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**Conversion and Transformations:
Missiological Approaches to Religious Change**

**Elisabeth J. Shepping's Conversion and its Impact
on the Transformation of Korean Women**

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Elisabeth J. Shepping, RN (1880-1934) was a lesser-known female nurse commissioned to Joseon by Southern Presbyterian Church in the USA. Her mission work was focused on local social services. From 1912 to 1934 in the days of Japanese colonial period, she worked as a single woman missionary in Gwangju, Gunsan, Jeonju, Busan, Seoul, and other regions to serve women, widows, orphans, Hansen's disease patients, and other marginalized populations. It is noteworthy that one lay female nurse, not a denominationally ordained male pastor, was the one who pioneered today's Korean social service sector.

For 22 years until her death and burial in Joseon soil, Shepping led a life markedly different from the majority of other missionaries. She tried to identify herself with the people of Joseon, and did not spare her possessions or her life. She did not carry the ideals of social Darwinism and the civilizing mission (the whiteman's burden), and unlike the majority of foreign missionaries, she did not flaunt her privileges or consider herself superior to the Joseon people. Even as a considerable number of missionaries equated Christian mission with the expansion of national interests, and commonly conducted or arranged commercial activities for personal profit, Shepping did not involve herself in these affairs. Although many missionaries were devoted to providing better living conditions for the women of Joseon, they also did not trust the recipients. Some missionaries did not even consider fostering talented people to take over the leadership, and even actively disrupted such efforts. She, on the other hand, empowered women leaders toward autonomy.

This study examines Shepping's uncommon missionary activities and consider their connections to her conversion experience. Her conversion was a factor that enabled her to live a non-imperialistic life in an imperialistic age. Shepping's experience and life in her historic context provide implications for today's Christian mission.

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