value system and definition of identity such as religious value are affected(Fungfusakul, 2003). From this overview, we can be classify identity into two groups as below.

**2.2.1 Individual Identity** as an expression of the Self-consciousness, Self-perceptions, Self-acceptance, Self-confidence and Self-esteem which is caused by the interaction with the natural environment and cultural environment. Individual identity consist of two sections, sociology define the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction as Ego Identity and the sense of an individual's unique image from others eyes as Personal identity(Chotechuang, 2011). Grouping oneself in terms of the personal identity means seeing the self as distinct and different from others. "The person is guided by its own goals rather than the group's goals. The activation of a social identity rather than a personal identity in a situation is a product of accessibility and fit"(Stets & Burke, 2005). This is the way of seeing oneself from being unique toward the perception of the self as a member of a social group(Stets & Burke, 2005). As individuals, we place importance on what makes



oneself unique(Packer, Rosko, Janda, & Kemp, 2011). This also means that individual identity can be created by our own thinking.

**2.2.2 Social Identity** as an expression of the outcome of social discipline, cultural changes and education system that appear in the pattern of belief, way of life and pattern of behavior. Social identity can be described as a social status such as occupation, class, gender, ethnicity or religion in which that person belongs to(Deaux, 2001) Society anticipates and requires that person on how should they conduct oneself(Chotechuang, 2011). Social identity acts as a member of a group, rather than as an individual. As groups, we place importance on what makes the group unique(Packer et al., 2011). For example, preferring certain values, one might identify oneself as a Christian as opposed to a Confucianist. For the most part, social identity is likely controlled by the group norm that they belong to. Group members may be influenced because they stereotype themselves in terms of group membership(Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005).

In this sense, this research is very close to individual identity although both individual identity and social identity seem to be controlled by each other and take place in oneself but construction of new identity which this research is supposed to find out tend to be an individual issue because religion is one of personal and private aspect of people so this research will focus more on this point.

### 2.3 Korean identity from the past to present

From the brief study of Korean History found that Korea has the long time history, tradition culture and religious which has been heritage for at least 5,000 years ago. Korean can maintain their strong nation before it was invaded and colonized by Japan. After World War two, Japan was loose and Korea gained independence. But later, Korea was in the stage of separation between the democracy led by United States and the Communist led by Soviet Union. War between the same nations but with different in political concept. There was a long time war. After the negotiation, Korea has been divided into two countries: North Korea and South Korea. Currently, leaders of the two countries strive to unite the South and North Korea but with the ideological conflicts as well as the mutual distrust still existed. The reunification is not successful.

Korea had faced with war for long time. However, Korea can develop country and reach the stage of leading country in technology and economic. From the past, Korea was an agricultural society. Most of Korean population fell into poverty due to the country had War for long time includes under the colonization continuously for a long time. From this point, Korea aware of the difficulties of Korean people. This results in an improvement in building up a Korean identity with the strong commitment as well.

Korean government has seen the important of Korean identity by setting up many policies as the cornerstone of the country included education reform policy and economic policy that aimed to develop human resources(Buddhatame, 2005).

Korean leaders realized that despite Korea may shortage of natural resources but the country never lack of human resources therefore they needed to accelerate the development of human resources seriously.

### **Educational Reform Policy**

Educational Reform Policy in Korea has risen drastically. Government encourages freedom for all Korean to be educated equally. Educational development has progressed rapidly with perfect goal and progress effectively. For educational system, Government set up 6-3-3-4 system the following elements:

1. All Korean citizens have all right to be educated according to their abilities equally.
2. All children are required to attend elementary school and other compulsory under law suit.
3. The compulsory education shall be none of charge.
4. University has freedom to learn with special expertise with central policy and can be recognized by the lawsuit.

5. States must promote the education for life continuously.

6 Basic importance of education system, management of education investment and the status of teachers will be prescribed by law suit.

Moreover, there needed to motivate people to study in the Education field for being teacher by raising higher salary for teacher profession, provide better living both in economy, cost of living and social status. Social status is not difficult to be resolved because there are high gratitude from social towards teachers. Therefore, the status of teachers in Korea is the precursor that social has respect and honor for all time.

About Teacher's salary In Korea as combined with extra income from school for taking care students after school, it had as high rate as doctors and lawyers' income. There are some differences between teacher and doctor because teacher can have long holidays on summer period therefore they can have time to relax and do the research to gain knowledge for teaching students.

The study will focus on academic, mental development, the development of basic idea to have sense of assertive correctly with principles and reason. The study also focused on instilling of sense of nationalistic to pride in the culture, tradition, to instill self-confidence and love of neighbor, to strengthen the ability of students to apply their knowledge to develop their local area.

For learning in higher education, Government determined the qualifying examination and considered academic performance during high school because students can have the sufficient knowledge for further study in university as well. The target for teaching in high school by creating quality human resources both in term of physical and intellectual skill. Student can work effectively in the future.

### **Economic policy**

Korea has laid economic policies coupled with the policy of education reform because Korean government believes in creating the new Korea. The government needs to lead the country to be a leader in Asian region.

They needs to develop human resources by providing education throughout the years with the strong educational foundation that made Economic policies proceeded smoothly with effectiveness. The first plan that needed to act urgently was saving policy, Government needed Korean citizen to save money for increasing of savings rate rose sharply and steadily. The economic development, Government accelerated all action both urban and rural together, especially in rural areas that citizens faced with poverty and starving, at the large number. All citizens must have the same economic position and to solve the rural exodus into the city and looking for work. The government has started the project called Saemaul Undong. The philosophy of this program is the perseverance, self-help and cooperation. Government recreates and re-cultivates the attitudes, values and ethics about work

for public. People in rural gain strong confidence in their future if they work harder they can have better future, they should believe in self-reliance and exploitation from nature instead of their own destiny. The success of this project relied on the cooperation from villagers, village leaders who have major role to change and develop their village.

Leaders must sincere and dedicate in working as well as the good cooperation from local officials, Political leaders, Businessmen who can provide supportive to the project as well.

Therefore, this project is the social process that has included great supportive power from public and private in term of tools and technology. Rural development can be succeed and can solve the issue of migration from rural area to the big city. Migration issue can cause other issues such as crime, congestion and pollution and etc. The success of this project can develop the country in all aspects with high successful.

Moreover, Korean Leaders always insert moral, culture, ethic and lifestyle of antecedents coupled with the development of human resources. South Korea is another country that focus on the crucial of instilling moral philosophy or ethics to the public since 5,000 years ago. The instillation of moral philosophy in Korea can be divided into two aspects. First, the instillation of moral philosophy in family because Korean believe and respect in the teachings of Confucius, for a long time, therefore

the moral philosophy cultivated in Korean society is the duty of the people in society for treating to each other. Regulatory or functions should abide called “5 Commandments”(Buddhatame, 2005).

1. Kings and nobles should have trust in each other
2. Father and son should be binding and carried
3. Husband and wife should have different role and duty
4. Adults and youngster should believe in seniority and
5. Friend should be honest with each other.

Beside those virtues, there are also some traditions inherited from the teachings of Confucius firmly such as adult tradition, wedding ceremony, funeral and etc. These traditions have been instilled in the concepts of moral philosophy that Korean people have followed strictly from past to present. The 5 commandments help Korean people from each family to have the basic idea of living with same moral and norms result them to be the good quality citizen for the country.

The development of all important aspects made Korean people have their own identity(Wongpornpawan, 2012). There are some major identities of the Korean people as followed.

### 1. The sequence of elderly and relatives

Korean people give importance to seniority strictly. If you first met with the Korean people, should not wonder if they ask your age. Because they can count on the seniority for treating you right such as conversation, vocabulary usage and etc. Younger generation see the important to obey seniors both in school, workplace or family. On the same time, seniors will provide fully assist to the younger generation as well.

### 2. The love of education institution and relationship between teacher and student

Culture is the identity of the Korean, students can eat and drink with their teachers after school. The atmosphere will be friendly but carries with proper respect with humility and courtesy. Student will serve food and wine or beer by holding bottle with two hands and slowly pour wine to teacher with great attitude. Student will not allow to drink face to face with teachers.

### 3. The Squadron

Korean people may look ignore towards foreigners because they considered a foreigner is not in the same ethnic group. But they can be good and sincere friends as well. Foreigner who is sincere to them can be accepted as good friend for them as well. It is not wonder if Korean invited only one person in group to drink with them because Korean will not drink with person that they cannot trust.



#### 4. The nationalism and patriotism

Korean people can express their nationalism by using supplies that produced in countries. For example, on Korean street, you can see most of vehicles produced in Korea such as Hyundai, Daewoo and Kia. In addition, there are many kinds of Korean consumer electronics manufacturer such as Samsung, the consumer electronics brand. We can see that Korean economy is stable because they spending will not leak out from the country.

In term of patriotism, Korean always protested against their government or other agencies. Because people, especially students, scholars and intellectuals always monitor and check the operation of the government. If they can see any wrong or unclear policies from government, they will against such policies. The interesting is the Protester will inform the agency who responsible for the negotiations about the location that they will make the protest in advance. Therefore it will not effect to the public way of life.

#### 5. Self-discipline

Korean people is strict in all discipline because they has been trained and instilled in the strict disciplinarian and became their habits. The law has harsh penalties for those who violate discipline or regulations. They will not break any rule about driving for example they will not cross road during red light signal for

pedestrians. Car will stop immediately as they saw the yellow lights. Driver will not drive through the red light even there were none of pedestrians.

Driver will stop car immediately as they saw people on zebra cross. Student will be taught to cross only they saw the green light for pedestrians. Korean will not cross road only on the pedestrian way. If the accident was may occur outside the pedestrian's way, people who got his by car will be illegal and get punishment by lawsuit.

#### 6. The dedication to work

Korean people always work hard with strong intention. They have strong dedication and commitment to the success of job. They will not have brake or snack time during work hours. They will not eat during work but they prefer to zip hot coffee during work. Korean will have brake only for lunch time and hurry back to work after finish eating. After work, Korean people will have relax time, they will have party, drinking with people they can trust.

#### 7. The strengthening the family

Korean men and women are fully educated to gain self-knowledge and can have good career. At the age of marriage, husband will take care family in the financial support and wife will take good care of husband, teach their children. Most Korean families, wife has master degree or doctoral degree, therefore, the quality of

young Koreans are very good because they receive good care from mothers who have good education.

#### 8. Diligence and work hard

Korean people faced with difficulties throughout the time. They will do everything for not starving. Korean people work hard, high patience with teachings of the Confucian culture and way of life in Korea, made the Korean people learn to love and help each other.

#### 9. Learn to know their role and duty.

This features that made Korean to success in all functions such as athletic who has dedicate their effort in training. It was not surprise that Korean athletes step into a professional sport such as baseball, football and etc. They can win golden medal in many global sports such as the Olympics, Asian Games. In the daily life, elderly has always taught their children to recognize and perform their duties properly. Minors will be obedient the elderly without arguing although the elderly is not their relatives as well.

### 2.4 Secularization

Secularization, which believed that modernization, democratization, and globalization would decreased the need of faith. As Wilson Bryan proposed that secularization refers to a process by which religion loses its social significance. His

influential approach to secularization keeps the focus squarely on the process by which religion “ceases to be significant in the working of the social system, a process by which it “has lost its presidency over other institutions”(Wilson, 1993).

The first perspective theories religious change. A predominant secularization paradigm in the sociology of religion predicts the decreasing importance and impact of religion in younger generations and in more recent times(Peter, 1967).Turning to a socio-cultural dimension of integration, there is evidence of the role of family ties in sustaining high levels of religiosity among the second generation, in line with more general findings on religion and social integration.

Secularism is to distinguish religion from government and lifestyle. It only remains in the religious thoughts and memories in the heart of a person who is not related to God in any way. Or maybe they are just symbols or traditions such as weddings or burials(Chaves, 1994).

## 2.5 Related Research

There are many researches that related to this topic. The first one that I chose was the analysis of Lee,S-H's “Preaching for the Upbuilding of the Church in Transition: A homiletic theory and praxis for the upbuilding of the church in Korea”, which reviews The church in “the conversion boom” period of 1960-1990s. According to this research, Lee reviewed an article about "Influence of preaching to

church growth" of MK Kim first that briefly describes some characteristics of preaching. Kim described that after the Japan colonial period, the Korean War and the recovery era, the preacher still remains as a stable cause of an effort to eradicate by Japan in the previous time. However, the preacher still kept the principle of the church that focused on liberation and freedom and placed importance on repentance.

Point to the focusing period, Lee said that church growth was greatly influenced by the West after the Korean War period. Coinciding with the period of Chung-Hee Park that became a leader of South Korea instead of Syng Man Ree's regime in 1960 and he was inaugurated as president in 1963. In that time many Koreans need to restore the state and recover their senses from the suffering that they endured for a long time. They believe that Christianity can be the answer to the problem that will fulfill their need and influence the economic growth of this government that will lead to Korea's industrialization and urbanization, and also encourage Korean's desire for modernization because they need something that could deal with their insecurities and their sense of alienation that affects from social conflict. "They presumed that to become a powerful country, Korea should become a Christian country like America."(S. H. Lee, 2004), because Christianity could adapt to the process of modernization in Korean society.

In the study of Moon Youngseok's "Sociological Implications of the Roman Catholic Conversion Boom in Korea". He studied about the causes of Catholicism increase by focusing on socio-cultural factors. He distributed those factors that contribute to the growth of Christianity into two groups, external growth and internal maturity, to examine the reason that these aspects occurred.

Firstly, he pointed out that Christianity in Korea is growing along with modernization and industrialization in contrast with the theory of the sociology of religion which "argued that modernity is accompanied by a general curtailment of traditional religious belief and practice"(Moon, 2011). In Korea, the growth of Christianity is a stark contrast with the modern world, especially in the West that view religion as an outer part of modern society but Korea perceived religion as a shelter from many things that Korea has undergone. Especially from the late 1800s and throughout the twentieth century, Korea suffered a lot from the Colonial period, the Korean War "and many Koreans defended their nation's independence with hopes of modernization." Then he started to view the rapid growth of religion in Korea that acted together with modernization through the two main factors. First is "internal factors", focusing on institutional which attracted Koreans who have been seeking the way of life. Second is "external factors" like social changes because of economic growth in Korea.

Both works of review above give an overview of religious conversion in a macro level in which conversion happened because of some of the events that occurred throughout Korean history. However this research's aim is to study the micro level of conversion, of individual factors, and to understand more about the reason or motivation that lead Korean people to change religions.

Next is the work of Gabriel Banaggia's "Conversion, with versions: exploring models of religious conversion" that emphasized what a conversion is and how it occurs and analyses the relation between the process of conversion and the concept of social change or acculturation. He studied the work of Joel Robbins which present religion conversion with the process of cultural change and other's work like Robin Horton who provided the theory of conversion's model not to explain diverging statements of conversion but to examine the different theories and models to understand which can be conclude in the four models of conversion, assimilation model, adoption model, substitution model and transformative reproductive model(Banaggia, 2009).

**Assimilation model** propound what the external influence modifying a native substrate incorporates the novelty in its own terms like it absorbing the external influence. It assumes that society reflects internally before absorbing outside cultural influences. Simply put, absorption depends mostly in the prior configuration of the individual or society.

**Adoption model** “primarily seek to observe the post-conversion continuities between the religion that a population effectively begins to practice and the original religion brought by the missionaries.... something essential can be transmitted without necessarily being modified in the process.” a society will adopt a new religion if it has some form of similarity in practices, forms or traditions from the old one, hence the term adoption.

**Substitution model** frequently presumes a radical transformation of the person, more specifically of the person’s subjectivity. In case that it’s difficult to receive the process in terms of adoption because some conflict between two religions that living in parallel. While adoption seeks some form of similarity, substitution is the opposite. There is a radical change in the individual or society.

**Transformative reproductive model** looks to provide a compromise between the two extremes. In this model an original culture is altered in response to its own precepts and to the specificities of the culture impacting on it. People from different cultures converting to distinct religions arrive at singular combinations, depending on the initial configuration just as much as the religion they start to follow

Among four models of conversion, assimilation model is somewhat close to the conversion of Korean people along with history review. Korean people gradually absorbed Christianity because of some essential situations and some schema from



Christianity that can get along with traditional beliefs like Confucianism so it's supposed to be easy to accept this new religion.

Tuba Boz "Religious Conversion, Models and Paradigms." provide an overview of the religious conversion process in general. In order to better understand, he mentioned Lewis Rambo, in Understanding Religious Conversion that offers a seven-stage model of conversion(Boz, 2011). The conversion process, is used to display the phases of the process that takes place over time. These seven stages are:

- (1) **Context**, consisting of the overall environment in which change takes place, factors when facilitating or constraining change.
- (2) **Crisis**, a stage in which there is a rupture in the taken for granted world which leads to stimulate pursuit of resolution.
- (3) **Quest stage** in which the individual actively seeks meaning and a new way to resolve the problem that was initiated by the crisis.
- (4) **Encounter** is contact between the questioner and the advocate who offers a new option and perspective.
- (5) **Interaction** is the intensification of the conversion process whereby the potential convert and advocate confer changes in perceptions and actions;

(6) **Commitment** is the stage in which the questioner makes the decision to change their life and adopt a new belief system.

(7) **Consequences** involve collective effects of various experiences, beliefs and actions that can either facilitate or hinder their conversion.

All of these seven stages seems to match well with this research and we will cover all of the purpose of this study if one more stage is added. To find the answer to the question of construction of new identity after religious conversion, the next stage is supposed to be re-construction of identity. As this study presumes that religion conversion affect the construction of identity.

## 2.6 Related Theories

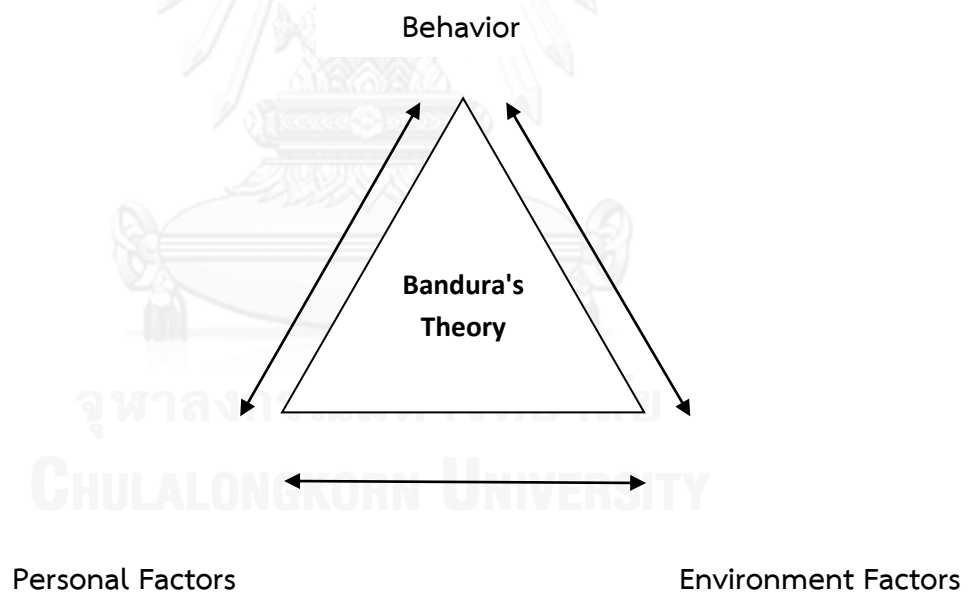
Conversion cannot be explained without reference to human behavior, then I have to review the theory that serve as the important foundation of my study.

### 2.6.1 Social Cognitive Learning Theory มหาวิทยาลัย

Social cognitive learning theory is a theoretical perspective of Bandura, this theory(Bandura, 1977), originally called Observation Learning Theory or Social Learning Theory emphasizes the important role in the learning process of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Since humans have interacted with the environment around them constantly, so learning is the interaction between people and the social environment in which both people

and environment influence each other. But later changed to social cognitive learning theory due to the result of experiments that found that learning by observing, people must observe and choose what they especially want to learn. The important thing is that people need to be encoded in long term memory correctly. In addition, the people must be able to assess whether their inimitable good or bad and how to control their own behavior as well. By observing others, people acquire knowledge of rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes. This theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting and changing human behavior as below.

**Figure 1 Social Cognitive Learning Theory Framework**



**(Cognitive, affective and biological events)**

Through this theory, he established that there are certain steps involved in the modeling process in 4 categories.

## **Attention**

The attention of the learner is really important to the process of learning. The observer must pay attention to learn something new that are influenced by the characteristics of the model. The more factors that are striking or different the more likely it is to gain the attention. Based on such factors as sensory capacity, arousal level, and perceptual set and past reinforcement. Likewise, if we regard something as prestigious, attractive or like ourselves, we will take more notice.

## **Retention**

This process involves the learner accessing symbolic coding of the behavior that they have paid attention and retain it. The learner store information and what they have seen the model doing in the form of verbal descriptions or mental images, and pull these triggers up later to help in reproducing the model with their own behavior.

## **Reproduction**

At this point after paid attention to the model and retention of the information, it is time that the learner has to actually perform the behavior or skill that was observed. The learner have to translate the images or descriptions into actual behavior. The learner must have the ability to convert the symbolic mental representations into actions that depend on physical capabilities and their abilities improve even when we just imagine ourselves performing.

## **Motivation**

This process includes external, vicarious and/or self-reinforced motivation. Motivational processes relate to the greater likelihood of observers exhibiting

modeled behavior if it results in valued outcomes (reinforcement) than if it has unrewarding effects (punishment).

### 2.6.2 Learning Theory by Thorndike

Thorndike said that learning is mean that learners can create Bond between stimulus and response and have been satisfied this can cause learning(Thorndike, 1911). Thorndike set up this theory from the study of animal learning (mostly cats) to open the mechanical box for a long time and have concluded that. Learning occurred by trial and error that caused by one who can see the continuation of the problem or see the linkage between the stimulus and response by trial and error. Learners require sufficient time or number of trial and error. Then it will lead to the desired goal. The leaning law of Thorndike can be concluded in 3 learning laws as follow:

#### 2.6.2.1 Law of Readiness declared the 3 conditions:

- 1) Act caused by the availability of the body. If one can act, it would cause their satisfaction.
- 2) When the body is ready to do anything, but if one could not do it may cause the dissatisfaction to them.
- 3) When the body is not ready to do anything, if they have been forced to act, it will inevitably cause dissatisfaction or annoyance.

### 2.6.2.2. Law of Exercise

Use to strengthen the links between stimuli and responses by training until strong and stable. The discontinued practice may cause the less expertise of that things. The meaning of practice law can be concluded as follows.

- a. Link or joints will be tighten when it have been used regularly. It will face Weakness of Connection if not use.
- b. Anything if has been trained or practiced repeatedly, person can do well but if lack of practice, person can lose ability to do so.
- c. Any behavior or action, if has been done continually may cause the completeness of such action. In contrary, it may be forgotten if it has been ignored.

### 2.6.2.3 Law of Effect

Stated about the link between stimulus and response defined above and followed by the conditions that cause satisfaction to strength of the link. However, if a link is followed by a condition that causes annoyance, it may untie such link. Therefore, human and animal tried to keep such condition or renew the condition that people have been satisfied while avoiding the situation that causes an annoyance. They need to end such condition as soon as possible.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Methodology

Qualitative method is used in this study to understand questions of conversion and new construction of identity. According to (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013), a qualitative research design is used to explore, describe and explain social psychology processes, themes and patterns, or a social world, culture or setting interpret lived experiences in their natural context. Qualitative methods is the approach to understand the experiences and attitudes of people. These methods aim to answer questions about the ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ of a phenomenon rather than ‘how many’ or ‘how much’, which are answered by quantitative methods. So the researcher adopted a qualitative approach. The study further aims to answer the research questions:

- What were the motives and aspiration of the converted?
- How does religious conversion affect construction of new identity?

#### 3.2 Pre-data Collection Process

##### 3.2.1 Gain Entry

All of the provided data were gained in various ways. First was through the researcher’s friend who made a recommendation to conduct an interview among the

members of a certain Korean congregation. The interviewer prepared the needed documents asking permission to have a personal interview with specific people who are attending that church. Upon approval from their elders there were five people who agreed to be interviewed and the interviewer met with them individually in their convenient time and so the interview proceeded as planned.

Next was through a personal research in the internet, a Korean church at Sukhumvit-Asoke area with a contact number was located. The researcher made a call to their main office and narrated the intention to their personnel. The interviewer personally attended the church and randomly asked people to give some time to have an interview. Two people agreed to come for a meeting therefore the interview with two Koreans at Asoke was conducted.

### **3.2.2 Build Rapport**

Giving information through personal interview and answering questions that require personal experiences are sometimes hard on the part of the interviewee, since it is between two people who just met each other for such purpose. To build confidence and rapport among the people group, the researcher frequently showed up in their church just to reduce strange feelings by establishing presence among them.

Engaging politely is also one of the ways to build rapport and so they knew that a study related to their beliefs is being conducted. All the questions must be



culturally respectful, and that it shows sincerity as well to know about their personal experiences. Giving presents to them is one of the best ways of showing gratitude for allowing the researcher to have their time and personal stories. It gained their gratitude in return, having someone to know their life changing testimonies.

### **3.2.3 Selection Criteria**

This research is specifically intended for Koreans who are living here in Thailand. They must be 40 years old and above, and already been a Christian for more than five years. This people group must come from different religious backgrounds, not just from one specific religion to another. Their maturity when it comes to their spiritual growth is another factor, they must be involved in the church ministry such as ushering people to church services, worship team, preaching of the Word, kids church, missions and other ways of serving their faith through the church.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

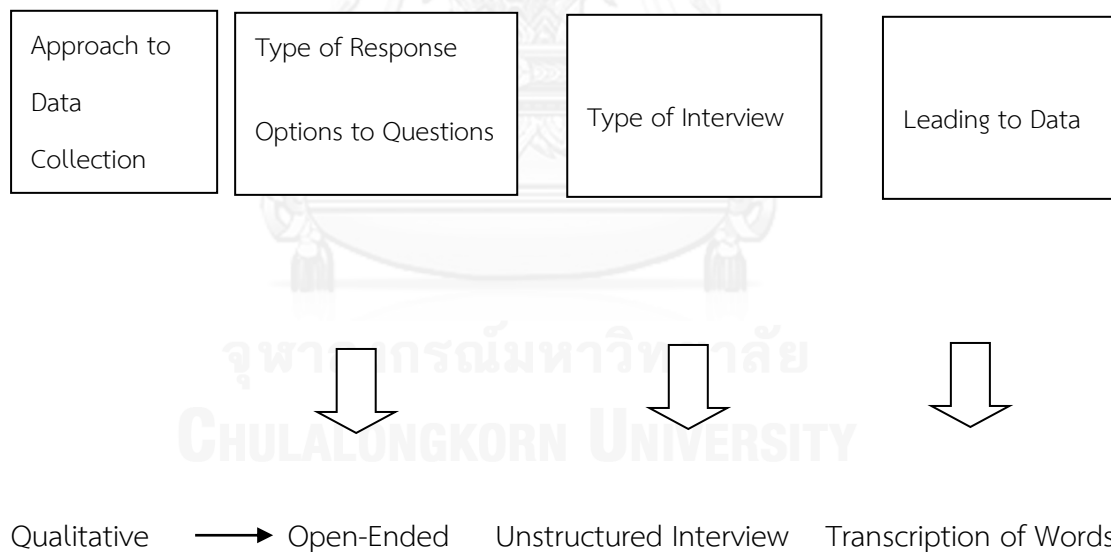
In this study, a qualitative method is applied by using the data collected from both primary data and secondary data. The documentary research as secondary data were used to collect data from previous researches, journals, books and related information that are available on the internet. For the second part, interviewing method is used to help this research become more reliable and intensify the construction of new identity after religious conversion.

### 3.3.1 Documentary Research

The secondary data is used in the first step and reviewed in Chapter 2. Socio-psychological literature was reviewed to understand what happened to the individual and the group, before, during and after conversion. Literature available on the religious history of Korea context is also reviewed to understand the anthropological and cultural aspects of conversion.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

Figure 2 Research design



Source : (Creswell, 2008)

Interviews as a data collection for qualitative research. Personal interview of Korean people in Thailand were used as a method of data collection for this study and the target population in this research will be the Korean aged 40 years old or

above who have an experience of conversion from any religion or non-religion to Christianity of not less than 5 years. Presume that Christianity is not a traditional religion that lived in Korean society as long as the other religions so most of Korean people who rely on Christianity now are supposed to have changed from other religions.

During the interview, we expect respondents to explain their experiences about conversion and perception about their own identity with unstructured questions and respondents were also asked to provide biographical data on sex, age, education level, occupation and marital status for further study.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative**

“The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind... We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (Patton, 1990, p. 278).

After collecting data from documentary research and all interviews, the data is analyzed based on the concern theories, literature reviews and interviews to answer the questions according to the research objective (to understand the motive of conversion among the Koreans and to contribute to our understanding of how religious conversion enable construction of new identity). The data is analyzed based

on some important points from all interviews as well as the literature review to support the argument.

### **3.5 Ethical Issue**

In this study, beside literature review, researcher has in-depth interviewed with informants under their consent. The interviewee will be informed the purpose of the research beforehand. Researcher will not showed their real identity and they will be informed about the purpose of research before starting the interview. The researcher asked permission to record the interview every time. Researchers would not disclose the information that can clearly express their identity. Whether the name of the interviewee, contact Information or other important information which may not appropriated to do, therefore this will not disturb the privacy of the interviewee. This will be benefit and easy to find the interviewee because the study will mention only location in wide scope but will not mentioned name or location of the research had been made.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study of religious conversion and construction of new identity in South Korea is a qualitative kind of research. Researcher collected data from related documents and made in-depth interviews. This chapter presented the background of Korean key informant for 7 persons who have lived in Thailand. In order to analyze the content for the next chapter, background of key informants comprised with four parts.

- 1). Background of key Informants and family history in briefly.
- 2). Personality, trait and habit of the key informants from observation.
- 3). Religious background of the key informants and family.
- 4). Decision and story of their religious conversion.

#### **4.1 Background of key informants**

##### **4.1.1 Key Informant 1**

Mr.Jo is the middle-aged men, aged 52 years, was born and lived in Seoul, South Korea. He is married to a Korean wife and had two daughters, aged 21 and 16 years old. Currently, his two daughters are studying in universities and secondary schools in Thailand. His wife has a Korean restaurant in downtown of Bangkok. He works as a missionary in Thailand.

Mr.Jo has personalities and appearance that is opposite to his age. He look young and strong like other Korean businessman. He speaks eloquently and has straightforward manner both on his speech and expression. While talking with him, everyone could catch his mood and it clearly showed on his face. He has created friendly atmosphere, despite the fact that it was our first time to meet but then he actively gave information without hesitation. He showed strong intention to give information about religious conversion and teaching. He has strong faith in Christianity that is being observed in his strong self-confidence and personality as well.

Mr.Jo was a Buddhist since birth because his parents and relatives were Buddhist too. His family members were born in the era of Buddhism that flourished in Korea. He himself personally did not understand Buddhism and so he is not that deeply devoted in this religion.

At the age of 25, he started to find himself and his own identity. He started to have an interest in Christianity. But he still did not comprehend everything clearly until he met a student who could helped him understand the life changing message of Christianity. Later on, he learned more about it by himself and had a very strong faith. Mr.Jo found the answer to all his questions in life.

He dedicated himself to be a missionary. He visited Thailand for the first time around 25 years ago. He intended to work as a missionary in Thailand because there were no South Korean missionary has ever visited Thailand during that time. He

decided to learn Thai language because he thought that understanding Thai would ease his job as missionary. Then his wife also converted into Christianity. After the trip to Thailand, his wife gave birth to their first born child but their daughter was not healthy because of weather in Thailand. He moved the family to Japan because Japan has better weather. They lived there for 3 years and went back to Korea for a while.

After that, he decided to come back to Thailand again with the original intention. Up to now for 7 years, he still serves as a reverend both in Bangkok and upcountry churches such as Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Tak and in the South of Thailand such as Koh Samui and Surat Thani. He goes to each province once a month and also rented a building in downtown of Bangkok, the first floor there is the Korean restaurant managed by his wife which has been opened for more than 10 months now. The second floor, he used as place for setting up the religious club. The club members has increased through invitations and outreaches to the students and working professionals.

They have spent time to discuss about the Bible every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Mr. Jo has duty to teach Bible by himself.

#### **4.1.2 Key Informant 2**

Mr.Lee is 57 years old, a retired soldier and was born in Gwangju, Southern provinces of Korea. He is married to his Korean wife for 32 years, they have two

children, daughter aged 32 years old who is not married yet and is working as a kindergarten teacher. Their 28-year-old son is running his own company. Both of them are living in Seoul, Korea. His wife worked as an accountant but she resigned after they got marriage. After they moved to Thailand, she worked as a chef and day care giver at the International school and nursery in Bangkok. Mr.Lee works as Korean language instructor at the same school with his wife.

He is a quiet and clam person, he is not that concern much about formality. He does not make people feel uncomfortable especially on the first meeting. He respects others and thoughtful at the same time. He talks nicely with non-emotional speech or expression. He can maintain the adulthood as a good professor should be.

His parents were Buddhist for a long time or about 30-40 years ago. Since Buddhism has flourished in that time, Mr.Lee and his brother were Buddhist also following their parents. Even after the marriage, Mr.Lee and his wife were doing the merit and donation to temples. Until year 2000, 14 years ago, the couple were converted to Christianity together. He worked in Korean Army at the Ministry of Defence. In 1997, he had opportunity to work at the Korean Embassy in Thailand. He met his juniors from military school who shared to him about God and Christianity. His friend came to visit him every Sunday after attending the church. At that time, Mr. Lee's house was nearby that church. Later on, Mr.Lee and his wife could



understand more about Jesus, God and Christianity. But they never attended the church service.

He was stationed in Thailand for three years, after a while he got an order to go back to Korea again. After returning to Korea, Mr.Lee and his wife decided to go church together for the first time. They started to believe in Christianity and went to church every Sunday. The church is located nearby his house as well. Later, his parent and kids turned to Christian as well except his brother that remained being Buddhism.

Mr.Lee and his wife were devout Christians until he retired then he decided to give his service to God. He started work in the Church in Korea. He was assigned in Thailand once again due to his knowledge in Thai language. He ever learned Thai language for 3 years. Mr.Lee and his wife decided to stay in Thailand but their children were still in Korea because they were grown-ups and are able to take good care of themselves. He also worked as a professor of Korean language. He though children aged between 10-12 years, 3 hours a day on every Sunday, they lived at the dormitory of school and worked as dormitory administrators. His wife is in charge of the school's kitchen for 2 days per week or on Monday to Wednesday. She works at nursery school as well.

They are actively attending the church service every Sunday and Wednesday. Saturday is a special day, they wake up early in the morning for worship at 5 am.

Students, parents and school personnel also attend the ceremony. On the afternoon teachers, staff and the ministers has group themselves as teams ( 5 members per team), they do preaching of the Bible together in various places in Thailand. The attendants were students in the dorm who lived nearby and the neighboring community doing activities such as religion teachings, dancing, singing and worship together. Some kids are not Christian, they religions were Buddhist or Islam.

Now he is pleased that he does not have to teach Christianity outside the school. He has more time for child care and in teaching kids. He plans to stay in Thailand for 2 years more and move back to Korea, because of the church that has sent them, gave a timeframe for only 4 years.

#### **4.1.3 Key Informant 3**

Mrs.Shin is middle-aged women aged 54 years old. She was born in Cheongju, South Korea and is married for 29 years. Her husband is from South Korea. They have two children, her daughter is 28 and her younger son is 26 years old. They are working in Thailand. Mrs.Shin worked as nurse in Korea, but changed her job to be Vice President of International School in Bangkok.

From that first meeting, Mrs.Shin has shown maturity and strong authority, she has less facial expression. This is due to her needs to behave a respectable and reliable school personnel. As researcher started talking to her and found out that she is good person, kind and has sense of humor while having the interview.

Mrs. Shin told the researcher about the background of her own religion that originally she was Buddhist. When she was a kid, her parents have to take her in doing merit and attend the temple for doing the ritual of Buddhism. She did not have the knowledge or understanding about this religion much. Until she studied at Grade 10, she went to school and met one senior who shared umbrella with her.

After that the senior began to encourage her to learn Christianity and persuaded her to go to church together. Since that time, she had interest in Christianity. The truth is, she has emptiness inside and that there were many questions that keep coming up to her. She tried to find the answer but with no success.

Since she knew much about Christianity, she could see the truth of life such as where all human being came from and where they go and how to live our lives. She turned to Christianity from Buddhism. She began to study Christianity with faith inside her and decided to embrace Christianity, dedicated to serving God and Christian activities.

These factors made her to move and settle down in Thailand since 26 years ago. The couple moved from Seoul, Korea together with their 1 year old daughter and unborn son.

She intended to do mission for Thai people, be a good person by focusing on students group but did not expect to build a school. On the first year, she started by

learning Thai language for 1 year In order to do the calibrated test for Grade 6. Later, she gradually started to do some activities to accomplish her goal Mrs. Shin wanted to make a permanent place for her teaching, so they decided as a couple to rent a place and use it as the religion learning center.

They set up training classes for kids and adult. After a while, with the support and suggestion from their members, the couple decided to open an international school. The school is also regarded as learning center in many field and used as the worship place on Sunday for Thais and Korean. She led the Korean prayers. In addition to the main event on Sunday, every Saturday the school staff meet children who are unprivileged to go to school both in elementary and high school. The couple would bring these kids for Sunday services such as leaning bible, worship God and etc. It is been 14 years since the school has been established by Mrs.Shin and her husband.

#### **4.1.4 Key Informant 4**

Mrs.Kim is 45 years old, a mother of three children, she has twin daughters and one son. She was born at Chun Cheong, South Korea but her parents moved to Seoul after she turned one year old. She worked part-time job after graduation. She got married at 28 years old and became a housewife.

Like many women in Korea, after her marriage she took care of the home and children. She has good personality that is different from common Korean people. She can get well with others easily and she is good in socializing with people.

She is well known among the faculty members, staff and parents in the school of her kids. During interviews, she has shown friendly manner, although the researcher met her only once before the interview, she still kept on talking and made her feel comfortable from the beginning to the end of the conversation.

She had no religion like her parents, until she met one missionary who taught her Thai language. She started to know more about Christianity. She needs something that will make her relax and be released from stress that often occurs in her life. After she moved to Thailand, she had more free time to learn about the religion. Later she decided to receive Christianity into her life. After doing worship, the housewives set up discussion group about bible and prayer.

Aside from the discussion group about religious activities, Mrs.Kim and her members meet and socialize outside normal schedule to discuss about other things because most of the members live close together. They connect at each other all the time just like close friends. They always attend their kid's activities at school regularly.

#### **4.1.5 Key Informant 5**

Mrs.Ha is a mother of two children, aged 42 years old, she was born in Gyeongsangnam-do in South Korea. Her husband was a reverend. They were married for 15 years and have a daughter aged 14 years old, son aged 8 year old. They are both studying at the International School in Bangkok. She is currently working as Korean missionary who teach Christianity in Thailand.

Mrs.Ha is slim, young looking and has a healthy lifestyle. From her external appearance, she looked quiet and less engaging. She looked solemn, polite and shy. After several meeting with her, Mrs.Ha was more talkative and relaxed than the first.

She told that she lived in Gyeongsangbuk-do province since she was born until she got a job and work. She did not have any religious beliefs or anything special. Although both of her parents were Buddhists, but Mrs.Ha said she had never been forced to worship anything. Until she studied at Grade 9 of high school at aged 16 years, she had some Christian friends who came and shared Christianity to her. She did not accepted Christian belief at that time. She remembered that day it was the evening of Saturday, there was a worship service for Christian youth group who were at the same age like her. These two instances made her decide to accept Christianity. She felt like she wanted to go to church so after helping her parent's work she decided to go church for the first time.

After attending that worship, she felt good and so happy within then she stated to study more and more about Christianity and accept Christianity as her religion. The more she read the Bible, the more she had faith and stronger belief. She understood more from church about the Bible and prayer.

Finally, she decided to quit her job and worked as a missionary. She came to Thailand and left her job as banker that she had worked for 20 years. Even banker is the steady job with a good income. But she chose to be a missionary in Thailand with her family. Her husband was a religious teacher and teaches Bible at South

Korea. Therefore, they both had same vision. At first they wanted to go to north of Thailand in the countryside area. But with the persuasion of other missionaries in Korea that there were sufficient number of missionaries at northern of Thailand, but in Kanchanaburi, there were few workers and Christianity is not that known then they decided to settle down at Kanchanaburi.

The couple were still living in Bangkok and while they go to Kanchanaburi every Friday and returned on Sunday. On other days, Mrs.Ha has to take care of their children. Their children were studying at school which has been recommended by a teacher in Korea. The school teaches of Christianity and several languages. Mrs.Ha herself had learned in this school for 6 months and further studied from an external institution. Currently, Mrs.Ha and her family have been living in Thailand for 2 years and they need to stay in Thailand for life.

#### **4.1.6 Key Informant 6**

Mrs.Yang is 49 years old, married, and has one son aged 21 years. He had studied in England. Mrs.Yang and her husband had lived in England as well. She works as counselor but had temporary work as Korean language teacher in Thailand.

Mrs.Yang has the personality of a modern woman, full of energy and actively doing things. She has a hectic life and busy with work all the time. She spent time for technology and work. She has high confidence and very proud of herself. You may think she is hard to read and reach, but during the communication with the

researcher, she loosen up and became at ease. She gradually opened herself and perceived the objective of the meeting.

She became a Christian and respected seriously at about 24-25 years old. She has no religion even though her parents were Buddhists. She knew Christianity because she studied in Christian school. Sometime in her life, she faced hard situations, she questioned about the meaning of life. What made her life faced such tough times.

Mrs.Yang began to find the answer from reading the Bible and through prayer to God, she saw light and have found a solution that made her have stronger faith in God than ever.

She did not give much information about her private life and how did she live in Thailand. She mentioned that she is in Thailand only for short time work in five months. She wants to teach Korean Language to Thai kids. She is learning Thai and planning to go back to England by next month. She does not know when she will come back to Thailand again.

#### **4.1.7 Key Informant 7**

Mrs.Kang was married woman age 48 years old. She married a Korean man and they had 2 daughters, the oldest one aged 22 years old and a graduating student from an institution in Hong Kong and planning to work there. The youngest one is 19 years-old and she is studying in Thailand and planning to further her



education in the U.S.A. Mrs.Kang is a housewife and has various positions related to religion as well.

She is an active woman with high confidence both in talking and communication. She can speak several languages such as Thai, English and Chinese. On the other hand she can talk calmly and describe her story in details. She is a good leader and follower. She can ask and answer questions without any hesitations. She focused on families and children very much.

Mrs.Kang has no religion like her parents but not until the early years of her primary school, she remembered that she had an opportunity to go to church but she felt like she does not want to see people even talk to them. Therefore she quit going to church and had forgotten about it.

At the age of 39 years old, she lived in China, Beijing. She lived with her family since 35 years old. One day. She attended a Christmas party organized by a Christian community, which had started with the prayer and singing. She felt impress in one clause from song, "Oh my Lord Jesus". She said that she used to be a bossy person. She did all the things for herself. Sometime she felt too much pressure in her life and tension from work. But after she married and quit from working, as a housewife it changed her life significantly. There are many causes of stress she does not want to be a bad example to her children. But after hearing the word "Oh my

Lord Jesus” it made her think and compare person who had god in life and who did not. For person who had god in life they can share tension with Lord.

They were not alone but they are able to live followed guidelines from God. They had a Lord that they can trust. Mrs. Kang felt envy at these people because she had a different life from them. She started to read the Bible and felt calm in her mind, since then she started to learn more about Christianity and became Christian, finally.

Even her husband did not respect any religion. But he had never stopped Mrs.Kang for having faith in Christianity. Meanwhile, she has never forced him to be a Christian like her. She only behaved a good way as a role model for him. She said her husband had well understood the good improvement because of Christianity, even if he did not decide to become a Christian.

She lived in China for 9 years and moved with her husband by his job. From China, the couple moved to Thailand. They had only the youngest daughter move to Thailand with them. I have known some churches in Thailand. Here is like a second home for them because she came here every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. She came to study the Bible, played music to praise and worship God, and attended the special prayer on Friday.

She set up a group for Bible study at home, and she worked as a group leader. On Sundays after the worship is done in the morning, she would teach

Korean to Thai people who attend church on Sunday. She devoted her time to do this because it is work for God. Then her hobby was just playing golf. Sometimes her husband joins her if he is freed from work. Most of her time goes to religious activities, so it is hard for her to have spare time for other hobbies.



## CHAPTER V DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study has been determined as followed:

- 1) To understand the motivations of religion conversion among the Koreans.
- 2) To contribute to our understanding of how religious conversion contributes to a construction of new identity.

This chapter presents data analysis in qualitative research gained from in-depth interviews of Korean participants who had lived in Thailand. Interviews were conducted on 7 persons in total.

The study of Korean history showed that Korea was able to recover the country from various traumatic situations both external factors and internal factors. As a result, it returned as a country with prosperity and development recognized by many countries. With the rapid developments and changes, religious believes among Koreans also changed radically.

Korea is a country with diverse cultures due to the streaming of the Asian and Western cultures into Korea for over time. In the early era of Korean history, Korea was the kingdom with large scale of social discrimination. Early Korean laws and code of conducts were hugely based upon the principles of religion, especially Confucianism.

Confucianism focused primarily on the respect of ancestors and giving priority to seniority. It also clearly defined woman and man duties. Those principles have shaped and affected the Korean identity until today.

Buddhism has also played an important role before it had been outlawed during the reign of the Japanese occupation of Korea. However, Buddhism is still popular in Korea until today.

Korea is a country that faced with the hard time for long time. Many adverse events and situations in the country have been happened continuously. Many times, people feel traumatized from being invaded by other countries and war. Finally, country has been divided into 2 parts, North Korea and South Korea. However, people had their strength and commitment until they could pass such severe situations. Now, Korea has many progresses in various aspects with modern technology, and its economy has been grown rapidly within short time compared to other countries around the world.

Therefore, the analysis of causes and motivation of religious change in Korean people cannot be only done in term of concepts and theories, but also has to be done in term of Korean history. The religion conversion did not occurred under the individual concepts only but society and the nation also played important role to the changes of religions. Although the interviews were only from 7 Korean participants that may not represent the concept of all Korean people who change

religion, the researchers believed that we can have the better understanding about the cause of religious conversion.

## **5.1 Motivations of religious conversion among the Korean people**

### **5.1.1 Religious void**

Because Korea was weakened in terms of religion and culture since the 20th century after the Japanese occupation for a long time (1910-1945). The religion and culture of Korea had been damaged, particularly Buddhism which had been flourished in Korea. After Korea was liberated, many Korean people who were Buddhist felt hopeless in believing a religion, so they became non-religious. Obviously viewed from the statistics, the population of Korean who were religious and non-religious became fifty-fifty.

At the same time, after Korea was colonized, Christianity began to stream into country. However, it was not successful in Joseon era as Korea people already had Confucianism and Buddhism. As Christianity came during the suffering time, they needed to improve both body and mind. Therefore, helps and support services were the major demand of Korean people. It became easy for people who felt emptiness in life and disappointed with their religion to open up to receive the new things.

Mr.Lee said, “I was Buddhist followed by my parent. Several times I came to temple with my wife. My parents had faith in Buddhism for 30-40 years because Buddhism has been flourished very much.”

Mrs.Shin said, “My parents prepared for me everything, I did not understand the ceremony, I never been taught, I just followed them.”

Mrs.Ha said, “My parents are Buddhists, but they never forced me to do the same as them.”

Mrs.Yang said that “I think most of Korean are Buddhists, but I'm not sure they are good Buddhists or not.”

From interviews of all 7 Koreans, researchers found the religion background from each family that was in the similar direction, they had or had not accepted religion followed their parents. In the first case, the informant added that in the past, Buddhism had been flourished in the Korean society. Most people still have respects in Buddhism. Informants himself, had respect in Buddhism before change to be a Christian. However, he did not have any knowledge about Buddhism that made him change to be a Christian.

Compared to Thailand, the country that has Buddhism as nation religion, the majority of the population is Buddhists. So Thai people do not have much freedom to respect any religion as same as Korean people that over half the Korean

population is not religious. Therefore it is possible and easier for them to accept Christianity than Thais.

#### 5.1.2 Seeking for social equality

Everywhere around the world has issued about social inequality. Today, people seek for social equality with strong hope that world will have social equality in near future. For Korea, it is believed that this feeling occurred for long time since the country had been ruled by elites. There were four hereditary classes that consisted of Yangban, the highest among four social classes who were scholar or aristocrat class. They were wealthy, rich and well-educated. Next is Chungin, the middle people that was the class of petty government official or technical officials. Below the Chungin were Sangmin, common people, or Yangmin, the peasant who lower than Chungin but above Chonmin, the bottom of social status which include slaves, female entertainers, butchers, shamans, prostitutes(Cho, 1989).

In the past, the elites had opportunity to study. Each class in Korea had been separated clearly that the class could be seen even by the appearance of each class. Many words could be said only by the elites. There was prohibition to marry among different classes. The funeral could not have the same type of ceremony if the dead people came from different classes.



Another obvious inequality in Korean society was the gender difference. Korean society gave the more important role to son than daughter. They preferred to have son than daughter.

With the influence of Confucianism that emphasized in the gratitude, particularly to parent and accentors, the role to take good care of parents will be the duty of eldest sons. If the daughter is married, she will be a property of husband's family and be disconnected to her original family. She must take good care of her husband's family. Duties of husband and wife are separated clearly. The husband is head of the family, and wife and children must give him the top priority.

Therefore, it is not surprise that Korean society demand for social equality. Then, when people were weak and hopeless from the colonization and the Korean War, Christianity spread into South Korea. Christianity became like the new hope for noble or elites who had lost their position and others who demanded for the better life. In modern society which has more competitions than ever, people need the opportunity to develop themselves. The informants mentioned about Christianity taught about the social equality. All humans are equal whether rich or poor. The people who never get the chance to fulfill this sense that they were equal to others could feel that they are, under the teaching of Christianity.

Mr.Jo said, "There are several levels in ancient Korea such as king, the Yang Ban especially women were suffered a lot. When I was young, women and men

could not eat together. But good news is that in Bible, it teaches the equality of women and men.”

Mrs.Shin said that “Confucian religion divided men and women, but the Bible mentioned men and women have different functions or duties but with equal rights.”

Besides talking with the informant, researcher has been told the similar story from some other Koreans as well. Once, researcher had conversation with Korean businesswoman who has major role in business and religion. She told about classes in Korean society and said Christianity can solve this issue because it taught Koreans for understanding the equality. People who have knowledge but did not have chance to get education have been helped by Christianity to feel that they are able to develop themselves and equal to others. Christianity emphasizes the feeling that Korean society needs to get out of society that framed and discriminated them.

### 5.1.3 Learning from role model

Social Cognitive Learning Theory by Bandura defined that most human learned by observation and imitation because humans interact with the environment around them all the time(Bandura, 1977).

The important process of learning by observation or learning from role models has been defined in 4 types: attention, retention, reproduction and

motivation. The motivation that Bandura stated is that the process drive learners to behave and act as their role model because they assume that would bring benefit for them.

The work of Gabriel Banaggia supported this concept. He propose the Assimilation Model(Banaggia, 2009), which mentioned that Korean society has been influenced from society outside the country. Christianity was the external influences that gradually spread into Korea until it increased amount of Korean people who accepted Christianity.

Mr.Jo said that “the United States was started by Christians, Oxford University started the first subject from Bible of Christianity.”

Mrs.Yang said that “Korea is the developing country. Korea is not totally completely developed. The developed countries are America, England and Switzerland, but Korea is just the country under the development and developed only in some part.”

Mrs.Ha said that “I thought country with Christianity as the major religion will be developed like the countries in Europe and the USA. Compare to Africa and Asia, those countries are more developed. South America does not believe in Christianity strongly which is why they are not developed much.”

Mrs.Shin said that “For poor countries. If they accept Christianity, they follow the teaching. Then they can change themselves from being bad to being good, from being lazy to being hard-working. Because God sacrificed himself for us, we must work as our functions with faith and sincere. Then, we will develop.”

After Korea suffered from hard time, Korean people needed to heal themselves and need to be developed by watching the developed countries as their role model in various aspects including religion. It is no surprise that the Korean people feel that religion influenced to the developed country. Therefore, they need to respect and adopt their religion as well.

Besides the role model from developed country, the popular people in Korea are considered as role models for the Koreans to respect Christianity as well.

Mr.Jo said, “Our lives need goals because if we success without goals we will feel emptiness. For example, the president of Korean or even the eldest son of Hyundai chairman and Korean actresses committed suicide because they felt hard to live even if they succeeded in life.”

In the interviews with Mr.Jo many times, he mentioned about people with huge success but not being able to find the real happiness. He said the real happiness in life that we need is living with goals and hopes under the core of Christianity more than concerns of fame, money or power.

Mr.Jo said, “For my daughters, I do not have any property for them, but I am sure the good news is the best things for them, and they understand about this too.”

#### 5.1.4 Causes from the emptiness, meaningless and selfless.

Korean society has many pressures in various matters due to the unexpected social change and society with the rapid economic growth. The society was not organized well, and it tends to happen in the modern society with a complex social structure. Social members have only the surface of relationship. They concern only themselves or their own family. Korean society tends to be increasingly individualistic.

As they are more individualistic than ever, it causes empty feelings and loneliness because they did not know who to turn to. Many times, they have caught up with the problems and solely found a solution by themselves.

It can be seen from competing in many terms such as learning. Every parent needs their kids to study in best high school and best university in order to get a good job. They perceive success in terms of money and social status. They cannot find true happiness because of the feeling of emptiness. They did not know what they really need. Therefore, religion was considered as an option that can give them the right solution for the true happiness in life. Many people may choose to embrace religion for this reason.

Mrs. Shin said that “I felt the emptiness in life, questioning where I came from and what I should do for being meaningful to others, what the values of my life are and how I have to live my life with values. I tried to find answer, but I could not.”

Mrs. Yang said that “During my hard time, I tried to find the meaning of my life. What is the value of my life? I worked hard to find a solution, but I could not.”

Mr. Jo said “I tried to figure out about my identity and what I have lived for, before this I felt very confused and did not know who I am.”

#### 5.1.5 Social acceptance

From “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life “, Durkheim mentioned that the origin of religion came from the public minds. Religion is the expression of public. It was the mutual conscious of many members to towards the sacred and moral(Durkheim, 1976). Many people will bring the principle of ethic or moral as the social principle for guidance their practice and act.

The origin of religion or society in the concept of Durkheim occurred from rituals. He explained that "The man without a civilization" (such as indigenous people) have experienced with "brightness" when they conducted activities with friends. This experience reflected some external power among them. After the ritual is completed, they were dispersed and lived for their normal activities in daily life. Durkheim divided the world in everyday life (profane) from the holy world (sacred).

Profane is the activities in our daily life such as working and studying. Sacred occurs as we join the ritual. People may feel about purity, power, bright and festive. The statues used in ritual or Totem is the symbol of power and causes cheerful feeling. Totem is a symbol of integration and solidarity of society.

Mrs.Ha said, “I remember that every Saturday evening, we were together for worship and discussion. I was a teenager at that time. After helping my parents’ housework, I went to church. I felt happy there and respected in Christianity.”

Mrs.Kim said, “I did not care about religion because I did not have time. But when I came here, I felt like I need to spare time for coming here.”

Causes and motivation, researcher had an opportunity to observe at Christian school, were from the daily lives of teachers and staff, including parents. In the case of Mrs.Ha, it was quite noticeable and match with the theory mentioned above. She started to interest in Christianity because she wanted to be involved with her friends of the same age. Of course, Christianity has many rituals. Participants could feel joy for joining rituals and have faith later.

The case of Mrs.Kim, showed that she did not respect any religion since she lived in Korea, but respected Christianity in Thailand as she met a missionary who taught English to their children. Mrs.Kim said she did not have any hobbies. She said “I like to talk with friends. I love to come church on Sunday to share ideas and

knowledge about Christianity. For normal day, I meet them for shopping and launch together.”

From these observations, we can notice that these incentives are things that can happen. Most wives will not work anymore after they get married, and they will become a housewife instead. Their main function is to care for children. Thus, when their children go to school, she has enough spare time to be with herself, pondering about herself, and sometimes she needs something to fill in life. Christianity, which is like a social one that gathers a lot of people from various backgrounds to come together, makes life more refreshing and not dull.

#### 5.1.6 Gratitude towards the help of the new religion

As mentioned about the streaming of Christianity that influenced Koreans after the Korean War by the arrival of the American missionaries, they brought the dissemination of teachings under the Bible in a form of education and technology, especially in the area of modern medicine. At that time, Korea demanded those things. The interviews from many informants supported that those things helped to promote the abilities of Koreans.

Mrs.Kang said that “I think most people have a similar feeling. In our past history, we were very hungry and poor, and people were not educated. Then, the Christianity from the U.S.A came. They built hospitals for sick people, and they built a university for education. This is the very main business for the Christianity. I think it



works well. Some people are anxious to learn because they have no money. Then, Christianity gave support by giving money and free scholarship. Then, they think...Oh! Christian helped me a lot, so they are good. I want to be a Christian.”

Mr.Lee said that “Someone needs to be successful in terms of their financial situation, but I think the Korean president at that time did not want to develop people. But the missionaries from abroad told us in many aspects of Christianity helping to develop the spirits of people. If we did not work, we could not be good or expertise in any things.”

Mr.Jo said that “I thought Korea had a lot of development because of the supports from other countries.”

The literature review on Christianity in Korea, as we knew that Korea is a small country with population with only 50 million. But Korea can produce the second highest number of missionaries with higher amount than United States of America could produce. Mrs.Kang said Korean people felt that Christianity helped them in many ways. Therefore, people have the positive attitude towards religion. It is not surprising that after religion change, many new Christians are very enthusiastic to help people. They believe that the mission of religion is to serve God and to help society as they had been received before.

### 5.1.7 The role of former religion has changed

When we mentioned about religion existed in Korea, excluding Christianity that came later, there were only Buddhism and Confucianism that were more prominent than other religions. Each religion had a history and tied with Korean people for long time which were alternatively flourished on each era. For Confucianism, the education or document showed the Confucianism as a cornerstone that shaped Koreans until today. There were many evidences showed Confucius has penetrated and absorbed into the lifestyle of Korean people, and it can be seen until today. Korean people did not regard Confucianism as the religion but as their culture and traditions that they need to maintain.

Mr.Lee said: “Confucianism is not a religion but it is the way of our living. In the past, I attend the ceremony of Confucianism such as Chuseok (respect to accentors), but since I changed to be Christian, I only followed the god’s path.”

Mrs.Shin said, “Now, people think that Confucianism is a religion but it still has influence to culture. For example, Confucianism showed us how children and adults should behave each other.”

Mrs.Kang said that “Confucianism has influenced in our country, but Confucianism is not a religion. It is a kind of common sense in our country. Confucianism is not a religion but like a tradition or culture.”

Beside the role of Confucianism that has been changed, the influence of Buddhism in Korea had lessened on Korean people than ever. While Confucianism had the prosperity and Christianity streamed into Korean rapidly, Buddhism has been limited to be located outside the city especially in rural areas. Many monks moved to the countryside that made the center of Buddhism to be in rural areas that made Korean people to feel unfamiliar with Buddhism. Buddhist monks and nuns have rarely contact or connect with Korean people especially in urban area. Most of Korean population is in urban area. They do less religious practices than ever, and the new generation of Korean people may reject to attend the religious practices. Thus, there are only the older people remained in the remote town who are Buddhists.

On the other hand, Christianity is always close to the Korean people. An access to Christianity is easy for Korean people because there are many churches located in the city. They can go to any church located nearby, and that is very convenient for them.

Mrs.Kim said that “In Seoul, temples are located very far and on mountain while there are many churches scattered around in many cities and easy to visit.”

Mr.Lee said that “Church in Seoul located in school, army and academy because I live nearby. My family and I had always visited there.”

## 5.2 How religion create the new identity for the Korean people

Talking about “Identity” from interview, researchers can conclude the overview of new identity is the real happiness because when it comes to identity, there is different point of view. Someone may mention about different temperament, attitudes, the changes that can be seen obviously such as expression, personality and interaction with others, and the changes that cannot be seen easily such as changes of mind. However, it can be concluded that both of 7 informants have changed in some parts of their identity to be better. They are happier under the change of religion. The religion has created some processes that reform their identity of Korean people.

### 5.2.1 Religion empowers inner self

Most of informants before turning into Christianity were lack of confidence in their lives and felt with emptiness and hopelessness because they faced lot of things that created weakness and powerlessness to live under social pressure.

Then, Koreans needed power to be stronger with more mental stability than ever so that they can overcome obstacles in life. Religion is counted as one important mechanism that can empower humans. Particularly, in psychological and spiritual terms, the Bible mentioned many stories that can empower people. For example, Jesus Christ sacrificed his life on the cross for the salvation to all human and made Christians feel the value inside them. Someone may ever feel frustrated,

not happy in life but can gain power because God is the Father who is always mercy to everyone.

People can adjust their feeling and convert it as mental power to change any things. They can be more confident when they see their value and gain more self-respect as they are empowered by religion.

Mrs.Kang said that “God looks at me that I am a good person, meaning God value me as the life of Jesus Christ. God looks at me as the prize of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross. He paid penalty and sin instead of me, meaning that I am a valuable person. God wants to save me because I am a slave. If I want to be free and if I want to be released, someone has to pay something for me. God paid for me. It means I was too proud of myself, which I have to be grateful of what God did for me All the Christians if they know, they understand. If they have more and more knowledge of God and the words of God, they will be happy and proud of themselves. ”

Mrs.Kang also said that “How others see me it doesn’t matter whether they like me or not, love me or not, or think I am a good person or not. I value myself as God values me, so how God sees me is more important than how others see me. So, having a Christian’s life totally changes people if they are real Christians, if they know Bible and if they learn more and more.”

Mrs.Kang said that “I have people whom I can trust, but even if I have a husband and children, they are human beings as well, so they are not perfect, which means that I cannot trust and rely on them truly and fully. It is impossible, but I have Jesus Christ, and he is perfect that I can rely on. I can trust everything that means I can be relaxed.”

Mr.jo said that “All men are free from the world of Satan and change from human to be son of god.”

Mr.Lee said that “Whatever your job is, it needs to be intended, and Christianity will help us to gain more power for that.”

Mrs.Kim said, “I have been stressed when I do not have money. But Christianity made me feel more relaxed and comfortable than ever.”

#### 5.2.2 Religion created learning process from practice regularly.

The changes of thoughts and behaviors of human are not something that can happen immediately. But it occurs from an adaptation under different environments. Therefore, the theory of Thorndike stated about the law of practice that any actions that human practice repeatedly, they can do it well and any behavior that has been done continuously, such action shall be completed (Thorndike, 1911).

It can be seen that in one week, Christians have one important day that they must participate like Sunday is the day for religion ceremony. Some informants also

mentioned to another day that they spend to study Bible, disseminate the religious knowledge and help people which are the activities of Christians. Those activities can help people to understand more about religion and they can be familiar with what they did and finally could change their identity.

Comparing between people who have been practicing in something consistently and who have not, people who have been practicing could gain more expertise in that field. The expertise may disappear, if they stop to practice or did not consistently practice it.

Mrs.Kang said that “I came here on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. I set up my own Bible study group at home, and on Sunday and Monday, I play songs for worship here. On Tuesday, I study the Bible from the pastor. On Wednesday and Friday, I give a service to our church. So Christians should not practice only on Sunday. Sunday is a MUST, the most important thing. But also, several other services are important in practicing the God’s teaching such as meeting or studying.”

Mr.Lee said: "Every morning I prayed for my wife and me for having healthy body so that we can take good care of our students. We read Bible 30-40 minutes before bed.”

Mr.Jo said, “I count the most important thing that causes a person’s identity is influence from the environment, surrounding or even a person. If anyone meets a thief very often, there is more tendency that he or she becomes a thief as well.”

Mrs.Ha said “When I was a Buddhist I rarely talked with anyone because I did not have confidence to talk with anyone. After I change to be Christian, I can socialize more than ever. I have more confidence, and I can lead my friends, and I can talk with others better.”

Mrs.Ha also said “My children know Christianity. When they pray, even my youngest daughter can lead our prayer, and she is very confident doing so.”

### 5.2.3 Religion helps to adjust point of views and attitudes

The psychological effects on behaviors, thoughts and attitudes are another important thing that can be changed by religion. Each religion has its own approach of teachings like the Bible in Christianity. It is considered as the most important in religion because it is the texts of God that religious leaders must follow. People sometimes have a lack of guidance in life. However, as they turn to religion, it is easier for them to follow and adapt themselves in the line of ideas and attitudes that religious leaders have been teaching.



Mrs.Shin said, “Before, I consumed only things that were benefit to me, but the Bible told me to love others even the enemy. I felt like I have grown more mentally and spiritually.”

Mrs.Kim said, “I have more patience than before when I get angry. I have expressed my anger, but now, I consider first.”

Mrs.Yang said that “Before I become a Christian, I was a selfish person. I did not care others about how they think, how they work and how they live, but now I care about others a lot in terms of welfare and their happiness.”

However, all new identities may not occur from only religion change. Change process is not easy and fast, so the new identities slowly appear through learning, practicing, adapting and eventually changing after religious conversion. People consistently experience and accustom to the outcomes of their actions until they find their new identity.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses its finding, summarize the results of the study, point out limitations of the research and also provide suggestions for further studies.

#### 6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 Based on the gathered data and interviews the key informants have shown different reasons why they turned to Christianity. As it was mentioned in their personal stories each one has their own turning point in life. Each situation has certain entry point that gave them a total turnaround from their former life into their new found faith. It did not just change their religion it changed every area of their lives. It gave them new perspective in life, all their actions and reasons in doing things are based on their faith. It is really a total surrender with the God that they served.

From this study, it was found that there are many inducements of religious conversion among interviewees. Although the motives are classified into 7 groups, there is more than a single motive that causes the conversion of each individual. In other words, these causes are varied towards each person, and they are taken into consideration in order to reach the decision of changing the religion. Therefore, when

the combination of multiple incentives happens, they potentially lead to identity movement.

For example, some Koreans were drawn to Christianity because they were influenced by the people they are looking up to who followed Christian faith. Putting their trust with the experiences of people who found what they have been seeking was a great factor in turning into Christian faith and belief and also mix with the common feeling of lack of self-worth and social acceptance. Some may turn around from their former belief because of unsatisfied spiritual feeding from their old religion along with the gratitude toward the help of the new religion. As they felt that through times their former religion has changed its purpose. They are no longer growing in their faith and belief and then they are also feel that Christianity gave them fresh vision in their spirituality. In return to show their gratitude they gave their genuine service to grow more in their belief.

It is obviously shown that many certain factors are linked together. Plus, it can be presumed that in the presence of the blended motives, it might give rise to identity movement as well. One thing that all these key informants have in common is that, as time goes by, each of them gradually became a changed person. To illustrate, there emerged a transition from being insecure to being secure, from being troubled to being peaceful, and from having full of doubts to being confident. All of these happened through their faith and trust that they have placed in God.

6.1.2 Knowing all these gave the researcher a new perspective towards every religion. It changes the pattern of thought and being close to other's way of belief. The researcher's significant gain in this study is the better relationship that has been established among the people who went through the interview. Each person that has been interviewed contributed a lot for this change of heart. The respect and broader understanding among this people group is a valued character that has been formed.

## 6.2 Conclusion

The research has been conducted through study of related documents and in-depth interviews under two main objectives as below.

- 1).To understand the motivations of religion conversion among the Korean people.
- 2).To contribute to our understanding of how religious conversion contributes to a construction of new identity.

### 6.2.1 Motivations of religious conversion among the Korean people

The study showed that the religion change from traditional religion to Christianity started after the Korean War in the 20th century. At that time, Korea was in a weak state in many aspects. People suffered both physically and mentally. Therefore, many things came into country in the form of assistance which easily gained influence to Korean people.

This study showed that Koreans that time opened up to the Western culture and turned to respect Christianity since then. After the war, Korea was moving into an era of accelerated development. The country passed the reconstruction era, then the country was ruled by the military until the era of democratization. Many things have been driven for the rapid development and Koreans wanted to keep that growth rate going on. However, in return, high pressures and tension were created among people.

From cause analysis, it can be seen that main reasons for religious change were due to social and mental issues. Religious change can sometimes be seen as the personal matter as well. But in fact, for the Korean people, social pressure is a very important factor that drove Koreans to find their values and meanings for themselves. The people suffered from the past, and thus they desired for better life and hope for good future for their children.

Many people are looking for goal for living correctly and successfully. Christianity can answer and fill in what Korean people demand than other religions. Therefore, Korean people are accepting and converting to be Christian increasingly.

### **6.2.2 How religion creates the new identity for the Korean people**

It is true that religion can change the identity of the Korean people. The change does not occur suddenly after the religion conversion, but gradually, religion

creates transition process of identity in 3 aspects: psychological, behavioral, and cognitive aspects.

Those three aspects occur from the deep study of religion, and being close to religious practices. Christianity is a religion that emphasizes both theory and practice. The study of theory can be practiced in everyday life. The identity will be changed based on the understanding and faith towards Christianity. If we are close to religion, we develop our mind, behaviors and thoughts altogether.

However, the new identity emerged from the process of religion. In conclusion, new identity emerged from religious conversion has made Koreans identities change in better direction.

### **6.3 Recommendations of the research**

Religion is a topic that requires a lot of attention and care because religion is sensitive topics for discussion. Researchers believe that the study of other religions and learning the advantages of each religion to adapt or apply in different fields is the interesting thing to do. Using ideas from other religion needs to be selective and considered so that the ideas may not impact their religion. The researcher believe that all religion teach people to be good person but with different approach in the line of their beliefs. Sometimes, it may cause conflicts in society because people have different ideas or perspectives.

It would be better if everyone tries to understand the religions because it would help us to understand other believes. It may cause us to respect other faith and may not offend anyone's beliefs which will lead to less conflict with each other.

#### **6.4 Research Limitations**

The statistics about the number of person who respect each religions in Korea used in this research was the data of year 2005 due to the National Statistical Office of Korea collecting the statistical data every 10 years. Some information may vary from current situation. The statistics did not show the amount of Korean people who change religion to be Christian. The research made by the numerical analysis from the comparison of Korean people who respect each religion could not see the increasing and decreasing trends of religion of the Korean people. These contributed the limitations of data collection.

In terms of time constraints, researcher can collect data on Korean people who have lived in Thailand. Moreover, with the restrictions on the language, the issue of communication made the small number of informants (7 persons) which could not represent the majority of the Korean people. Also, sometimes, when they moved to Thailand for long time, their national identity has been blended to Thai society. The interview used Thai, English and Korean language that may have caused the deviate of meanings because it needed to be translated for many steps.

## 6.5 Suggestions for Future research

1. In this study, the researcher was limited the study to just Koreans who live in Thailand. It would be better to study Koreans living in Korea because it would better provide information about change in the identity of the Korean people. The moving of resident may affect the change of their identity as well. Therefore, religion change may decrease its effect to identity change if a person migrates to stay in other country. They may be blended to the society and culture of that country as well.

2. Suggestion for future research to expand and increase the size of the research population due to many limitations in this research that cause the small data and because of this study provide in depth interview with person who has in-depth understanding and experience of religion so researcher select to interview Korean people who has age 40 years old and above only. But to understand the Korean people comprehensively, the next study should focus on other age such as student, working group, elderly and etc.

3. To increase the interesting of the research, the future research could be made by comparing the differences between religions inside Korea. For example, researchers can interview Buddhists or none religion and compare the reasons and motivation of this research.



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