

SOCIAL PRESSURE, THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS INTEREST, AND THE INCREASING VISIBILITY OF ISLAM IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines declining religious interest in South Korea and its relationship with social pressures, mental health challenges, and the reconfiguration of spirituality in modern society. It aims to analyze these interconnected dynamics and explore the growing visibility of Islam as a minority spiritual alternative. This study adopts a qualitative-interpretive approach grounded in Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie. Data are drawn from a literature review, semi-structured interviews, scholarly articles, media reports, and official statistics. The findings indicate that the weakening of institutional religiosity is associated with individualism, modernization, competitive culture, and pressures arising from work and academic expectations. However, declining religiosity does not necessarily signify the disappearance of spirituality. Some individuals turn toward agnosticism or non-institutional spirituality, while others express interest in Islam as a source of moral discipline, community solidarity, and transcendental meaning. Changes in South Korea's religious landscape reflect a reconfiguration of spirituality in response to modern pressures. Islam may offer an alternative framework for meaning-making for some segments of society, particularly younger generations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modernization is a process of social change that not only transforms economic structures, technology, and culture, but also reshapes how individuals understand religion, spirituality, and the meaning of life. In modern society, social life is increasingly characterized by rationalization, urbanization, economic competition, and individualization. Religion, which previously functioned as a center of social integration, a source of moral authority, and a collective space for solidarity, has increasingly shifted into a more private personal choice. This change is often understood through the concept of secularization, namely the declining authority of institutional religion in regulating modern social life (Jakšić Turčinović, 2018). However, secularization does not necessarily mean the disappearance of spiritual needs. On the contrary, modern societies often continue to seek meaning, inner peace, and moral orientation through new forms of spirituality that are not always bound to formal religious institutions.

South Korea is an important case for understanding the relationship between modernization, social pressure, and religious transformation. Within a relatively short period, South Korea transformed from a poor post-war state into one of East Asia's most influential powers in the fields of economy, technology, education, and popular culture. This developmental success is often described as an "economic miracle," yet behind it lies a highly competitive social structure. The education system, the world of work, standards of social success, and a culture of productivity generate intense pressure on individuals, particularly younger generations. In this context, South Korean modernization has produced not only material progress but also psychological pressure, social alienation, and a crisis of meaning (K. K. Lee, 2024).

Social pressure in South Korea appears in several forms. First, academic pressure emerges from school age through competition for

admission to prestigious universities and the demand for high achievement. Second, work-related pressure appears in the culture of long working hours, career competition, and strong expectations of productivity. Third, social pressure also emerges through standards of physical appearance, economic status, home ownership, job stability, and family success. The combination of these pressures creates a situation in which individuals are not only expected to succeed but also to continuously present themselves as strong, productive, and resilient. Under such conditions, academic failure, employment uncertainty, loneliness, and the inability to meet social standards may trigger stress, anxiety, depression, and alienation (I. Jang et al., 2025).

This condition is closely related to mental health problems in South Korea. The high suicide rate, growing public attention to depression, anxiety, loneliness, and burnout indicate that South Korean modernization produces a social paradox. On the one hand, the country has achieved impressive economic and technological progress; on the other hand, its society faces a heavy psychological burden caused by continuous social competition. This phenomenon shows that material progress does not automatically correspond with mental and spiritual well-being. Modernization can expand life opportunities, but it can also weaken social solidarity, intensify individualism, and generate existential pressure (Kwon et al., 2023).

At the same time, South Korea's religious landscape is undergoing significant change (Cho & Heinz, 2025). Contemporary data indicate an increasing number of people with no religious affiliation. Younger generations tend to be more distant from formal religious institutions than previous generations. Religion is no longer automatically viewed as the center of social life, but rather as one option among many ways of obtaining peace, identity, and meaning. Many individuals have begun to choose non-institutional approaches such as self-healing,

mindfulness, meditation, psychological counseling, popular therapy, wellness culture, or individual spiritual practices. This phenomenon shows that declining religious affiliation does not necessarily indicate the disappearance of spirituality; rather, it reflects a shift in the form of religiosity from institutional religion toward a more personal, flexible, and pragmatic spirituality (Gaitano et al., 2025).

In this context, the increasing visibility of Islam in South Korea becomes an interesting phenomenon to examine. Islam remains a minority religion in South Korea and cannot be compared demographically with Christianity or Buddhism. However, the development of Muslim communities, the presence of Muslim migrant workers, international students, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora, halal centers, mosques, digital da'wah communities, and the emergence of Korean Muslims indicate that Islam has begun to occupy a more visible social space. This phenomenon is important because it appears amid a society that is generally experiencing an increase in non-religious groups. In other words, while some segments of society are moving away from institutional religion, others are seeking new spiritual orientations, including through Islam (Shin et al., 2025).

Interest in Islam within modern South Korean society can be read as part of the search for meaning amid the pressures of material life. Islam offers a relatively clear spiritual structure through the concepts of tawhid, daily worship, moral discipline, community, solidarity, and a life orientation that connects worldly existence with transcendent purpose. For some individuals who experience spiritual emptiness, individualism, and social pressure, a religion such as Islam may be understood as an alternative space for finding identity, moral order, and a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the increasing visibility of Islam in South Korea also faces challenges, including stereotypes of Islam, Islamophobia, difficulties in practicing

halal lifestyles, social norms surrounding alcohol consumption, and the position of Muslims as a minority in a society not yet fully familiar with Islam.

Based on this background, this study argues that declining religious interest and the increasing visibility of Islam in South Korea should not be understood as contradictory phenomena. Both can instead be read as part of the transformation of religiosity in modern society. On the one hand, social pressure, individualism, and secularization weaken attachment to institutional religion. On the other hand, crises of meaning, loneliness, and psychological pressure open space for new spiritual searches, including interest in Islam. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between social pressure, the dynamics of religious interest, mental health, and the increasing visibility of Islam in contemporary South Korean society by employing Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie as the main analytical framework.

This study uses Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie as its main analytical framework (E. Durkheim, 1984). In Durkheim's thought, anomie refers to a condition in which social norms weaken, no longer provide clear moral guidance, or fail to integrate individuals into collective life. Anomie often appears in societies undergoing rapid social change, especially when economic transformation, modernization, urbanization, and individualization move faster than the capacity of social institutions to provide moral orientation. Under conditions of anomie, individuals may experience alienation, loss of meaning, weak social solidarity, and uncertainty in evaluating life goals.

The theory of anomie is relevant for explaining modern South Korean society because the country has undergone extremely rapid modernization. Economic, technological, educational, and cultural progress has formed a highly productive but also highly competitive society (É. Durkheim, 2005). Norms of social

success have become very strong: individuals are expected to achieve academically, obtain stable employment, possess respectable economic status, and conform to certain social standards. When such standards are too high and not all individuals can achieve them, tension emerges between social aspirations and individual capacity. From a Durkheimian perspective, this tension can generate modern anomie: society imposes many demands but does not always provide adequate moral and social support.

In this study, anomie is used to read three main processes (Besnard, 2020). First, anomie explains how social pressure weakens individual attachment to community and religious institutions. When life becomes increasingly oriented toward competition, productivity, and material achievement, religion may be perceived as less relevant by some individuals, especially if religious institutions are unable to respond to the anxieties of younger generations. Second, anomie explains the rise of mental health problems as a result of weakened social integration and increased life pressure. Stress, depression, anxiety, and loneliness are understood not only as psychological conditions, but also as social symptoms of a society that has lost balance between material progress and moral integration. Third, anomie explains why some individuals continue to search for new forms of spirituality. When old norms weaken and formal religious institutions lose appeal, individuals may seek other sources of meaning, either through non-institutional spirituality or through minority religions such as Islam.

In addition to anomie, this study uses the concept of secularization as a supporting framework. Secularization explains the declining influence of institutional religion in modern social life. However, this study does not understand secularization as the total disappearance of religion. Rather, secularization is understood as a change in the position of religion: from the center of collective life to a

personal choice, from a social obligation to an expression of identity, and from a dominant institution to one source of meaning among many alternatives. Thus, secularization in South Korea does not only produce a non-religious society, but also generates more individual, flexible, and selective forms of spirituality.

The concept of modern spirituality that introduced by Dave Vliegenthart is also important for explaining the phenomenon of being spiritual but not religious. In modern society, individuals may reject formal religious affiliation while continuing to seek spiritual experience, inner peace, and meaning in life. Modern spirituality is often personal, pragmatic, and therapeutic (Vliegenthart, 2025). It is chosen not because of traditional obligation, but because it is perceived as helpful in facing life pressures. In this context, practices such as meditation, self-healing, spiritual consultation, digital shamanism, and wellness culture show that the need for meaning does not disappear, but changes form.

Within this framework, Islam is positioned as one spiritual alternative emerging in contemporary South Korean society. Islam offers a life orientation that differs from modern materialistic logic because it emphasizes regular worship, community, moral discipline, solidarity, and the relationship between human beings and God. For some people, Islam may provide moral certainty and a clearer life structure amid a competitive and individualistic society (Kabir et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this study positions Islam analytically rather than apologetically. This means that Islam is not normatively understood as the single answer to the crisis of modernity, but as one form of spiritual response to anomie, secularization, and the pressures of material life in South Korea.

Based on this framework, this study develops the following analytical flow: rapid modernization produces social pressure; social pressure strengthens anomie through weakened social integration and increased crises of

meaning; anomie contributes to declining interest in institutional religion and rising mental health problems; under these conditions, some individuals search for alternative forms of spirituality; Islam emerges as one alternative that offers moral structure, community, and transcendent meaning. Thus, the relationship between social pressure, the dynamics of religious interest, and the increasing visibility of Islam in South Korea can be understood as a process of religious transformation in modern society.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-interpretive approach to analyze the relationship between social pressure, the dynamics of religious interest, mental health, and the increasing visibility of Islam in contemporary South Korean society. This approach was selected because the study does not seek to measure statistical causality, but rather to understand the social meanings behind religious transformation in the contexts of modernization, social competition, and spiritual crisis.

The research data consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, conducted both directly and online, with informants who understand South Korean social life, including students, workers, observers of Korean culture, members of Muslim communities, and individuals with experience or knowledge of religiosity, academic pressure, work culture, and mental health. Secondary data were obtained from reputable journal articles, academic books, reports by international institutions such as the OECD, WHO, and Pew Research Center, South Korean government documents, and relevant Korean media reports published between 2015 and 2025.

Data collection was conducted through literature review and semi-structured interviews. The literature review was used to map debates on secularization, modern spirituality, social

pressure, mental health, and the position of Islam as a minority religion in South Korea. Interviews were used to deepen the understanding of social experiences and perceptions of religion amid competitive modern life.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis by identifying major patterns related to secularization, anomie, social pressure, the search for meaning, and interest in Islam. Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie was used as the analytical framework to explain how rapid social change can weaken moral and spiritual bonds. Data validity was examined through source triangulation by comparing interview findings with academic literature, official reports, and Korean media sources.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The decline of religious attachment in South Korea cannot be reduced to a process of total secularization. This phenomenon is more accurately understood as a transformation of religiosity from institutional, collective, and socially inherited forms toward more personal, selective, and non-institutional forms. In contemporary South Korean society, religion has not entirely disappeared, but its function has changed. Religion no longer automatically operates as the primary center for producing social meaning, but has become one personal option among various sources of life orientation available in modern society (Baker, 2013).

This transformation is consistent with the increase in groups with no religious affiliation. However, the non-religious category is not always identical with atheism or a total rejection of spirituality. Many individuals no longer attach themselves to particular religious institutions, yet continue to maintain a need for meaning, inner peace, and moral orientation. Therefore, declining religious affiliation should be read as a changing relationship between individuals and religion, not as the disappearance of the human need for spiritual dimensions.

Interview findings reinforce this pattern. Informant A demonstrated ;

“a religious attitude not bound to a particular institution while still respecting the existence of different forms of belief”.

This attitude can be understood as a form of epistemic neutrality, namely a position in which individuals neither affirm nor reject religious truth claims in absolute terms. In the context of South Korean modernity, such a position appears because individuals live within an increasingly plural, rational, and competitive social environment. Religion is not rejected frontally, but is placed in a private sphere that depends on personal preference, experience, and psychological need.

Meanwhile, Informants B and C indicated that

“religious practices are still carried out, but in a more personal way and without necessarily involving active participation in religious communities”.

This pattern confirms a shift from collective religiosity toward subjective religiosity. Religion is no longer understood primarily as a social obligation, but as a personal experience that can be chosen, negotiated, or even abandoned when it is perceived as no longer relevant to the pressures of modern life. Thus, the dynamics of religious interest in South Korea do not move in a straight line from “religious” to “non-religious,” but form a spectrum that includes formal religiosity, personal spirituality, agnosticism, and alternative searches for meaning.

3.1. Social Pressure and Anomie in a Competitive Society

South Korean modernization has produced remarkable economic, technological, educational, and popular cultural achievements (K. K. Lee, 2024). However, this success has also created a highly competitive social structure. An education system that emphasizes achievement, a labor market that demands high

productivity, an intense work culture, and social standards of success generate significant pressure on individuals (J. Y. Kim, 2022). In this context, modernization produces not only material progress but also social conditions vulnerable to anxiety, stress, loneliness, and crises of meaning.

Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie is relevant for reading this condition. Anomie refers to a situation in which social norms can no longer provide stable moral orientation for individuals. In societies undergoing rapid change, individuals may lose a sense of direction because the social structure demands success, but does not always provide adequate moral and emotional support. South Korea displays a form of modern anomie when individuals are encouraged to continuously achieve, compete, and be productive, while simultaneously experiencing high psychological pressure and disconnection from meaning-giving communities.

Social pressure in South Korea appears mainly in three domains. First is the educational domain, where academic success is often positioned as the main path toward social status and economic stability (M. J. Kim, 2023). Second is the occupational domain, where individuals face demands for productivity, long working hours, and career competition (H. Lee, 2021). Third is the domain of social life, where standards of success, appearance, consumption, and economic status create symbolic pressures that are difficult to avoid. Under such conditions, religion may lose its appeal when religious institutions are perceived as unable to respond to the concrete anxieties of modern society.

Thus, declining religious interest is not merely the result of rationalization or technological advancement, but also of a dislocation of meaning. Individuals living under competitive pressure tend to seek coping mechanisms that are perceived as more immediate, practical, and personal, such as psychological counseling, self-care, meditation,

recreational activities, or non-institutional spirituality. Formal religion remains present, but it does not always serve as the main reference point for facing everyday life pressures (Stolz et al., 2025).

3.2 Mental Health, Crisis of Meaning, and the Privatization of Coping

The mental health crisis in South Korea reveals the paradox of modern society. On the one hand, South Korea has become an advanced country with strong educational, technological, and economic infrastructures. On the other hand, its people face serious problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, social isolation, and high suicide rates. This condition shows that material progress does not automatically generate psychological and spiritual well-being.

From a Durkheimian perspective, mental health should not be understood only as an individual problem, but also as a social symptom. When individuals lose attachment to community, norms, and stable systems of meaning, they become more vulnerable to alienation (Podgornik & Kovačič, 2014). In South Korea, this alienation is reinforced by a competitive culture that evaluates individuals through achievement, productivity, and material success. Individuals who fail to meet these standards may experience feelings of inadequacy, failure, and social disconnection.

This condition also affects how people view religion. Informant A state

“For some people, religion is no longer perceived as the primary source of psychological recovery because it is considered too institutional, normative, or distant from concrete experiences of modern life pressure”.

As a result, coping becomes privatized. Individuals are more likely to choose approaches that are personal, therapeutic, and flexible. Self-healing, mindfulness, psychological counseling, sports, digital entertainment, and informal

spiritual consultation become new spaces for managing pressure.

However, the privatization of coping does not mean that spiritual needs disappear. Precisely when social institutions weaken, the need for meaning may emerge in new forms. Some individuals continue to search for transcendent orientation, although not always through majority religions or traditional religious institutions. This is why religion in South Korean society needs to be understood not only through formal affiliation statistics, but also through more fluid and individualized practices of meaning-making.

3.3. Agnosticism as Adaptation to Reflexive Modernity

Agnosticism in the South Korean context cannot be understood merely as weak faith or ignorance of religion. It is more accurately read as an adaptive strategy in a modern society that is plural, rational, and full of uncertainty. Agnosticism provides a middle position for individuals who do not wish to be bound by the dogma of a particular religion, while also not entirely rejecting the possibility of spiritual dimensions.

Interview with informant B show that

“I do not always reject religion, but tend to keep a distance from absolute truth claims”.

This attitude reflects the character of reflexive modernity, a condition in which individuals continuously evaluate their identities, values, and life choices. In a highly competitive society, individuals need autonomous space to choose sources of meaning that correspond to their lived experiences. Therefore, agnosticism becomes a way to maintain openness toward spirituality without having to submit to formal religious institutions.

Agnosticism is also related to changes in religious authority (Chun & Das Gupta, 2022). Religious authority is no longer accepted automatically, but is negotiated through personal

experience, rationality, digital media, and social interaction. Younger generations in South Korea can more easily access various forms of information about religion, life philosophy, popular psychology, and global spirituality. This condition creates a plural market of meaning in which religion competes with various alternative narratives of happiness, success, self-healing, and the meaning of life (Höllinger & Makula, 2021).

Therefore, agnosticism is not a sign of spiritual emptiness, but a reflective form of religiosity born from the combination of secularization, individualism, social pressure, and value pluralism. It shows that modern society does not always leave religion because it no longer needs meaning, but because it seeks forms of meaning that are more personal, open, and less bound to institutions.

Loneliness is one of the important symptoms of contemporary South Korean society. Although South Korea is technologically advanced and highly connected digitally, digital connectivity does not always produce deep social relationships (Chung & Kim, 2023). Informant A assessed that social relations are often shallow, while Informants B and C indicated that individuals can still experience emotional isolation even when they are socially active. This shows the distinction between social connectivity and emotional connectedness.

In traditional societies, religion often functioned as a space of social integration. Religious activities provided community, shared rituals, solidarity, and moral language for understanding suffering (Conner, 2019). However, when religion becomes privatized and religious institutions lose appeal, this integrative function weakens. Individuals do not only move away from religion; they also lose one of the social spaces that previously played a role in creating a sense of belonging.

South Korea is technologically advanced and highly connected digitally; however, digital connectivity does not always generate deep

social relationships. Informant A assessed that social relations are often shallow, while Informants B and C noted that individuals can still experience emotional isolation even when they are socially active. This demonstrates the difference between social connectivity and emotional connectedness (Y. Jang et al., 2025).

For this reason, declining religious interest in South Korea needs to be read in relation to the crisis of social relationships. Religion is not only losing doctrinal authority; it is also losing part of its social function as a communal space. In this situation, new spiritual searches may emerge not only from theological need but also from the need for community, life order, and a sense of belonging.

3.4. Islam as a Minority Spiritual Alternative

In the South Korean religious landscape, Islam remains a minority religion (N. Song, 2015). Even in the period before 2020, it shows that anti-Islam sentiment has grown massively (Jeong, 2017). However, in post the 2020 period, there is an interesting phenomenon that the South Korean public is increasingly friendly to Islam (Shin et al., 2025), and even a number of public figure have converted to Islam (Farrah Sheikh, 2020). Therefore, the term “growth of Islam” needs to be used carefully. Academically, it is more appropriate to refer to the phenomenon as the increasing visibility of Islam in South Korean public life. This visibility appears through the presence of Muslim communities, international students, migrant workers, Muslim tourists, halal restaurants, mosques, Islamic information centers, digital da'wah communities, and Korean Muslim figures who introduce Islam through social media (Srimulyani, 2021).

The increasing visibility of Islam is significant because it appears amid the rise of non-religious groups. This phenomenon shows that secularization does not always close space for new or minority religions. On the contrary,

secularization can open space for alternative searches when traditional religions are no longer perceived as sufficiently relevant by some individuals. In this context, Islam may attract attention not merely because of its doctrinal aspects, but also because it offers a clear structure of life, disciplined worship, community, moral orientation, and a transcendent relationship with God. As demonstrated by a number of Muslim diasporas who work and live in Korea (Suh, 2025).

Islam can be understood as a spiritual alternative for some individuals experiencing material life pressure and emptiness of meaning (Grayson, 2002). In a highly competitive society, Islam offers an orientation different from the logic of material achievement. The concepts of tawhid, prayer, fasting, zakat, halal, simplicity, and social solidarity form a life system that emphasizes balance between this world and the hereafter, the individual and the community, freedom and moral discipline. For individuals who feel alienated within competitive culture, such a structure may provide a sense of order and life purpose.

Nevertheless, Islam in South Korea also faces social challenges (Nam, 2012). As a minority religion, Islam is often perceived as a foreign religion associated with migrants, the Middle East, or global media representations of conflict and terrorism. Islamic practices such as prayer, hijab, halal food, and abstention from alcohol can conflict with Korean social norms, especially within work and social cultures that often involve communal dining and alcohol consumption. Therefore, interest in Islam cannot be read simply as an easy process of acceptance, but must be understood as a process of identity negotiation, cultural adaptation, and struggle against stereotypes.

Even so, Korean Muslim communities and Muslim diasporas play an important role in introducing Islam as a religion that can coexist with Korean identity (D. Song, 2016). Social media has become an important space for

explaining Islam in a more personal and dialogical way. Through digital space, Korean Muslims can present everyday experiences as Muslims, respond to stereotypes, and build an image of Islam that is closer to Korean social life. In this context, Islam appears not only as a transnational religion, but also as an identity negotiated within modern Korean society.

The findings of this study show that declining religious interest, social pressure, mental health, loneliness, agnosticism, and the increasing visibility of Islam are part of a single process of religious transformation. South Korean modernization has produced a highly competitive and productive society, but it has also created conditions of anomie in which individuals lose stable orientations of meaning. Under these conditions, institutional religion does not always succeed in maintaining its integrative function, especially for younger generations who are more individualistic and reflexive.

However, the weakening of institutional religion does not mean the disappearance of spiritual needs. On the contrary, social pressure and crises of meaning can encourage individuals to seek new forms of spirituality. Some choose agnostic pathways or non-institutional spirituality; others become interested in minority religious forms such as Islam. Thus, Islam in South Korea should not be read as a phenomenon that contradicts secularization. It can instead be understood as one form of rearticulating meaning within a society experiencing spiritual dislocation.

The main contribution of this analysis lies in connecting three levels of explanation. At the structural level, modernization and social competition create high life pressure. At the psychosocial level, such pressure generates stress, loneliness, alienation, and crises of meaning. At the religious level, these conditions produce two directions simultaneously: the weakening of attachment to institutional religion and the opening of space for alternative

spirituality. Islam appears in this second space, not as a replacement for majority religions, but as one spiritual alternative that has gained attention within the contemporary South Korean religious landscape.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the dynamics of religious interest in South Korea cannot be explained simply as the disappearance of religion from modern social life. Declining religious affiliation, particularly among younger generations, is more accurately understood as a transformation of religiosity from institutional and collective forms toward more personal, selective, and reflexive forms. Rapid modernization, urbanization, rationalization, and increasing individualism have shifted the position of religion from the center of social life to one private option in the search for meaning.

In this context, South Korean society has not completely abandoned the spiritual needs, but has become more critical of formal religion, which is often seen as less able to cope with the concrete pressures of modern life. Agnosticism, non-institutional spirituality, self-healing, psychological counseling and practices of self-reflection have become new expressions of meaning-making in an increasingly competitive and plural society.

This study, by applying Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie, highlights the importance of social pressure in South Korea as an influential factor in the changing relationship between society and religion. The competitive educational system, the rigorous work culture, the high standards of social success, and the increasing problems of loneliness and mental health show a gap between material progress and spiritual well-being. Modernization produces impressive economic and technological achievements, but at the same time weakens social bonds, communal solidarity, and consistent moral orientation.

In such anomic conditions, individuals experience pressure to keep succeeding, yet do not always receive adequate social and spiritual support. Religion, which once functioned as a space of social integration and a source of collective meaning, no longer always serves as the main reference point in facing anxiety, depression, loneliness, and alienation. This condition shows that the crisis of religiosity in South Korea is closely connected to a crisis of meaning within modern society.

However, the findings of this study also show that secularization does not necessarily close the space for the emergence of new forms of religiosity. The rising presence of Islam in South Korea shows that there are those who still seek spiritual directions that include moral structure, community, life discipline, and a transcendent relationship with God.. Islam is not present as a replacement for religions that have long been established, but as one minority spiritual alternative within the contemporary South Korean religious landscape. Interest in Islam must be read carefully, not merely as demographic growth, but as part of the rearticulation of meaning amid the pressures of material life.

Therefore, the relationship between social pressure, declining religious interest, mental health, and the visibility of Islam shows that South Korean society is experiencing a complex religious transformation: institutional religion is weakening, but the need for meaning, peace, community, and spiritual orientation continues to persist in new forms.

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