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**Footprints of Interchurch Exchange
between Korea and Japan:
With Special Reference to the Situation
of the Two Countries from 1945 to 1967,
the Year of the Mission Agreement**

Mansong Ko

Introduction

The year 2010 was the centennial of Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. In this meaningful moment, we, the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary in Korea and the Seigakuin University General Research Institute in Japan, began to do research on this common theme: "A Comparative Study of the Korean-Japanese Relationship with Special Reference to the Interchurch Exchange between the Two Countries from 1910 to 2010."

One of the purposes of this research is to shed new light on the subject for the sake of the mutual benefit of the churches in both countries in view of the event of 1910, and to set a common foundation upon which the Christian churches of Northeast Asia, including North Korea and China, can grow together.⁽¹⁾

This study is focused on the relationship between the United Church of Christ in Japan (hereinafter UCCJ or Kyodan) denomination and the Presbyterian Churches in Korea, not on the talks of the Catholic and Protestant Church in their entirety or on the interdenominational exchanges between Protestants as a whole. However, our research is also expected to include some other Protestant denominations, such as the

Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists. The current study is simply one part of the projects being carried out overall.

Since 1910 Japan ruled over the entire Korean peninsula, not only in the political domain and through economic exploitation but also in cultural activities, for thirty-six years. Christian believers in Korea were small in number, but had a disproportional intellectual influence upon the populace. As such, the Japanese government, as Akio Dohi stated, expected the UCCJ to make some contributions to Korea in terms of civilian aid and support.⁽²⁾ In this sense, we believe that the UCCJ unwittingly corroborated in Japan's annexation of Korea. If this is even partially true, we then ask about what efforts the Japanese Church is making in trying to reconcile with the Korean Church.

The top priority of this study is to determine what the first step of such a reconciliation process has been since 1945. We will focus particularly on the ties between the largest Protestant denomination in Japanese Christianity and mainstream Korean Protestants, considering the time both before and after the 1967 Mission Agreement.

In 1967 a significant "agreement of mission" between the two sides was concluded, and documental exchanges were accordingly made for the first time since 1945. Regarding this, we may ask several questions, such as why it took over twenty years to reach such an agreement, what the impetus for the reconciliation was, and what the actual heart of the Korean Church in the view of thirty-six years of persecution is.

The UCCJ at the time made an agreement with two Presbyterian denominations and one Methodist. According to the report presented to denomination headquarters at the time, the UCCJ completed the treaty with three churches in Korea. However, the expression "three churches" is incorrect: these were not merely three churches as generally understood, but three independent *denominations* with general assemblies. For better understanding of this, we have researched the entire process of the split between the two Presbyterian Churches in Korea and with which particular denomination the Agreement was consequently made.

Preliminary Research

The “Nikkan Kirisuto Koryushi” (“History of the Exchange between the Korean and Japanese Churches”) is the most remarkable effort that was undertaken by Rev. Oh.⁽³⁾ Though just printed in 1968, it contains details describing what the international Agreement was all about.⁽⁴⁾ One article is “Nikkan Kankeishi Kenkyū” (“Research on the Korea-Japan Relational History”), by Myung-kwan Chi, who influenced both countries from 1972 to 1993. Another important article is the small but significant treatise entitled “A Relational History of Korea-Japan as Seen by Korean Mass Communication,” which is very useful and worthy of further research.⁽⁵⁾ “Nihon Protestantō Kirisutokyō” (“A Historical Theory of the Protestant Church in Japan”), by Akio Dohi, a church historian in Japan, is also available.⁽⁶⁾ However, we will set the record straight regarding some incorrect information caused by improper citations in some of the materials concerning our topic.

I. Mission Agreement Established between the UCCJ and Three Denominations in Korea

1) Content of the Agreement

The UCCJ made the Mission Agreement with three Korean denominations in 1967. It was established twenty-two years after the Liberation of Korea in 1945. Let us examine the details.

In the opening statement, four parties are elucidated: the UCCJ, the Presbyterian Church of Korea [hereinafter PCK: Evangelical], the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea [hereinafter PROK: Liberal], and the Korean Methodists. Further, it describes how both the Japanese and Korean sides determined to make a mutual effort toward reconciliation in order to secure a brighter future for both countries as they sought to heal

the trauma of the past by the power of the Gospel.⁽⁷⁾

The Agreement contains four articles. The first is that both sides should share human resources and make a common effort for the sake of the mission. The second article stipulates that all types of correspondence should be sent through a designated committee. The third asserts that all materials must be mutually shared at all times. The fourth and final article affirms that both sides share the same ecumenical spirit.⁽⁸⁾

2) Regarding the Expression “the Three Churches in Korea”

Since the *Report of the UCCJ General Assembly* and its journal, *The Kyodan Times*, used the expression “the three churches in Korea,” it may very well be misunderstood, so we want to emphasize that it actually means three very different denominations in the Korean Church. We need to prove that the subject of the Agreement was not a particular church but a denomination and to understand the Presbyterian denominations in Korea with unprejudiced information gleaned from *The Kyodan Times*.

The origin of PCK [conservative] was derived from the first General Assembly on September 12, 1912, which was hosted by the General Assembly of the Chosen Korean Presbyterian Church. This organization was a unique institution before the Liberation of 1945. It was reorganized by the Japanese as the Korean branch of the UCCJ by force on May 7, 1943, and reconstructed after the war as the General Assembly of the Chosen Korean Presbyterian Church on April 18, 1947. It finally changed its name to “General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK)” on April 22, 1949. But the denomination was split into at least four factions in the mid-1950s. Ironically, it was a sect of the Kosin faction that first forced Shrine worship upon its members. Some pastors who denied Shrine worship established the Koryeo Theological Seminary in 1946. The General Assembly of the PCK officially denied recognition of the seminary in May 1951, and the Kosin faction originated from this, the main reason being that some pastors who were involved in Shrine worship still had religious power and conflicted with those who rejected Shrine worship.⁽⁹⁾

The predominant characteristic of the denomination was that it was strongly ‘closed’ more than any others in terms of denying Shrine worship. Therefore, this organization did not make an agreement with the UCCJ.

The second split was into the PROK, the original body of which was derived from the Chosun (Korean) Theological Seminary, established before 1945. The first Presbyterian Seminary in Korea was the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, founded by Samuel A. Moffet (1864–1939) in Pyongyang.⁽¹⁰⁾ A temporary closure of the school was announced in September 1938 as a protest against Shrine worship. After the General Assembly of the Korean Churches made a decision approving Shrine worship, the Seminary in Pyongyang finally decided to close its doors.⁽¹¹⁾ However, it reopened as the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary in Seoul in June 1948, becoming the preeminent seminary for the PCK. The PCK is one that made the Mission Agreement with the UCCJ.

On the other hand, some people who were open-minded and theologically liberal established the Chosun Theological Seminary in 1939. The main supporter of this was Pastor Jae-joon Kim, who studied theology at Aoyama Academy in Japan and who was eventually excommunicated from the PCK. He did not believe in the infallibility of the Bible and was therefore condemned by Discipline Article 6-41. He was eventually banned as a pastor.⁽¹²⁾

Nevertheless, Kim started a new denomination, the PROK, in June 1954 with the slogan “Freedom of Theological Study and the Gospel.”⁽¹³⁾ Its theological direction was very liberal, in accordance with the Mission Department of Canada.⁽¹⁴⁾ The institution created “Minjung Theology” (“Theology for the People”), and it was frequently cited during the democratization era of Korea in the 1970s.⁽¹⁵⁾ The initial membership consisted of 568 local churches, 291 pastors, and 21,917 believers. Though small, this denomination is another that signed the Mission Agreement with the UCCJ.

The PROK and PCK still have connections with the UCCJ to this day. The PROK reflects “Minjung Theology,” which is advanced and liberal

(represented by Hansin University), whereas the PCK seeks out an “evangelical, biblical, reformatory and ecumenical” theology, of which the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary is representative.⁽¹⁶⁾ In spite of the above, the *Report of the UCCJ General Assembly and The Kyodan Times* reported that they made an agreement with “the three churches of Korea” instead of the “three denominations.” This situation desperately needs to be corrected.

II. Churches in Japan and Korea: Before and After the Mission Agreement

1) Participation of the Chairman of the UCCJ in the General Assembly of the PROK

In the year 1965, when the initial Korea-Japan treaty was made, Pastor Jae-joon Kim invited the Chairman of the UCCJ to Korea. The UCCJ officially stated that it dispatched representatives, including Chairman Omura, to the 50th General Assembly of the PROK in September 1965.⁽¹⁷⁾

Even after twenty years, it seemed to be difficult for Japanese church leaders to apologize for their wrongdoings before the Korean people. Representatives present at the Assembly debated whether or not to explicitly give this opportunity to the Japanese pastors. There was a long debate over having a Japanese pastor appear at the podium for such an apology. Pastor In-ha Lee, the official interpreter at the event, was an eyewitness who noted that the atmosphere was so brutal it was likened to “sitting on a pin cushion,” and the agenda barely passed in a neck-to-neck struggle.⁽¹⁸⁾

On the other hand, what particularly draws our attention about this meeting is how the PCK responded to the visit of UCCJ Chairman Omura. According to Yun-tae Oh, the denomination originally rejected the notion of his visit to PCK.⁽¹⁹⁾ This indicated that Korea was still quite hostile toward Japan even in 1965. Even pastors who believe in the power of forgiveness and brotherly love were reluctant to respond in a positive manner. One

might assume, of course, that this was due to 36 years of colonization.

On the occasion of his first visit, Omura gave a meaningful address and apologized for Japan's past sins with regard to the annexation of Korea. The following statement is part of his address to the Assembly:

First of all, I honestly want to speak of my agony. Just before the Pacific War, we, the Japanese government, made a huge mistake regarding the Korean people, the results of which lasted for 36 years in total, not only in the form of political pressure but also in the abuse of human rights. We, as some of the responsible people representing the UCCJ, now deeply regret those wrongdoings and repent from the bottom of our hearts. . . . So far, we haven't made any effort towards solidarity, and for that we are sorry. But from now on, we will make an effort to connect with you in His love and mercy in order to carry out the Great Commission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isamu Omura, Chairman of the UCCJ
September 25, 1965⁽²⁰⁾

Akio Dohi pointed out that Omura's message actually apologized for all the sins the Japanese government, including the Japanese people, committed, but there was no specific reference to the Japanese Church's sins before God.⁽²¹⁾ Nevertheless, from the Korean perspective it was interpreted in a positive way, with this comment being made in the record at the time:

In this General Assembly, we, Dr. Isamu Omura, who represents the UCCJ, and Rev. In-Soo Jung, who represents the Korean Christian Church in Japan, are worshipping one and the same God, on which we want to deepen our relationship. In this message this was proven by the executive committee of the UCCJ, and the Korean side wants to interpret it as being authentic repentance of trespasses committed for 36 years, making this a path for reconciliation.⁽²²⁾

At this point, we do not need to be reminded of the importance of mutual cooperation in accomplishing the common goal of reconciliation and the resulting witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So we will now point out that the 1967 Mission Agreement in Tokyo was made between the staff representing the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ) and three Korean delegations representing three denominations: the PROK, PCK, and Methodists.

In an interview held soon after his visit to Korea, Omura stated that the Korean Church was established through a long history of national suffering and that this had become a seed for further church growth in the country. So what he said while in Korea “was not a formal apology as such, but an expression of the mental attitude of the Japanese Church to have for the future.”⁽²³⁾

2) Chairman Suzuki’s Visit to Korea

From July 26 to August 1, 1967, three Korean church representatives composed a draft document entitled “MOU between Three Churches in Korean and the UCCJ.”⁽²⁴⁾ Chairman Suzuki and Secretary Kimura of the UCCJ visited Korea from September 20 to 24 in response.⁽²⁵⁾

After examining the appropriate records, Rev. Suzuki made a report of his trip in the article, “My Memories of Visiting Three Korean Churches” in *The Kyodan Times* issued on November 18, 1967. On the first day of his visit, at Ahyun Methodist Church Pastor Suzuki as Chairman of the UCCJ apologized for the Japanese Church’s inappropriate behavior toward Korean church goers during the difficult time of the war, and he preached a message of the joy of salvation, hope of resurrection, and intimate fellowship among brothers and sisters in Christ.⁽²⁶⁾ Unlike the message of Omura in 1965, Suzuki confessed the sins of the Japanese Church during World War Two.

We believe that Suzuki, as an official representative of the UCCJ, had a deep sense of responsibility in 1967.⁽²⁷⁾ As a matter of fact, Chairman Suzuki

addressed two denominations in Korea, but we can find no specific information on this in the records. We can nonetheless make inferences from the contemporary situation as noted in *The Kyodan Times*. The Chairman of the General Assembly of PROK, Rev. Won-ryong Kang, supported our inferences. He commented,

The reason why I asked Suzuki to speak is because the Korean Church among all the churches of the world may have some special responsibility for the Asian continent that are unique, thereby making establishment of a good relationship between Korea and Japan an important task of the utmost urgency. So I dared to ask him to speak with a sincere heart to see what is really going on in the undercurrent of the Japanese Church.⁽²⁸⁾

But what was the response of the Korean Church to Suzuki's visit? As Pastor Won-ryong Kang indicated, the PROK reaction to the remarks made by the UCCJ was very positive. Yet the PCK interpreted the comments made by Suzuki in a cynical manner. Interpreter Masahiko Sawa, who was living in Korea at the time, referred to the situation by saying "so to speak, though they are sincere Christians, some pastors and elders who are under Japanese pressure closed their hearts to Japan."⁽²⁹⁾ The expression "closed" is actually quite generous in reality. As a matter of fact, I believe that most of the Korean people still harbor resentment against Japan as a result of 36 years of colonization.

III. Influence of the [South] Korea-Japan Treaty Anti-ratification Movement, 1965

The Korea-Japan Treaty was completed on June 22, 1965. Both before and after this, some Korean churches initiated an anti-ratification movement. We believe that the Korean churches spearheaded this movement with a prophetic spirit, which in turn affected the Japanese

Church.

1) Situation

The Korea-Japan talks meant to establish diplomatic relations started in 1951 and finally resulted in the Korea-Japan summit talks of December 1961, though there were some ups and downs due to the interference of the military. Due to American pressure in 1964, Korea and Japan began to have frequent contact.⁽³⁰⁾ Rumor had it that the treaty event was supposed to occur in May of that year, so opposition parties' unions subsequently created a "non-humiliating diplomacy committee" with various societal, religious, and cultural leaders to put a stop to it. Student power was added to this movement when 5,000 students turned out for street demonstrations in 1964, with a riot on April 19 being the largest scale such incident since the beginning of the student revolution in 1960. Emergency martial law was declared on June 3, 1964, and anti-government movements were thereby suppressed.

Yet soon afterward, the basic Korea-Japan Treaty was tentatively agreed upon in February 1965, kindling more protest movements. When the Korea-Japan Treaty was formally signed in Tokyo on June 22, 1965, an anti-ratification movement was spawned in South Korea. Pastors in Seoul began prayer meetings with the slogan, "No one is to shy away from the fate of the nation if you are Christian,"⁽³¹⁾ and this metamorphosed into a nationwide movement. Some scholars have argued that the year 1965 was the turning point of the anti-Japan movement after 1945.⁽³²⁾ In one sense the anti-Japan movement in Korea was actually an anti-government riot. Myung-Kwan Chi insisted the protest power of the people's demonstration was the seed for the democratization of the 1970s.⁽³³⁾ But we are focused on the Christians among the movement, who started prayer meetings with faith that "only God can give us victory in this crisis," not as a means of demonstrating but as an expression of patriotism.⁽³⁴⁾ Along these lines, it is important to examine the "Teachers' Statement of the Save the Nation Committee" and the "Message to Japanese Christians."

2) Teachers' Statement of the Save the Nation Committee

The Kyodan Times issued on September 18, 1965, carried an article about the "Teachers' Statement of the Save the Nation Committee."⁽³⁵⁾ The signatures of 240 Korean pastors, including Rev. Kyong-chik Han, were collected for this. Looking into the statement itself, it is evident that it defended why Korean Christians had decided to get involved in this historical event. Article I reads, "Righteous thinking has been expressed by prophets and apostles in history, and we Korean Christians now have a special concern as well. The reconciliation of Korea and Japan is the most critical issue of all, and we Christians will carry out our divine obligation in this regard with the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Article II implores Christians to seek the common benefits of true reconciliation not only for individuals but also for the sake of the nation. In order to truly reconcile and create history anew, repentance of past sins, accompanied by and cooperation with goodwill, must come first. That's the bottom line for the Christian spirit and is the minimum demand for Korean Christians, who were persecuted for 36 years, which is the reason why reconciliation had not come to pass. The article asserts, "Unfortunately, Japan sought only its own profit from the international society. Such an attitude has great upset the Korean people, causing hostility between the two countries."

Article IV states, "We [Korean Christians] believe in the concept of "ecclesia militant," meaning that we Christians must be ready to fight against any type of despotism, dishonesty, or behavior creating havoc. We will also fight again any political, moral, or economic enemy or impure influence from outside. We solemnly swear to pray for our mother country." (Signed by 240 pastors, including Kyung-chik Han, on July 11, 1965.)⁽³⁶⁾

The editor who carried report of this in *The Kyodan Times* underestimated the situation and thought it was the opinion of only a small number of Korean churches. He commented in a footnote, "Above is a summary of the Korea-Japan Statement presented by the will of the Korean Church, and

it is essential for the understanding of Korea.”⁽³⁷⁾ Unfortunately, the editor’s viewpoint was wrong, as he failed to comprehend the contemporary situation of the time. It only appeared that Rev. Kyung-chik Han had signed as a deputy representing 240 pastors, but the real architect of the statement was Pastor Jae-joon Kim.⁽³⁸⁾ These two pastors were major players in the tension between two respective Korean denominations during the 1950s, but such was not the case during the prayer meeting being scrutinized. So this statement was made through interdenominational cooperation. According to Kyung-jae Kim there are two reasons why the “Youngnak Presbyterian Church” sponsored the anti-ratification movement.⁽³⁹⁾ The first is because the church had taken part in major national protests since the Independence Movement of March 1, 1919. The second reason was due to that fact that the two Christian leaders, Rev. Kyung-chik Han and Pastor Jae-joon Kim, had made an agreement to supersede or move beyond denominational boundaries. In this sense, therefore, we have to accept the fact that the statement was not simply a minority opinion, but reflected the will of the entire Korean Church.

3) Korea-Japan Treaty Anti-ratification Movement (hereinafter ARM)

Shortly after the signing of the Korea-Japan Treaty (1965), the Korean Church initiated the anti-ratification movement (ARM). The first meeting with this purpose in mind was held at the Youngnak Presbyterian Church under the banner of “A prayer meeting for our nation.” The journal of PCK, *Kidok Kongbo*, is full of articles on this incident, which indicate that 5,000 believers participated in the July 7 meeting.

At this point, we need to observe how contemporary Korean church leaders of the time viewed Japan. In a sermon on June 27, Rev. Kyung-chik Han noted that it had been said that all the Korean people wanted normal diplomatic relations with Japan, but there was reason to be upset with this assertion. “First,” he said, “is Japan’s attitude. Japan committed brutal crimes upon the Korean people for 36 years, but it is still rare to find a repentant spirit among the Japanese people.”⁽⁴⁰⁾ He expressed further anger

that, although many countries sacrificed their property and even their precious lives in the fight for freedom in the Korean War (1950–53), South Korea’s closest neighbor, Japan, never did a thing, instead utilizing the opportunity to jump-start its own economy through events on the Korean peninsula. Even worse than this, he commented, was the bitterness he perceived in their brazen faces that did not seem to express shame in the least. Such an attitude continued to make Koreans angry, he concluded.⁽⁴¹⁾

As a Korean pastor who had experienced Japanese Imperialism firsthand, Rev. Han attempted to control his personal feelings (perhaps in vain) in order to try to be as objective as possible. But what did Pastor Jae-joon Kim think? He interpreted the Korea-Japan summit talks in this fashion: A newspaper ran an article that asserted “Dr. Kim has interpreted the Japanese Invasion (of WW2) as having come down from the policies of their ancestors, which continues to this day.”⁽⁴²⁾ The elder Myung-kwan Chi argued in his explanation that he totally opposed the treaty on the grounds that it was being used as an economical vehicle through which to colonize Korea once again. In fact, this was not only his personal opinion but was also the commonly held outlook of many Korean church leaders.⁽⁴³⁾

A second prayer meeting was held on July 11, in which 7,000 Korean Christians prayed together. A newspaper ran the story of how believers from every denomination prayed for the country and then sent a letter to South Korean President Jung-hee Park to halt efforts to create closer Korea-Japan ties.

The clearest argument against the treaty came out of what is known as the August Meeting. A statement from that meeting reads that Korean Christians could agree to normal diplomacy with Japan but were still opposed to ratification of the Korea-Japan Treaty, with a softening of this stance being predicated upon Japanese Christian leaders coming before their Korean counterparts with a spirit of repentance.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It is interesting to note that the “Message to Japanese Christians” was adopted on the very same day.

4) Message to Japanese Christians

Approximately 2,500 believers participated in the August Meeting in which the “Message to Japanese Christians” was adopted.⁽⁴⁵⁾ To whom it was sent is uncertain, as a message to Prime Minister Sato of Japan and a memorandum to U.S. President Johnson were also adopted. This notwithstanding, the “Message to Japanese Christians,” unlike the messages to Japan’s prime minister and the American president, was fortunately based on the Christian faith. The preface reads, “May God bless you all as members of Christ in the name of our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.” The latter part of the preface concludes, “We dare ask you to understand our heart. If you were in our shoes, you may understand why we behave like this.”

Let us consider the message on a deeper level. The message, in terms of the ratification of the Korea-Japan Treaty, needed to be agreed upon in order to meet a goal that is everlasting between the two countries. It confirmed that the Korean people still harbor some bitterness toward the Japanese. It was not a product of chance, but had its roots in the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, the trauma of which is something the uninitiated cannot possibly imagine.

This was the outcome of an unfortunate past, so to speak. The message indicated that, if ratification of the Korea-Japan Treaty proceeded further, then, though deeply regrettable, uncomfortable relations between the two countries were likely to persist. The “Message to Japanese Christians” concluded, “If you have sympathy with those who share the same Christian faith, it would greatly encourage us. We bless you all in the name of the Triune God.” (Signed by all the Christian teachers present on August 1, 1965)⁽⁴⁶⁾ Of course, due to some of the bold expressions used and the direct literary style employed, there may be an uncomfortable mood shared amongst some readers even now.

5) Influence of the Anti-ratification Movement (ARM)

In the midst of anti-Japan sentiment, Korean Christians conducted ARM in line with the following logic. According to the Treaty, Koreans perceived that the Japanese attitude was a type of apparatus of Neo-Imperialism, in which the weak would be oppressed for Japan's benefit. Korean Christians did not oppose Japan for the sake of the anti-Japan movement itself, but considered their position to be the foundation upon which Christians from both sides could grow together in the true fellowship of Christ.⁽⁴⁷⁾

We believe that the spirit of prophetic protest of the Korean Christians was communicated to the Japanese Church. A comment made by Omura, the Chairman of the UCCJ, supported this notion. He understood that, if there were no spirit of protest on the part of Korean believers, then any form of authentic communication would be impossible on either side. Chairman Omura gave a talk related to the 50th General Assembly of the PROK, at a time when the ARM atmosphere still prevailed. He stated,

I was initially invited to the 50th General Assembly of the PROK in February of this year. But as it turns out, I realized that *there are some opponents to the [Treaty] ratification even among Christians*. And I felt that a deep trauma was being passed on from the Korean people at the grassroots level, trauma that was caused by the unforgettable fear of 36 years of oppression. But in regard to this condition, *we as Christians in the Japanese Church have not begun to provide healing and have done little to understand the situation. We truly and sincerely regret that nothing has been done.*⁽⁴⁸⁾

If the protesting spirit of Korean Christians became a seed for democratization in 1965, what did the noumenon of such power look like?⁽⁴⁹⁾ I think such fighting spirit provided them with a motif to rise up against the Japanese Church. To Japanese believers, it was a great impetus to

see Korean Christians stand up for their beliefs. If the assertion that the Korean Church made the Mission Agreement even in the midst of a severe anti-Japanese atmosphere is true, then we Japanese believers deeply admire Korean believers' sense of Brotherhood in Christ.⁽⁵⁰⁾

IV. Why Did Reconciliation Require More than 20 Years?

1) The Domestic Situation in Korea

Korea was liberated from Japan's domination in 1945. As a result, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was established. Yet, there was a major rift and resultant split in the Korean Presbyterian Church at the time of the Korean War (1950–53). Due to that horrible and chaotic war, some Presbyterian churches were evacuated to Busan [Pusan], and splits continued, with the Koryeo faction even being condemned.⁽⁵¹⁾

Dr. Chul-ha Han, who witnessed the entire process, pointed out that we, the Korean Church, had written a disgraceful chapter in church history during the Korean War. He recalled the attitude of the Korean Church at that time and how passive it had been simply as a means to avoid a national predicament rather than to boldly stand for what it believed.⁽⁵²⁾

In fact, the Korean Church found it difficult just to survive during the war, with churches being evacuated and moved from place to place. Subsequently, after the armistice in 1953, the weakened Korean Church had no strength or even the latitude to establish better relations with the Japanese Church for a brighter future. The April 19, 1960 Student Revolution and Military Coup of May 16, 1961, contributed toward making such an effort impossible.

2) Back to the Fundamental Point: Anti-Japan Ethos after 1945

The elder, Myung-Kwan Chi, who arrived in Korea after studying in Japan to find a new era of democratization, contributed to the *Dong-A Daily*, a source which classified the fifty-year history of Korean-Japanese relations according to periods. He set apart the period from 1945 to 1950

as “the foundation point,” the years from 1950 to 1961 as “the period of resuming steps toward new diplomatic relations,” and the time from 1961 to 1965 as “the period of the Korea-Japan Treaty and the Anti-ratification Movement.”⁽⁵³⁾

Simply stated, an anti-Japan ethos continued on during the twenty years from 1945 to 1965. But we would like to bring attention to the so-called Fire at a Japanese Shrine Incident in 1945, which was a watershed moment during this period. This fire literally ignited Koreans’ anti-Japanese behavior when someone set ablaze a Japanese Shrine. There were approximately 2,346 Japanese Shrines in Korea at that time, with an average of 7,000 visits per day and 2,648,356 worshipers annually, according to statistics.⁽⁵⁴⁾ After this fire was set at a Shrine in Pyongyang, many other sites nationwide were damaged or completely destroyed by arson. A Japanese scholar commented that, to the Korean people, Shrines were central to and represented the Japanese spirit, so they became targets for Korean protests both against enshrinement and the shrines themselves. Thus, since 1945, setting fire to Japanese shrines became a symbol and basic expression of anti-Japanese sentiment.

3) Bad Memories toward the Japanese Church

Prior to 1945 Shrine worship was forced upon Koreans as a result of Japanese Imperialism. When the Presbyterian Church was faced with this spiritual predicament, the Japanese Church dispatched Mitsuru Domita (1883–1961) to Korea in order to persuade the people that Shrine worship was not really religion. However, in a great historical irony, Presbyterian Pastor Gi-Cheul Ju (1897–1944) was martyred for his genuine faith in God and for denying Shrine worship.⁽⁵⁵⁾

According to one source, “Mitsuru Domita, a pastor of the Shiba Church, visited Korea from June to July 1938 as a representative of the UCCJ. He met and interviewed around 100 believers from four different regions west of Pyongyang and Pyongyang itself to discuss the Shrine issue, and he succeeded in persuading them that Shrine worship is not a

problem.”⁽⁵⁶⁾ Such coercive pressure and its support by Japanese Christians resulted in Korean believers (especially in the PCK) coming to hate the Japanese version of Christianity.

In 1944 Japanese Christian authorities sent a letter to Christians in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, including believers in China, Taiwan, and Korea. The letter identified the United States and England as their common enemy and criticized the Christianity of both countries while glamorizing the Japanese War as a way for all Asians to be truly free.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Recalling this and the sad memory of Shrine worship, Korean Christians had such a negative image that they hated the version of Christianity espoused by the Japanese. Some of this, though, was due to feelings of guilt over having brought shame upon themselves by occasionally worshipping at Japanese shrines. Korean Christians remember the “Statement of Cancellation of Shrine Worship” issued by the 39th General Assembly of the PCK in 1954. The president of the General Assembly was Pastor Won-young Lee (1886–1958), who had been imprisoned by the Japanese three times for refusing Shrine worship and was tortured almost to the point of death before he was finally released from prison on Liberation Day in 1945. Because of his experience of imprisonment and torture, Pastor Lee was called “a living martyr.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

After all this, he was elected as Chairman of the PCK denomination and cancelled the 1938 statement in which Shrine worship had been approved. The gist of the 1954 “Statement of Cancellation” was that Shrine worship had been forced upon the Korean people by Japanese imperialism. Consequently, the General Assembly of the PCK determined that the 1938 statement had been in violation of God’s law.⁽⁵⁹⁾

V. Two Korean Presbyterian Denominations’ Attitude toward the UCCJ

1) The Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK; conservative evangelical)

In a word, the PCK was half-hearted towards establishing relations

with the UCCJ for the reasons outlined above. In fact, the PCK intended to establish relations with churches in Japan that were deeply committed to Calvinism.

There was no specific information about the UCCJ when Chairman Omura and Chairman Suzuki visited Korea, as mentioned earlier. Even after the Mission Agreement, one can find little information about who the UCCJ was at the time.

Why is this so? The minutes of the General Assembly of the PCK contain a vestige of a hint that the denomination wanted to communicate with the Reformed Church in Japan. According to the records, there were many letters between Pastor Takaoki Dokiwa of Grace Church in Japan and Pastor Minoru Okada of the Kobe Reformed Seminary. Pastor Dokiwa personally agreed to the sanction of the General Assembly of the PCK. On the other hand, Pastor Okada wanted to interpret it in the light of Calvinism.

The minutes of the 1967 General Assembly of the PCK read, “sending an amity delegation to the Kobe Meeting for the General Assembly of the Japanese Reformed Church seemed to be a good idea; in order to save time, however, any relevant documents must be sent instead.”⁽⁶⁰⁾ The proceedings of the 1971 General Assembly also indicate that a petition had already been submitted to establish friendly relations with the Japanese Reformed Church.

At that time, it seemed as though it would be difficult for the PCK to rediscover its connection to the UCCJ. This is because the PCK had been burdened by the issue concerning forced Shrine worship and had no opportunities to reconcile with the UCCJ.

2) The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK; liberal)

This is the bottom line. The PROK worked together with the UCCJ with a positive attitude because they believed that both sides had already formed a close relationship with the Chosun Theological Seminary, which had been established prior to 1945. This denomination of the Presbyterian

Church, not the PCK referred to above, is the one that actually reported on the Mission Agreement in 1967. On the Korean side, the PROK is the group that expressed the most positive attitude toward the Agreement, seeing it as an example of international and/or interchurch exchange.

By the 1970s, the PROK and its related seminary actively began to be involved in the democracy uprising. The PROK was deeply influenced by “Minjung Theology” (“Theology for the People”). For this reason, the UCCJ actively supported democratization in Korea and stood with the PROK in firm solidarity on this issue. In 1974, the chairman of the Dota denomination sent a letter to the UCCJ entitled, “Appeal to All the Churches in Japan regarding Today’s Korean Church.” The UCCJ responded by saying, “We, Japanese Christians, as brothers of the same faith, want to support you both materially and morally from the bottom of our heart.” As it turned out, the UCCJ and PROK in the 1970s marched straight ahead in mutual support of one another.

VI. Conclusion

In 1967, twenty-two years after the Liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945, the Mission Agreement between the UCCJ and three denominations in Korea was concluded. In this article, we have searched for and elaborated upon the reason for why it took so long for such an agreement to be reached. Part of this was because of the political situation, with Korea having come out of some extremely difficult times in World War and the Korean War, along with two revolutions. Furthermore, church splits occurred over and over again in post-war Korea, a time in which the anti-Japanese ethos of the Korean people was at its apogee. In the midst of this, the anti-ratification movement against the Korea-Japan Treaty (1965) surfaced and created a stronger anti-Japanese atmosphere.

During this period, the Korean Church conveyed a message of opposition to the ratification of the Treaty as it held prayer meetings on a large scale that were devoted to this subject. But in this sense, the spirit of

prophetic protest on the part of the Korean Church touched its counterpart in Japan and fostered a change of attitude in which the Japanese Church vowed to cooperate and work together with their Korean brothers and sisters in Christ. The ultimate expression of this sentiment was the confession made by a Japanese Christian delegation to Korea in which past sins were acknowledged and responsibility taken for World War Two. As a result, the churches of both countries reached reconciliation through the Korean-Japan Mission Agreement of 1967.

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), being firmly rooted in liberal theology, was closely allied with the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), and they developed an age of democratization with solidarity. However, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), which is committed to evangelical theology, has been rather passive since 1967. The PCK concluded that the persecution and suffering of Korean Christians at the hands of Imperial Japan and the collusion of the Japanese Church, with which the UCCJ was identified.

Had either the UCCJ or the PCK, the leading denomination in Korea, proactively sought reconciliation, the relationship between the churches in Japan and Korea today would likely have been much more dynamic and active.

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Endnotes

- (1) Cf. "Comparative Study of the Korean-Japanese Relationship," *NEWSLETTER of Seigakuin University General Institute* (Ageo: Seigakuin University General Research Institute, 2009), Vol. 19, No. 5, 40.

- (2) Akio Dohi, *Nihon Protesutanto Kirisutokyōshi* [History of the Protestant Church of Japan] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 2004), 302.
- (3) Yun-tae Oh, *Nikkan Kirisuto Kōryūsi* [The History of Exchange between the Korean and Japanese Churches] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1968).
- (4) *Ibid.*, 278–296.
- (5) Myung-kwan Chi, *Nikkan Kankeisi Kenkyū* [The Historical Studies of Japan and Korea: 1965–2002] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1999).
- (6) Akio Dohi, *Nihon Protestantō Kirisutokyōshi Ron* [The Historical Theory of the Protestant Church in Japan] (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1987).
- (7) *Dai-15-kai Nihon Kiristo Kyōdan Sōkai Hōkokusho* [The Report of the 15th UCCJ General Assembly] (Tokyo: UCCJ, 1968), 31.
- (8) *Ibid.*, 31-2.
- (9) Gyung-bae Min, *Kankoku Kirisuto Kyōkaishi* [History of the Christian Church in Korea] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1981), 428.
- (10) In-soo Kim, *Jangrohoe Sinhakdaehakyo 100 Nyonsa* [History of One Hundred Years of the Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary (PCTS)] (Seoul: PCTS, 2002), 79.
- (11) *Ibid.*, 171.
- (12) *Daehan Yesukyo Jangrohoe 38hoe Hoeirok* [The Proceedings of the General Assembly of the PCK] (Seoul: The Archives for Korean Church History Studies, 1953), 238.
- (13) Masahiko Sawa “Chosen,” *Ajia Kiristokyō no Rekishi* [The History of Christianity in Asia] (Tokyo: UCCJ Publishing, 1991), 112.
- (14) Kim, *op.cit.*, 335.
- (15) Cf. Alister McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 312.
- (16) Kim, *op. cit.*, 482-3.
- (17) *Dai-14-kai Nihonkirisutokyōdan Sōkai Gian Hōkokusho* [The Agenda and the Report of the 14th UCCJ General Assembly] (Tokyo: UCCJ, 1966), 18.
- (18) Sirou Abe, In-ha Lee, Mikio Sumiya, Kiyoko Takeda, Shigeo Matsukawa, *Nihon wa Nani o Shita ka, Shinakatta ka: Sengo 50-nen to Kirisutokyō* [What Japan Did or Did Not Do: Christianity in the 50 Years since World War II] (Tokyo: The Board of Publications of UCCJ, 1996), 38–9.
- (19) Oh, *op. cit.*, 80.
- (20) *Kyōdan Times*, 2 October 1965, 3.
- (21) Dohi, *op. cit.*, 362.
- (22) *Hanguk Kidokkyo Jangrohoe Hoebo* [The Newsletter of PROK] 1 November 1965, 10.
- (23) *Kyōdan Times* [The Journal of UCCJ] 16 October 1965, 3.

- (24) *The Report of the 15th UCCJ General Assembly*, 31.
- (25) Ibid.
- (26) *Kyodan Times*, 18 November 1967, 6.
- (27) Dohi, op. cit.
- (28) *Kyodan Times*, op.cit.
- (29) *Kyodan Times*, op.cit.
- (30) Cf. Myung-kwan Chi, *Kankoku Gendaishi to Kyōkaishi* [Modern and Church History of Korea] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1975), 46.
- (31) *Kidok Kongbo* [The Christian Newspaper], 10 July 1965, 1.
- (32) Chi, op. cit., 52.
- (33) Myung-kwan Chi, *Kankokuto Kankokujin* [Korea and Koreans] (Tokyo: Atonis, 2004), 142.
- (34) *Kidok Kongbo*, 14 August 1965, 3.
- (35) *Kyodan Times*, 18 September 1965, 4.
- (36) Ibid.
- (37) Ibid.
- (38) Kyung-jae Kim, *Ultarirol Nomoseo* [Over the Fence] (Seoul: Yutopia, 2005), 47.
- (39) Cf. <http://en.youngnak.net/main/main.aspx> (2011.7.7).
- (40) Kyung-chik Han, *Hankyungjik Moksa Seolkyo Jeonjip* 8 [The Kyung-chik Han Preachings] (Seoul: The Rev. Kyung-chik Han Memorial Foundation, 2009), 365.
- (41) Ibid.
- (42) *Kidok Kongbo*, 10 July 1965, 1.
- (43) Ibid.
- (44) Ibid., 7 August 1965, 1.
- (45) Ibid., 2.
- (46) Ibid.
- (47) Ibid.
- (48) *Kyodan Times*, 18 September 1965, 3. My emphasis.
- (49) Chi, op. cit., 142.
- (50) Ibid.
- (51) Min, op. cit., 428.
- (52) Cheol-ha Han, “Hangukgyohoeui Youngkwangkoa Suchi [The Glorious and Disgraceful History of Korean Church],” *Fukuin to Sekai* [The Gospel and the World] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, August 1970), 70.
- (53) Chi, op. cit., 11–8.
- (54) Yosio Morita, *Chosen Shusenno Kiroku* [Record of Chosen] (Tokyo: Kennando, 1986), 108–9.
- (55) Cf. In Soo Kim, *Ju Gi-Cheul: The Life of The Reverend Soyang Ju Gi-Cheul, Lamb of Jesus* (Seoul: PCTS Press, 2008).

- (56) Masahiro Tomura (ed.), *Jinja Mondai to Kirisutokyō* [The Problem of Shinto Shrines and Christianity] (Tokyo: Shinkyō, 1967), 323.
- (57) *Nihonkiristokyō Rekishi Daijiten* [The Encyclopedia of the History of Christianity in Japan] (Tokyo: Kyōbun Kan, 1988), 1047.
- (58) Hee-kuk Lim, *Yiwonyong Yeongu* [Study of Rev. Won-Young Lee] (Seoul: Kidogkyo-munsa, 2001), 163.
- (59) *The Proceedings of the 39th General Assembly of the PCK*, 1954, 263.
- (60) *The Proceedings of the 52nd General Assembly of the PCK*, 1967, 39.