

## A SURVEY OF THE KOREAN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

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The Korean church has moved from being a “missionary-receiving” church to a “missionary-sending” church. According to Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, the Korean church has 10,646 missionaries serving in 156 other countries. This is the second-highest number exceeded only by the USA.<sup>1</sup> In the Philippines, where I served as a missionary from 1981 to 1996, there were 523 Korean missionaries as of the year 2000. I believe that in the coming years the number of Korean missionaries going overseas will continue to increase. However, more in-depth studies will be needed to understand the missionary movement of the Korean church. In this article, I will do a short overview of the Korean missionary movement, from its beginning to the present, and provide some suggestions to what Korean missionaries and church leaders can do to carry on their missionary responsibilities more effectively in the twenty-first century.

### 1. Opening of the “Hermit Kingdom” and the Growth of the Church

Korea was known to the world as the “Hermit Kingdom” until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Japan was the first foreign nation that made Korea open its doors to the world, by pressuring Korea to sign

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<sup>1</sup> See Patrick J. Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, eds., *Operation World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster USA, 2001) on “Korea, South” (p. 387).

the “Treaty of Kanghwa” (1876).<sup>2</sup> Afterwards, Korea signed the “Amity and Friendship Treaty” with the United States in 1882, followed by other western treaties: Great Britain (1883), Russia (1884), Italy (1885), France (1886), Australia-Hungary (1892), Belgium (1901) and Denmark (1902).<sup>3</sup> On November 17, 1905, Japan “pressured” Korea to sign the “Protectorate Treaty” and annexed Korea on August 22, 1910, following their defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894) and Russia in Russo-Japanese War (1904). The first resident missionary to Korea, Horace N. Allen (Presbyterian) arrived on September 20, 1884, but some non-residential missionaries from Europe such as Karl Gutzlaff and Robert J. Thomas made short visits to Korea to preach the gospel to Korean people. Korean merchants who heard the gospel preached by John Ross and John McIntyre, who were Scottish missionaries in Manchuria, started the gospel work before the arrival of the first foreign residential missionaries. They are Hong-Joon Paik, Eung-Chan Lee, Sung-Ha Lee, Jin-Ki Kim and Sang-Yoon Suh.<sup>4</sup> Protestant missionary work in Korea started quietly, but with the continual sacrifice of missionaries and Korean Christians, the church in Korea quickly grew.<sup>5</sup> The 2001 edition of *Operation World* describes the Korean church as follows.

First, we praise God for the unique Korean church. It was founded on sound indigenous principles, blessed with a succession of revivals, refined by persecutions and is now foremost in the world for mission

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<sup>2</sup> Wi-Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea* (New York: State University of New York, 1997), pp. 12-13, “A Treaty of Amity was signed [in Kanghwa Island of Korea] on February 26, 1876. This treaty, which was Korea’s first major involvement in international relations, signaled the beginning of a gradual loss of independence. The treaty was established not by Korean willingness, but by the military threat of Japan.”

<sup>3</sup> Rhodes 1934:10

<sup>4</sup> Ho Yong Kim 1993:92

<sup>5</sup> Samuel H. Moffett recounts that in 1889 there were only 74 “communicant” Korean Protestants and in 1890 there were 10,000 to 17,000 Korean Roman Catholics, but by 1930, there were 415,000 total Korean Christians, about 2 percent of Korea’s population. The greatest growth took place in Pyongyang, historical capital of Korea and now of North Korea, under the Northern Presbyterian Mission (U.S.A.) (Clark 1986:7). Today, the Protestant population in South Korea is at 16,954,000 claiming 27% of the population, but in North Korea the size of the Christian population is unknown. The North Korean government only recognizes three Christian churches.

vision. Its presence is highly visible; every level of society has been impacted and growth has been remarkable. Korea could become the first major Protestant/Evangelical country in Asia.

Second, passionate Korean praying and commitment have made possible several distinctions unique to the Korean church. For example, the first Protestant church was planted in 1884. By 1984 there were over 30,000 churches, and by 2000 over 60,000. Of the eleven largest mega-congregations in the world, ten are in the one city of Seoul. Here also are the largest Pentecostal, Presbyterian and Methodist congregations in the world and the second largest Baptist.

The world's largest theological colleges are located in Korea. Some of the largest Christian baptismal services since Pentecost and some of the largest evangelistic and Christian gatherings in history have been recorded there.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Korean Missionary Work during Japanese Colonial Rule

### 2.1 Cross-Cultural Mission

Among the early Korean Protestant denominations, the group that was most involved in missionary work was the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK). On September 17, 1907, the first seven graduates (Kyung-Jo Suh, Suk-Jin Han, In-Suh Song, Chun-Baik Yang, Ki-Chang Bang, Sun-Chu Kil and Ki-Pung Yi) of Pyungyang Theological Seminary<sup>7</sup> were ordained into the ministry as the first Korean Presbyterian pastors. The newly organized Korean Presbytery sent Ki-Pung Yi as missionary to Cheju Island, sixty miles from the southern coast of the mainland. George L. Paik, quoting the North American Report of 1910, writes the following of Yi's appointment:

The church's missionary enterprise outside the Korean peninsula has begun as early as 1907 when the independent Presbytery was ushered into existence. When the Presbytery of Korea was duly constituted,

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<sup>6</sup> *Operation World* (2001), pp. 387-88.

<sup>7</sup> In 1903, missionaries from the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches of America, the Canadian Presbyterian Church and the Australian Presbyterian Church who were in Korea established the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pyungyang together to prepare leaders for the Korean church. Both the Chongshin University and the Presbyterian College and Seminary in Seoul claim that their seminaries are the original Pyungyang Presbyterian Seminary.

seven men, graduates of the Theological Seminary of Korea [Pyongyang], were ordained to the ministry. “Yi Ki P’ung [Ki-Pung Yi], one of the seven ordained ministers, volunteered to go to the Island of Quelpart [Cheju], about sixty miles off the southern coast of the mainland, as the first Protestant missionary of the Korean church. The Presbytery accepted his offer and appointed a missionary committee to administer the undertaking and ordered the whole church to make a special offering to carry on the propagation of the faith.”<sup>8</sup>

To raise the necessary funds, the new Presbytery formed an Executive Mission Committee and requested the Korean Presbyterian congregations to make “thanksgiving offerings” to support Yi and a couple of helpers who would go with him. The dedication of Yi to Cheju Island was undoubtedly one of remarkable sacrifice and great joy. He together with other committed Korean missionaries<sup>9</sup> and native believers made considerable strides to evangelize the island. The Cheju mission grew to thirty churches with an independent presbytery.

In 1909, the second class graduated from the Pyongyang Presbyterian Seminary. Among the eight graduates ordained into ministry, the Korean Presbytery commissioned Rev. Kwan-Heul Choi as a missionary to Vladivostok, Siberia. In addition, when the Presbyterian Church in Korea was organized in 1912, the church commissioned three of its fifty-four ordained ministers: Tai-Ro Park, Byung-Soon Sa and Young-Hoon Kim, as missionaries to Shantung, China.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> George L. Paik, *The History of Protest Missions in Korea 1832-1910* (Seoul: Yunsei University Press 1970), p. 390; [C. A. Clark,] *Northern Presbyterian Report for 1910*, p. 281.

<sup>9</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Research Center of Chongshin University Graduate School of World Mission and the 1907 and 1909 Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, missionaries who worked in Cheju Island were Reverends Sik-Myung Yoon, Dae-Jin Choi, Dae-Sun Choi, Duk-Sang Chang, Chang-Kuk Kim, Chang-Kyu Lee, Do-Jong Lee, Soon-Mo Chung and Sang-Hak Cho besides Ki-Pung Yi. Kwan-Sun Yi, a Bible woman, was sent by the Women’s Mission Society of Pyung-An and worked there from 1908 to 1913, Hyung-Jae Kim, a student, from 1909, Chang-Moon Kim, a layman, in 1909, and Hong-Nyun Kim from 1915. See Hwal-Young Kim, “From Asia to Asia” (D.Miss. dissertation, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> The mission to Shantung, China continued as Rev. Hyo-Won Pang, Seung-Han Hong, Sang-Soon Park, Dae-Young Lee, Miss Soon-Ho Kim, Ji-Il Pang followed the original three missionaries.

The Shantung mission was in cooperation with the Chinese church and the western mission in Shantung. The fruit of ministry was marvelous. Korean missionaries planted forty local churches, organized three presbyteries, opened schools and trained local church leaders. The PCK missionary work to Shantung, China lasted until 1957 when, Rev. Ji-II Pang, the last missionary, was driven out by the Chinese Communist government. Following is a summary of PCK mission to Shantung, China,<sup>11</sup> from my dissertation.<sup>12</sup>

If the mission to Jeju Island was the first cross-cultural mission within national boundaries (even though in a political sense it was foreign), the mission to Shantung, China was the first cross-cultural mission work for non-Koreans in a foreign land. As it was with the mission to Jeju, the mission to Shantung, China was an expression of joy and gratitude to God for the organization of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea. The Korean church, in deciding on Shantung as a mission field did not proceed on their own but consulted with the Chinese church and a western mission who was at work in the field.

Missionaries thoroughly applied the three-self principles (self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating) that they learned in their home church in their ministry. Missionaries in the field had team work among themselves. They worked in cooperation with Chinese and western missionaries. The Korean missionaries in Shantung did not try to set up a Korean denomination but joined the Chinese church to plant Chinese churches. They did comprehensive ministry that included church planting, medical mission, educational mission, literacy evangelism, etc. A female missionary (Miss Soon-Ho Kim) in addition to male missionaries was sent to minister among the women.

Unlike western missionaries who launched their missionary work in abundance and with the political power of their sending countries; Korean missionaries (like missionaries of the early church who worked under the Roman colonial rule), worked from a weaker position. It was a new missionary movement by Asians among Asians. The Korean churches participated in their ministry by prayer and financial support.

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<sup>11</sup> Timothy Kiho Park, *Missionary Movement of the Korean Church* (in Korean, Seoul: Institute for Asian Mission, 1999), p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Kiho Park, "A Two-Thirds World Mission on the Move: The Missionary Movement of the Presbyterian Church in Korea" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1991), p. 66.

## 2.2 Mission to Korean Diaspora

From 1900 to 1945, 256 Korean missionaries were sent to Korean diasporas in eight countries: 172 to Manchuria, 32 to Japan, 21 to Siberia, 14 to Jeju, 9 to the United States of America (including Hawaii), 4 to China, 2 to Mongolia, and 1 to Cuba. Four Korean denominations participated in this effort: 146 Presbyterians, 46 Methodists, 16 Baptists, 14 Evangelicals (Holiness church) and 30 unclassified missionaries. Four missionaries were sent in cooperation of the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Holiness Church.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. Missionary Work from the Liberation to the Present

The Korean church, which launched its missionary work during Japanese colonial rule continued its missionary work after the independence of Korea in 1945. Yang-Sun Kim, a prominent Korean church historian, summed up the ten years after the Korean liberation as a period of “suffering and revival.” During the Korean War (1950-1953), he said 400 Korean pastors (360 pastors in the north and 40 pastors in the south) became martyrs and 1,541 church buildings (1,000 in the north and 541 in the south) were bombed. However, this tragedy resulted in spiritual revival in the Korean church.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the church planting movement between 1950 and 1955, the Presbyterian Church in Korea planted 12,000 churches.<sup>15</sup>

Even during the suffering period, the Korean church did not forget the missionary responsibility of the church and continued by sending missionaries to Asia, Africa, Middle and South America such as Thailand, Taiwan, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Brazil, from the 1950s to 1970s.

Though Korea regained its sovereignty from Japan in 1948, it underwent the civil war from 1950 to 1952 and was in an extremely difficult situation. About three decades of Korean mission after the

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<sup>13</sup> Hae-Sung Kim, Hye-Kyung Chung, Kyung-Ok Park, and Young-Chul, *A Study on the Early Korean Overseas Mission* (Seoul: Institute of Chongshin University for Mission).

<sup>14</sup> Yang-Sun Kim, *The Ten Years History of the Korean Church after the Liberation* (in Korean, Seoul: Education Department of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, 1956).

<sup>15</sup> Taik-Boo Jun, *The History of the Development of the Korean Church* (in Korean, Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1987).

independence of the nation also was mission from the position of weakness.

Missionary work since the 1980s has been characterized as mission from abundance. Explosive church growth, marvelous economic growth, continued immigration to many countries of the world, seeking higher education and accumulated missionary experience have enhanced the missionary movement of the Korean church in recent years and has made the Korean church the second-largest missionary sending church to many nations after the American church.

Some major changes in Korean mission since the middle of the 1990s follow.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1 Cross-Cultural Mission, Particularly Mission to Unreached People Groups

Korean mission in the 1970s was mainly for the Korean Diaspora abroad. However, we see the opposite trend taking place in recent years. Most Korean missionaries at the end of the 1990s became involved in cross-cultural missions. Another characteristic of the Korean mission is that Korean missionaries are endeavoring to evangelize the unreached people. This rate has greatly increased in contrast to 29% noted in the 1994 statistics. This has been proven by the fact that at least 47.7% (2,098) of the total number of Korean missionaries are working in the "10/40 Window" set by Luis Bush.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2 Emergence of Korean Missions

As we look into the missions that Korean missionaries belong to, one major change is apparent: the number of Koreans who belong to *foreign* missions has been decreasing, while those who belong to *Korean* missions have been increasing. There are still many who belong to foreign missions but the number of Koreans who are sent out through Korean native missions such as Global Partners, UBF, GMF, Paul Mission, Intercorp, etc. is increasing in recent years.

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<sup>16</sup> Sang-Chul Moon, ed., *Korean Mission Handbook* (in Korean; Seoul: GMF Press, 1996), pp. 26-29.

<sup>17</sup> Moon, *Korean Mission Handbook*, pp. 26-27.



### 3.3 Advancement of Denominational Mission

It has been known that at least 28.4% of the total number of Korean missionaries are ordained and 11% are seminary graduates who chose not to receive ordination. The 1994 survey shows that there were 1,804 missionaries who belonged to denominational missions, but the 1996 survey indicates that the number increased to 2,558 which was 58.1%. Thus the number of denominational missionaries who graduate from seminaries is increasing. The ratio of single missionaries decreased from 20% in 1994 to 16% in 1996, and the number of long-term missionaries increased from 91.2% in 1994 to 95.7% in 1996. It is the same phenomenon as the number of full-time increased from 76.1% in 1994 to 89.5% in 1996.<sup>18</sup> The phenomenon of denominational missions being vitalized was due to the fact that a considerable number of mass-produced seminary graduates were absorbed in mission fields. It is a very positive aspect in the sense that it provides highly trained missionary candidates, specialization of denominational mission and strengthening of management systems. However, we need to seriously think about the selection, training and deployment of missionaries lest it become a temporary consequence of a plateau of church growth at home resulting in the deployment of less motivated and committed missionaries.

<sup>18</sup> Moon, *Korean Mission Handbook*, p. 28.

As mentioned above, more than 10,000 Korean missionaries are working in 156 countries of the world as of today, and the Korean church has become one of the major world missionary forces.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the light of this overview of the Korean missionary movement, here are some suggestions to consider as we look to doing mission in the twenty-first century:

1. Korean churches and missions need to establish a mission theology relevant to their situation by recognizing the call of the time and by understanding the changes in the world, which includes a ministry of both word and deeds.

2. Korean churches and missions (as the early Korean missionaries in Shantung, China did) need to pursue team ministry with fellow Korean missionaries and partnership ministry with other ethnic churches and mission groups to evangelize the explosively growing world population, using various methods and working with short-term missionaries, professional missionaries, non-residential missionaries and business missionaries.

3. Korean churches and missions need to avoid a missionary-dominant spirit and missionary methods depending on mission subsidy that hinders the indigenization of the gospel and the independent spirit of local churches. They should develop methods that help the indigenization of local churches as early foreign missionaries in Korea and Korean missionaries to Shantung, China did.

4. Korean churches and missions need to develop missionary methods that use state of the art information and communication methods by realizing that the use of the internet and web can make access possible to people who cannot be won in other ways.

5. Korean churches and missions should recognize the importance of lay people and women and help them maximize the effects of their mission. They should remember the gospel was first preached to Korea by lay people.

The Korean church has about one-hundred years of mission history. Korean churches and missions need to learn from their past history and need to critically evaluate what they are doing today, so that they can better carry on their missionary responsibilities effectively in the twenty-first century.