

Hosanna, *Mansei*, or *Banzai*?

Missionary Narratives and the 1919 March First Movement

Hajin Jun

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To my mother and father

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*I know of a land that is sunk in shame,
Of hearts that faint and tire;
And I know of a Name, a precious Name,
That can set this world on fire:
Its sound is a brand, its letters flame
I know of a Name, a Name, a Name
That will set this land on fire.*

John Wilbur Chapman, "Tis Jesus"

Introduction

The 1919 March First Movement remains one of the most iconic events in Korean history. Inspired in part by President Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination, Korean nationalists organized the first large-scale protest against Japanese colonial rule. The date was set for March first, just days before Emperor Kojong's state funeral.¹ At two o'clock on that brisk afternoon, thousands of Koreans poured into Pagoda Park in Seoul shouting "*mansei*" ("ten thousand years for Korea") and proclaiming a newly drafted Declaration of Independence.² Demonstrations soon swept across the whole country, involving an estimated 500,000 to 1 million people³ in over six hundred different places.⁴ After over two months of peaceful protests, however, the Movement ended tragically. Instead of attaining their desired freedom, Koreans were brutally repressed by the colonial regime.⁵ According to Japanese accounts, 553 were killed, 1,409 were injured, and over 14,000 were arrested between March and December.⁶ But if Korean sources are correct, the actual cost in human lives was much higher, leaving approximately 7,500 killed, 15,000 injured, and over 45,000 imprisoned.⁷ Korea would remain a Japanese colony for another twenty-six years.

¹ Emperor Kojong was the last independent monarch of the Chosŏn Dynasty. The mystery surrounding his death only contributed to the nationalist fervor. The Government-General claimed that he died of cerebral anemia, but rumors abounded that he had been poisoned by the Japanese or had committed suicide in protest of the pending marriage between the Crown Prince and a Japanese princess. See also, Chong-sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 108.

² Hugh C. Cynn, *The Rebirth of Korea: The Reawakening of the People, Its Causes, and the Outlook* (New York: Abingdon, 1920), 24-25.

³ Michael J. Seth, *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 269.

⁴ Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 155.

⁵ Michael Edson Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth Century Odyssey* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 48.

⁶ Seth, *A History of Korea*, 269.

⁷ Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth Century Odyssey*, 48.

Despite its better known role in the trajectory of Korean nationalism, the Movement also represents a key moment in the story of Christianity in Korea. While Protestants made up only about one percent of the population in 1919, they made their presence felt. Sixteen of the thirty-three signers—almost half—of the Declaration of the Independence were Protestants,⁸ among whom were three of the most prominent Church leaders: Rev. Kil Sŏnju,⁹ Rev. Yang Chŏnbaek, and Elder Yi Sŭnghun.¹⁰ Protestants also made up over 17 percent of those arrested.¹¹ Moreover, the Church remains engrained in Koreans' collective memory of the Movement.¹² The burning of a church in Che'am-ni is still remembered as a symbol of the ruthlessness of the Japanese gendarmes, and Yu Kwan-sun, a student at a Methodist missionary school, continues to be the icon of Korean patriotism for her heroism and courage in the demonstrations.

The March First Movement was of deep concern to another group of Christians in Korea as well—the American missionaries. Unlike the Korean Christians, missionaries did not take part in the demonstrations. They had but faint suspicions of what was developing as the Movement took shape¹³ and made dogged professions of political neutrality throughout its duration.¹⁴ Despite their nonparticipation in the protests, however, missionaries found themselves embroiled in the political tumult. First, they had to dispel accusations from the local press for having

⁸ Timothy S. Lee, "A Political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea: Protestantism and the 1919 March First Movement," *Church History* 69 (Mar. 2000), 138-139.

⁹ I have used the McCune-Reischauer system for Romanizing Korean names and reference them using the traditional Korean order: surname followed by given name.

¹⁰ Chung-Shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 136.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹² Lee, "A political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea," 140.

¹³ The only missionary who had any foreknowledge of the Movement was Frank Schofield, a Canadian Presbyterian missionary. The night before demonstrations broke out, Yi Kap-sang, a student and worker at Severence Hospital, paid a visit to Schofield and entreated him to take photographs as the Movement unfolded. See also, Doretha E. Mortimore, *Dr. Francis W. Schofield and Korea* (Kalamazoo, 1975), 40.

¹⁴ Donald N. Clark, "'Surely God Will Work Out Their Salvation': Protestant Missionaries in the March First Movement," *Korean Studies* 13 (1989), 43.

instigated the demonstrations. According to one Japanese colonial newspaper, missionaries “were at the back of the Korean rioters,” “recklessly advocat[ing]” revolutionary ideas under the guise of “propagating Christianity.”¹⁵ But more significantly, as violence engulfed the peninsula, missionaries felt an imperative to respond. Treating victims in hospitals was not enough; they had to speak out.

While the Korean Protestants often take center stage in discussions of Christianity’s place in the Movement, it is the role of American missionaries that may be more intriguing. Producing accounts of the demonstrations and the bloody aftermath, missionaries provided the wider world a voice and a window onto Korea’s turmoil. Their extensive writings, however, also pose several paradoxes. During the early days of colonial rule, missionaries urged Korean Christians to submit to established authorities in accordance to the Bible.¹⁶ However, this seemingly straightforward policy does not account for the activism of the Korean Church during the Movement or the ways in which missionaries made sense of their Korean coreligionists’ actions. Korean Christians, who were renowned for their familiarity with the Bible, spoke out against colonial rule, and instead of condemning protesters’ disobedience to scriptural dictate, missionaries portrayed Korean Christians as courageous and pious patriots.¹⁷ In addition, although the missionary community professed strict neutrality and absolute abstention from politics, many of their writings nonetheless strayed into the political arena. In this thesis, I examine the missionaries’ representations of the Movement to better understand the precarious relationship between religion and politics at work in this time.

While many scholars have examined the March First Movement in its relation to Korean nationalism, far fewer have analyzed the place of American missionaries in this tumultuous

¹⁵ “Korean Independence Outbreak, Part VI,” 1919. Korean Independence Outbreak Movement. BTS.

¹⁶ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to M. Komatzu, May 18, 1915, Record Group 140, 16:12, PHS.

¹⁷ Brown, *Mastery of the Far East*, 526.

moment in history. In the limited body of scholarship that does exist, historians have sought to make sense of their complex position of neutrality. Historian Dae-yeol Ku, for instance, argues that the Movement marked an important shift in missionaries' political position. Missionaries may not have participated in the demonstrations, but their stance of neutrality "gradually [gave] way" as they witnessed Japanese atrocities.¹⁸ Ku writes that missionaries' reporting of Japanese abuses "could hardly be seen... as neutrality."¹⁹ Accounts describing a Korean boy "chased by mounted soldiers like a 'hunted animal,'" pastors led away "'like criminals to prison,'" and firemen "charg[ing] a demonstrating crowd 'like gnomes'"²⁰ served as critiques, Ku argues, advancing an "anti-government campaign."²¹ And citing the possibility that one missionary, O.R. Avison, "gave tacit consent for the use of his hospital as a channel of communication with Koreans in Shanghai," Ku suggests that missionaries' professions of political neutrality not only belied their true sympathies, but also the extent of their actual involvement.²² In his view, missionaries like Avison, "whose views were passed over," may have actually made significant direct contributions to the independence movement.²³

Not all scholars in the field, however, share this view of robust missionary involvement. Analyzing the theological leanings of missionaries in Korea, Dae Young Ryu suggests that missionaries did not care one way or another about which power ruled Korea. Because the "primary features of American missionaries' religion were personal spirituality and otherworldliness," their "ultimate goal was the salvation of the Korean soul, not the nation." Missionaries were "ready to welcome any political power, be it Korean or anti-Korean, that was

¹⁸ Dae-yeol Ku, *Korea Under Colonialism: The March First Movement and Anglo Japanese Relations* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1985), 189.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 192.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

²² *Ibid.*, 198.

²³ *Ibid.*, 197.

favorable for that goal and to condemn any deterrent.”²⁴ More tellingly, Ku writes that the “suppressive years of Japanese occupation” were a boon for missionaries, allowing Korean Protestantism to “solidify its ethical-theological and revivalistic-evangelistic practices.”²⁵

Ku and Ryu’s arguments, however, represent but the extreme ends of the interpretive spectrum. Many scholars fall somewhere in the middle, grappling with the problems posed by the position of neutrality itself. According to Timothy S. Lee, although missionaries believed that “disallowing political activities from taking place within the church” supported their “nonpartisan stance,” true neutrality was not possible.²⁶ He states that “[f]or between Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism, there was no middle ground. One had to choose a side. Refusing to take a side, as the missionaries did... merely meant accepting the status quo—that is, Japanese rule.”²⁷ Missionaries’ so-called neutrality strained their relationships with Korean Christians, and it was only their “unwitting contribution” after the March First demonstrations—caring for victims and raising awareness against atrocities—that redeemed missionaries in the eyes of many Koreans.²⁸

Historian Frank Baldwin offers one of the more nuanced analyses of the missionaries’ role in the Movement. As the subtitle of his article on the independence movement suggests (“Can Moral Men be Neutral?”), he sets out to examine the issue at the crux of the missionaries’ experiences in the Movement. In the immediate aftermath of the demonstrations, missionaries vigorously denied the charge made by Japanese newspapers that they had instigated the protests. Baldwin suggests that although the Japanese press eventually retracted their accusations,

²⁴ Dae Young Ryu, "The Origin and Characteristics of Evangelical Protestantism in Korea at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." *Church History* 77.2 (2008), 396.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Lee, 128.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

recognition as “not guilty” actually raised “new pressure from both Koreans and the Japanese authorities.”²⁹ Addressing the challenges nationalism posed for missionaries, Baldwin additionally asks the questions: “[w]ere the missionaries radicalized by their experiences in the Korean independence movement?”³⁰ and “[w]ere the missionaries politically neutral?”³¹ Although Lee dismisses the possibility for true political neutrality, Baldwin argues that missionaries “accomplished the nearly impossible: In large measure they adhered to a position of not taking a position.”³² By distinguishing between moral and political neutrality, he argues, missionaries acted on their moral convictions without renouncing their political neutrality.

Although historians have advanced widely diverging interpretations of missionaries’ presence in the March First Movement, they nonetheless converge on a common theme. Scholars have assessed the validity of missionaries’ claim to neutrality in an effort map out their true place on the spectrum between Korean partisanship and colonial collaboration. However, while this approach addresses a key facet of missionaries’ connection with the Movement, it does so at the expense of others. In particular, it overlooks how the Movement looked from the vantage point of the mission itself. While the primary objective of the missionaries’ accounts was to halt police brutality, their narratives of the Movement reflect the missionary community’s own anxieties and prerogatives as well.

Contemporary theories on secularization may provide a framework to understand missionary narratives of the Movement. For anthropologist Talal Asad, the development of secularism—the clear separation of private from public, the religious from the political—is

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁰ Frank Baldwin, “Missionaries and the March First Movement: Can Moral Men be Neutral?.” in *Korea under Japanese Colonial Rule: Studies of the Policy and Techniques of Japanese Colonialism*, ed., Andrew C. Nahm (Kalamazoo: Center for Korean Studies, Western Michigan University, 1973), 210.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

³² *Ibid.*

neither natural nor inevitable.³³ The concept of the secular itself can be traced historically with the rise of the nation-state.³⁴ For all its lofty aims of defending individual freedom of conscience and religious pluralism, secularism emerged as expression of the state's authority. In Asad's words, viewing "uncontrolled religion" as threatening or subversive "became part of the nation-state's performance of sovereignty." There was a politics, then, to the demarcation of the religious and the secular. Since the state assumed the power to draw the line between the two, it "meant that 'religion' could be excluded from its domain or absorbed by it."³⁵ Sociologist José Casanova adds, however, that religious actors often did not passively accept their marginalization from the public sphere. He writes that the modern age has seen the "deprivatization" of religion, whereby different religions across the world rejected the "privatized role" consigned to them by theories of modernity and secularization.³⁶ Casanova maintains that this resistance and contestation have always accompanied the process of secularization. Religions "ente[r] the public sphere...not only to defend their traditional turf...but also to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres."³⁷

In some ways, missionaries' narratives on the March First Movement may illustrate Casanova's theory of the deprivatization of religion. When the demonstrations broke out, the missionaries had long been nursing their own grievances against the colonial regime. In 1912, the government singled out Christians for arrest on a fabricated charge of conspiracy against the

³³ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ Talal Asad, "Trying to Understand French Secularism," in Hent de Vries, ed., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 498.

³⁶ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

life of the Governor-General. And starting in 1913, it also enacted a series of regulations on missionary hospitals, religious propagation, and educational practices that not only made missionaries' work more onerous, but even co-opted the language of secularism to limit the scope of their activities. According to officials, peaceful coexistence in an inter-confessional society not only required government oversight over religious organizations, but some tasks, such as education, would be better off in the hands of the state. From this perspective, I argue that the missionaries' narratives of the March First Movement were shaped in part by these early conflicts. Refusing to quietly accede to these encroachments, missionaries seized upon different opportunities presented during the Movement to subtly renegotiate the terms of the religious-secular divide.

Several types of sources form the basis of this study. To understand the goals and governing ideologies of the Korea missionaries, I draw upon denominational publications, as well as books written by prominent spokespersons in the missionary enterprise such as Arthur Judson Brown and Arthur T. Pierson. To examine the ways in which missionaries understood and portrayed the March First Movement, I rely mainly on archival sources, including: eye-witness accounts, conference minutes, personal correspondences, letters to mission board administrators, station reports, photographs, and diary entries. A number of missionary periodicals have also provided important insights into the missionaries' views. To take into account some of the major external influences informing missionaries' discourse, I have incorporated U.S. State Department memos, as well as articles from American and English-language Japanese newspapers.

This is not an exhaustive treatment of the March First Movement. Among the several important groups of actors involved in the Movement, I have chosen to examine just one—the

American missionaries. I also touch upon, at least, the voices of the Korean Christians, the Government-General, and the American legation in Korea. Among the missionaries, I narrow my focus even further to the Presbyterians. There are several reasons for this choice. Not only did Korean Presbyterians represent the greatest number of Protestants who participated in the Movement, but among the various missionary groups, the Presbyterian missionaries had the most strained relationship with the colonial regime.³⁸ Because I explore points of contestation between missionaries and the Government-General, the Presbyterian missionaries present richer sources and a more compelling narrative. Lastly, while I examine the history of the mission prior to the Movement, I do not address at length the subsequent period of the missionaries' presence in Korea.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Together, they illuminate the missionaries' representations of the March First Movement. The first chapter provides an introduction to the kinds of documentation and narratives missionaries produced during the March First Movement. The second chapter takes chronological a step back to explore the historical trajectory of the Korea mission prior to 1919, with an especial focus on the development of and changes in the missionaries' interactions with governing authorities. And finally, the third chapter examines the Movement from the missionaries' perspectives, analyzing the presence of their own discursive contestation with the colonial regime.

³⁸ During both the 1912 Conspiracy Case and the March First Movement, the only missionaries who faced arrest were Presbyterian—George S. McCune and Eli M. Mowry, respectively. Moreover, the Methodists (the second largest denomination in Korea) were in general more willing to make compromises, thereby enjoying smoother relations with the government.

1. “Speaking Truth to Power”

So this time, ...I tried just to be a sympathetic listener. And the only thing that has been hard to do was to keep from boiling over. The situation would wring sympathy from a wooden man at the north pole in December, and grow ears on a cabbage head. One had to listen. –William B. Hunt³⁹

It is not a long story but one is made to pause and think and visualize the scene. Think of it occurring in your own home, in your own village; picture the darkness, the shooting, the beating, the screams of the women and children, the flames and then the firing of the soldiers on those trying to escape. –Anonymous report of the Suwon Massacre.⁴⁰

In northern Korea, the Declaration of Independence was first proclaimed at a memorial service for Emperor Kojong. The air was thick with anticipation as over three thousand people gathered at the Christian Boys’ School in P’yŏngyang. After the benediction and reading of scripture, Chung Il-sun, a graduate of the missionary college, rose to the platform. Saying it was the happiest moment of his life, Chung proceeded to read the Declaration. The crowd stood up with a cheer and began to wildly wave small Korean flags. Sitting discreetly to one side of the throng during this momentous event were three American missionaries: Charles Bernheisel, Charles Clark, and Samuel A. Moffett. They too had heard of the service and decided to attend. Though the missionaries often drew attention with their Western physique and dress, this day, they went largely unnoticed. They simply observed. And as the crowds pushed toward the streets, the missionaries slipped quietly into an alley, removing themselves from the unfolding demonstration.⁴¹

³⁹ William B. Hunt, Personal Report of William B. Hunt for 1918-1919, MF POS 103, Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter PHS), Philadelphia.

⁴⁰ “Korean Independence Outbreak, Part IX,” 1919. Korean Independence Outbreak Movement. Burke Theological Library (hereafter BTS), New York.

⁴¹ “Korean Independence Outbreak, Part I,” 1919. Korean Independence Outbreak Movement. BTS.

Missionaries were not the main actors in the March First demonstrations. The peaceful protests caught them by surprise, and like Bernheisel, Clark, and Moffett, they chose not to participate. But as church historian (and son of the famed missionary) Samuel Hugh Moffett notes, the role of the missionaries, “while secondary was nevertheless real.”⁴² Missionaries bore witness to the Movement and provided one of the primary lenses through which the international community understood the event. Peering out from their courtyards, treating victims in hospitals, and visiting sites where atrocities took place, missionaries produced a vast body of documentation giving voice to the Koreans’ suffering. Friends leaving for China skirted Japanese censors, secretly conveying the missionaries’ letters, diary entries, photographs, editorials, and reports to a wide audience in America. Family members, friends, affiliated churches, local and national newspapers, and even the floor of Congress came to learn of the Movement.⁴³ Through their writings, missionaries made their own mark in Korean history.

As the foundation for further analysis, this chapter is an examination of the missionary documents on the March First Movement. They shed light not only on the ways in which missionaries exposed the truth of government atrocities, but also the ways in which missionaries interpreted and narrated the Movement.

Documenting Atrocities

In some ways, the missionaries’ role as primary witnesses for the Movement is hardly surprising. Many missionaries often could not help but observe the unfolding political tumult.

⁴² Samuel H. Moffett, “The Independence Movement and the Missionaries,” *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch* 54 (1979), 15.

⁴³ Donald N. Clark, “‘Surly God Will Work Out Their Salvation:’ Protestant Missionaries in the March First Movement,” *Korean Studies* 13 (1989), 59.

The P'yŏngyang Presbyterian Station, for instance, was situated on high ground with “good views of the streets and surrounding country.”⁴⁴ In many cases, the violence occurred just “[a] few hundred yards” away from the places where missionaries lived and worked.⁴⁵ In an otherwise quotidian letter to her mother, Mrs. R. O. Reiner recounts a scene she observed near her home:

[T]he soldiers gathered too and whenever they tho't [sic] the crowd too big they'd run toward them with their bayonets...the soldiers got worse and worse and ran into the crowds and began grabbing people here and there and then the awful sights we saw from our place—I can't describe, a reign of terror on poor helpless people.⁴⁶

The protests and the horrors of police violence became a very real part of the missionaries' everyday lives.

Missionaries, however, were not merely passive observers; reports from villages in the interior prompted missionaries to become active investigators of the violence. According to R.O. Reiner, the missionary community received accounts so horrifying that they made incidents in the cities seem “mild” in comparison. Missionaries had to “see the situation with their own eyes.”⁴⁷ Reiner personally began gathering material on the subject,⁴⁸ and in Seoul, Horace H. Underwood (son of the pioneer missionary Horace G. Underwood), Frank Schofield, E.W. Koons, and W.G. Cram formed an investigation committee on Japanese atrocities against Koreans.⁴⁹ When missionary doctors treated Korean victims, they not only documented the circumstances of the injuries but carefully cross-referenced victims' stories to compile accurate assessments of the situation.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Sadie N. Welbon, Letter to friends, March 20, 1919. Record Group 140, 16: 14. PHS.

⁴⁵ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919, Record Group 140, 16: 13, PHS.

⁴⁶ Mrs. R. O. Reiner, Letter to her mother, March 9, 1919. MF POS 103, PHS.

⁴⁷ R.O. Reiner, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 25, 1919, Record Group 140, 16: 14, PHS.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Moffett, “The Independence Movement and the Missionaries,” 22.

⁵⁰ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korea Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events by Eye Witnesses*, New York: The Commission, 1919, 37.

Once they verified the accounts, missionaries produced penetrating reports of the gendarmes' ruthless treatment of Korean demonstrators. Underwood personally visited Suwon and documented the infamous massacre at Che'am-ni. Having coaxed the "poor frightened people" to recount what had happened, Underwood recorded the following:

[E]arly in the afternoon some soldiers had entered the village and given orders that all the adult male Christians and members of the Chundokyo (Heavenly Way Society) were to assemble in the Church as a lecture was to be given them. In all some twenty-three men went to the church as ordered... the soldiers immediately surrounded the church and fired into it through the paper windows. When most of them had been either killed or wounded, the Japanese soldiers cold-bloodedly set fire to the thatch and wooden building which readily blazed. Some tried to make their escape by rushing out, but they were immediately bayoneted or shot... The soldiers then set the village on fire and left.⁵¹

Most notable about Underwood's account, as well as others in this genre of reporting, is its efforts at rhetorical conservatism. For the most part, Underwood refrains from incorporating his own subjective commentary into his depiction of the police brutality, building his narrative as a quick succession of occurrences. Despite the grisly details preceding it, the only adverb of the text—"cold-bloodedly"—almost seems out of place, a slip of the tongue. Underwood may have intended to use this detachment not only to lend credibility and power to the account, but to also imply that the story spoke for itself. Simply relating what happened sufficiently demonstrated the excesses of government violence.

Photographs also represented an important part of the missionaries' documentation of the Movement. In some ways, they served a similar function as Underwood's account. As images of scenes and people in real time, photographs purported to present objective, self-evident truths. In many cases, they even seemed to carry greater weight than the missionaries' written accounts, bolstering the credibility of particularly horrific accounts. For instance, when describing victims whose heads were cut open so badly that "the brain was protruding," John F. Genso enclosed a

⁵¹ "Korean Independence Movement, Part IX."

photograph with a remark that it was “only a sample of many [he] could send.”⁵² Photographs of the atrocities were raw, visceral, and haunting. When confronted with images of decimated villages, severed limbs, and mangled bodies disfigured beyond recognition, viewers would hardly be able to dispute the existence of a real humanitarian crisis in Korea.



Figure 1: Demonstrator Attacked by a Japanese Gendarme.
(Source: *Korean Independence Movement*)

⁵² John F. Genso, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 5, 1919, Record Group 140, 16: 14, PHS.



Figure 2: Demonstrator Dismembered by Japanese Soldier.
(Source: *Korean Independence Movement*)



Figure 3: Victim of Flogging.
(Source: *Japanese Atrocities*)



Figure 4: Japanese Police Officer at the Site of Che'am-ni Massacre.
(Source: *The Case for Korea*, 232)

While the missionaries sought to provide objective and authentic representations of the Movement, they nonetheless constructed their accounts in ways that would rouse the reader to action. For instance, missionaries frequently drew connections between Prussia's conquest of Belgium during World War I and Japan's treatment of Korea. The missionaries denounced Japanese "Prussianism," commonly referring to Japanese soldiers as 'Huns,' an epithet made common in war propaganda. In a letter addressed to friends, Charles E. Sharp writes:

The Belgian government has recently announced that during the more than four years that Germany held the country six thousand civilians were put to death by the Germans. Here in this land it is probably safe to say that two thousand men, women, and children empty handed and helpless, have been put to death in seven weeks. You may now draw your own conclusions.⁵³

⁵³ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919. Record Group 140, 16: 13, PHS.

The comparison was a powerful means to underscore the gravity and urgency of the situation. With the First World War recently drawn to a close (having claimed over a hundred thousand American lives) and the Paris Peace Conference still in session, these references resonated strongly with American readers.

Those documenting police cruelty also made their appeals by emphasizing particular types of ethical transgressions. Many missionaries viewed the mistreatment of women as “[a] peculiarly revolting feature of police methods,” and such cases formed a category of its own.⁵⁴ They recorded violence against women under headings like “Story of Girl Prisoner,”⁵⁵ “The Experience of a Korean Girl under Arrest by the Police,”⁵⁶ “School Girls Tied to Post by Hair.”⁵⁷ And while police beat and tortured prisoners regardless of gender, records pay especial attention on the sexual harassment of women prisoners. In a pamphlet published by the Federal Council of Churches, a translated account of a released prisoner reads:

They spit in my face. This with curses and invectives of the worst kind. He said, ‘You prostitute, you vile, pregnant girl!’ I was ordered to expose my breasts, but refusing, they tore my upper garment from me and I was told all sorts of inhuman things which shocked me terribly.⁵⁸

Interestingly, when another missionary summarized an account found in the same collection of documents, he also highlighted the sexual abuse over the other kinds of abuses included in the original text.⁵⁹ In the words of one missionary, sexual harassment represented an especially serious crime since a “Korean woman would rather die than expose her naked body in ways not conformable to local custom.”⁶⁰ Focusing on crimes against women, however, perhaps reflect

⁵⁴ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korea Situation*, 85.

⁵⁵ “Story of Released Girl Prisoner (No 5),” Record Group 140, 16: 14, PHS, Philadelphia.

⁵⁶ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korea Situation*, 47.

⁵⁷ “Korean Independence Movement, Part IV,” 1919. Korean Independence Outbreak Movement. BTS.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

more than just their “maddening” effects on Koreans (Figure 1.4).⁶¹ The choice of stories included in the pamphlet aimed to strike a chord with the reader. As John F. Genso remarked, “[w]hat would we think if our daughters and sisters were treated in this manner?”⁶² These accounts reveal the ways in which missionaries highlighted the moral “depravity” of Japanese gendarmes and ultimately challenged the Japanese Empire’s claim to civilization and modernity.⁶³



Figure 5: Arrest of Korean Women
(Source: *Japanese Atrocities*)

Missionaries also made a point to shed light on the distress of Koreans as Christians. Through church networks, news about local pastors, elders, and ordinary congregants circulated quickly. Many missionaries expressed anxiety that the Church itself was being persecuted, noting that Christians were more likely to be arrested, treated more harshly, and “mocked by non-

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² John F. Genso, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 5, 1919. Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁶³ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *The Korean Situation*, 104.

believing officials.”⁶⁴ Illustrating this claim, several accounts described how theological students were bound to a wooden cross, “given thirty-nine strokes with a paddle,” and were told that it was “fitting” that they suffer as Christ did.⁶⁵ Missionaries also detailed the destruction of churches, the most famous of which was the Che’am-ni massacre. According to R.O. Reiner’s account, in P’yŏngyang alone, the gendarmes razed more than eighteen churches.⁶⁶ The charge of religious persecution was especially significant considering the missionaries’ primary readership. As members of “one body” in Christ, churches, mission boards, and to even some extent, the Western world at large, were more apt to sympathize with the affliction of their Korean coreligionists.⁶⁷ Indeed, recognizing the magnitude of the damage to its reputation, the Government-General responded by publishing a lengthy pamphlet defending its historical support for Korean Christianity.⁶⁸

These prolific accounts formed the basis of an international campaign to stop the atrocities committed against Koreans. As Mrs. R. O. Reiner remarked, the missionary community determined to “mak[e] a protest” “in every way” it knew, “leav[ing] no stone unturned” in the attempt.⁶⁹ First, they enlisted the help of family and friends back home to get “the whole thing out.”⁷⁰ Church papers circulated missionary accounts, sparking efforts in America to raise awareness about the atrocities. A minister in Kentucky, for instance, wrote to Arthur Judson Brown on the importance of making Americans “acquainted with the real tragedy” in Korea, emphasizing that “[n]othing but such publicity and emphatic moral

⁶⁴ “An opinion of the missionaries as to what changes are desirable in the existing laws and in the attitude of the government towards the Christian church and mission work in Korea,” MF POS 103, PHS.

⁶⁵ Federal Council of Churches in America, *The Korean Situation*, 67.

⁶⁶ R.O. Reiner, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 25, 1919. Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:12.

⁶⁸ Kiyoshi Nakarai, *Relations between the Government and Christianity in Chosen* (1921), 1.

⁶⁹ Mrs. R.O. Reiner, Letter to her mother, March 9, 1919, MF POS 103, PHS.

⁷⁰ Henry N. Lampe, Letter to his father, March 12, 1919, Record Group 140, 10:15, PHS.

condemnation of the world” would bring about “justice to the suffering Koreans.”⁷¹ The missionaries also lobbied American government officials. They wrote letters to the Consul General in Korea, and through the efforts of Sallie Swallen, whose brother was an Ohio congressman, the *Congressional Record* reproduced the Federal Council’s pamphlet in its entirety.⁷² But among their many tactics, the missionaries made their greatest impact through the foreign press. A. E. Armstrong sent articles to North American newspapers such as: the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, the *Chicago News*, the *Montreal Gazette*, as well as the *Montreal Star*, where his article “furnished a headline across the entire front page.”⁷³

However, the missionaries’ accomplishments in raising awareness for the Koreans’ plight cannot fully be appreciated without understanding the difficulty of their undertaking. In fact, the great diversity of the missionaries’ approaches speaks to the daunting competition missionaries faced in shaping public perception of the Movement. The Government-General fiercely promoted its own propaganda. According to the *Seoul Press*, an English-language newspaper that often acted as the mouthpiece of the colonial government, Koreans told missionaries false or exaggerated accounts of gendarme violence. It argued that though soldiers “probably went too far in the execution of their duties,” the accounts written by missionaries were “so shocking that they are hardly believable.” They accused Koreans of being “great liar[s]” and the missionaries, who “constantly associate with Koreans,” of blind sympathy.⁷⁴ Moreover, even when the *Seoul Press* admitted the “very harsh” treatment of Koreans in the Suwon massacre, it did so only after detailing the “very serious crimes” of Korean rioters that “naturally embittered the feeling of the

⁷¹ Thomas Wallis Rainey, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, July 15, 1919. Record Group 140, 10:15, PHS.

⁷² *Report on the Situation in Korea*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record*, vol. 58 (July 17, 1919): S 2697-2718.

⁷³ A. E. Armstrong, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, July 14, 1919. Record Group 140, 10:15, PHS.

⁷⁴ “Stories of Cruelty,” *Seoul Press*, March 20, 1919.

troops.”⁷⁵ The missionaries thus did not merely attempt to voice Koreans’ silent suffering. They fought back against the “flow” of state propaganda that sought to “overbalanc[e] and discredi[t]” their writings.⁷⁶ The stakes of documenting atrocities was high, and missionaries carried out their “solemn duty” with great energy and vigor.⁷⁷ Herbert E. Blair once marveled at Koreans’ belief in “[t]he idea that appeal and protest and noise are as powerful as guns.”⁷⁸ In many ways, the missionaries were perhaps not so unlike the Koreans they tried to protect.

Understanding the Movement

Creating a narrative of the Movement itself was an important priority for both missionaries and the colonial regime. Exposing atrocities could not have its full effect if readers did not understand the Movement’s meaning or the character of its principal actors. Keenly aware of this fact, the Government-General attempted to salvage its reputation by criticizing the Movement’s objectives. According to Japanese propaganda, the source of the turmoil was the Koreans’ own political naiveté. They organized the demonstrations based on a misreading of President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. According to one *Seoul Press* editorial, Koreans foolishly declared independence, not realizing that self-determination would only be granted to countries directly involved in the war.⁷⁹ Moreover, even if the victors broadened the scope of Wilson’s principle, Koreans simply were not capable of governing themselves.⁸⁰ Frank Heron

⁷⁵ “The Suwon Incident,” *Seoul Press*, April 30, 1919.

⁷⁶ Norman C. Wittemore, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, Dec. 3, 1920, Record Group 140, 16:20, PHS.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Herbert E. Blair, Letter to his father, April 30, 1919. Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁷⁹ “What foreign missionaries can do now,” *Seoul Press*, March 22, 1919.

⁸⁰ “Japan’s Efficient Administration of Korea,” *Seoul Press*, April 10, 1919.

Smith,⁸¹ a former Japan missionary who was re-commissioned to Korea just five years prior, echoed the appeal to Japan's civilizing mission. He writes: "They [the Koreans] are not ready for independence. They are like a baby crying for cake or candy... They have none of the qualifications necessary to stand alone."⁸² In Smith's eyes, Koreans rejected Japan's benevolent and far superior administration simply because "it was not [theirs]."⁸³ Independence was irrational and contrary to Korea's true interests.

Conversely, although the missionaries acknowledged the galvanizing effect of Wilson's ideas, they put far more emphasis on Koreans' long-standing grievances against the Government-General. As one missionary put it, the "outward progress" of Japanese rule was deceiving—"the beauty at the top springs from oppression at the bottom."⁸⁴ In an official report prepared for the Board of Foreign Missions, missionaries outlined the most egregious offenses: Japan's breach of international treaty in annexing Korea, oppressive military administration, absence of civil liberties, discrimination against Koreans in public offices and educational opportunities, forcible cultural assimilation, unjust land reforms, introduction of immoral activities among the youth, and the forcible migration of Koreans to Manchuria.⁸⁵ The Movement was not launched by impetuous agitators; it was the inevitable response of a people with no other means of recourse. According to the report, Koreans repeatedly told missionaries that "conditions of life are intolerable... and that the people might as well die at once as by slow

⁸¹ Having spent the greater part of his career in Japan, Frank Heron Smith was fluent in Japanese and maintained close connections with Japanese authorities in Korea as well as in Japan proper. The most outspoken Japan sympathizer among Korea missionaries, he often alienated his colleagues. In one letter, he wrote that many missionaries discredited his views and that he has "had to stand pretty much alone." See also, Frank H. Smith, Letter to Sidney L. Gulick, Oct. 15, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁸² Frank Heron Smith, Letter to Sidney L. Gulick, Jan. 10, 1920, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁸³ Frank Heron Smith, Letter to J.R. Joy, Oct. 3, 1919, Record Group 140, 16: 14, PHS.

⁸⁴ Herbert E. Blair, Letter to his father, April 30, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

⁸⁵ Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission, "The Present Movement for Korean Independence in its Relation to the Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," April 24, 1919. MF POS 155, PHS.

degrees of social and economic strangulation.”⁸⁶ Koreans had finally found that life was “no longer worth living unless a change can be brought about.”⁸⁷ Without calling for independence directly, missionaries urged readers to at least understand what Koreans were fighting to achieve.

The manner in which Koreans carried out the Movement was another central focus of the story. In America, George Trumbull Ladd, a renowned psychology professor at Yale University who sympathized with Japan, tried to play down the horror of the gendarmes’ actions by maligning the Korean protesters. He argued that “mobs” provoked, and perhaps even deserved, the soldiers’ “occasional savagery.”⁸⁸ Missionaries objected to both claims. They frequently mentioned the demonstrators’ intentional non-violence, marveling that Koreans did not resist police officers even when arrested. The commendable behavior of the Movement’s leaders, for instance, served as the missionaries’ example of choice. Before distributing the Declaration of Independence among the people, the signatories not only sent a copy to the Governor-General “in a decorous manner,” but they then willingly notified and gave themselves up to the police.⁸⁹ Moreover, missionaries informed their readers that “instances” of violence on the part of demonstrators were “comparatively few,” anomalies prompted by “desperation” and “the brutality of the police and soldiers.”⁹⁰ Juxtaposed against graphic depictions of police aggression, the descriptions of the peaceful protesters aligned the Koreans’ cause with greater moral authority.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

⁸⁸ George Trumbull Ladd, “Causes of the Korean Uprising,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1919.

⁸⁹ Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission, “The Present Movement for Korean Independence in its Relation to the Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

⁹⁰ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.



Figure 6: Demonstrators Outside the Government-General Building, Seoul
(Source: *Korean Independence Movement*)

The peaceful nature of the protests had a profound impact on missionaries, who in turn portrayed Korean demonstrators as exemplary patriots. Blanche Stevens' letter to her mother perhaps best demonstrates the missionaries' deep respect for Koreans' "self-restraint," "fortitude," and "endurance."⁹¹ Stevens movingly recalls the quiet heroism of a Korean boy she met while making rounds in the hospital. Bludgeoned ninety times for having cried "*mansei*" in the streets, the boy was incapacitated with pain. But even as his "sweet" "young life" dimmed, he did not regret his participation in the Movement. He remarked that though he could not "live to see his country free... he was glad to give his life for her."⁹² Stevens describes his last moments:

He could not utter a word but at last he got strength to lift his hand to his mouth. He bit at his little finger, looking at me with the message so plainly written in the brilliant dark eyes which a moment later closed in death. He wanted to pledge his life in blood to the

⁹¹ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919. Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

⁹² Blanche Stevens, Letter to her mother, May 25, 1919. MF POS 103, PHS.

country he loved so well. Poor boy- he had already given his blood- the bed was soaked with it from the seeping wounds on his back and hips where the cruel blows of the bamboo bludgeon had beaten the flesh to a mangled pulp.⁹³

This *amor patriae* followed the boy even to the grave. When the community gathered to lay his body to rest, one woman “dar[ed] the consequences” and placed a small Korean flag on the coffin. She remarked, “[t]hey have done their worst to him. No blows can harm him now.”⁹⁴ The missionaries represented Koreans not as rebels but as heroes who gave their lives for their nation.

Allegations and Alibis

Though paramount, raising awareness about the Movement and its aftermath was not the sole objective of the missionary narratives. By necessity, much of their writings were also defensive and self-reflexive. When the demonstrations first broke out, several Japanese newspapers held missionaries accountable. For instance, in an editorial published in the *Osaka Aishi*, the author claimed that the missionaries “secretly stir[ed] up political disturbances” under the guise of religious propagation. He charged that while missionaries “educat[ed] Korean children and heal[ed] their diseases on the one hand,” on the other, they “foster[ed] trouble,” and their homes were those of “devils.”⁹⁵

The missionaries vehemently denied these charges. Calling them “scandalous and libelous,” the missionaries demanded and, not long after, received the Government-General’s official exoneration.⁹⁶ Though publicly vindicated, missionaries faced the still greater task of

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “The Evil Village Outside the West Gate,” March 17, 1919, *Osaka Ashi*.

⁹⁶ “Korean Independence Movement, Part VI.”

making sense of Christianity's connection to the political tumult. What exactly was the nature of the missionaries' connection to the Movement? How would one account for disproportionate participation of Christians in the Movement? What does this reveal about the interests and loyalties of the Korean Church?

First, to avoid any further controversy, missionaries unequivocally professed abstention from politics. Missionaries universally disavowed prior knowledge of the demonstrations and even pointed to the special precautions they took to avoid even the slightest suspicion of political involvement.⁹⁷ They stopped making itinerating journeys into the interior, and the Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission went so far as to advise missionaries to stop "carrying letters for their [Korean] friends from one place to another in the course of their work, lest they should be unwitting purveyors of propagandist literature."⁹⁸ The Executive Committee stated explicitly that the missionaries had "no idea of injecting [themselves] into the present political situation." Whether "Korea is granted independence or home rule," it continued, was "not a matter upon which [they] can make any representation."⁹⁹ Even their campaign against gendarme violence, the missionaries maintained, did not indicate a breach in political neutrality. They were simply interested in the "question of humanity."¹⁰⁰

On the surface, the missionaries appeared far more willing to discuss the issue of Korean Christians' involvement. They made no attempt to deny that "the Christian church [was] right in

⁹⁷ Henry N. Lampe, Letter to his father, March 5, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:15, PHS.

⁹⁸ Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission, "The Present Movement for Korean Independence in its Relation to the Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," April 24, 1919. PHS MF POS 155., 32.

⁹⁹ "An opinion of missionaries as to what changes are desirable in the existing laws and in the attitude of the government towards the Christian church and mission work in Korea."

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to the relatives and friends of the Chosen missionaries, June 30, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:15, PHS.

the midst of the Movement.”¹⁰¹ They readily recalled the large representation of Christians among the signatories of the Declaration; the “enthusiastic support” of mission school students; the involvement of important clergy; as well as the sheer number of Christian demonstrators.¹⁰² More tellingly, some missionaries even conceded general influences of the Korean Church. Missionaries remarked that Christianity (and Protestantism in particular) naturally produced an affinity for democracy. According to one missionary, Protestantism had “unconscious” “moral, intellectual, and idealistic” effects, inculcating “the rights of the individual, the value of initiative, the power of organized effort, the real meaning of brotherhood and co-operation.”¹⁰³ In addition, the organizational structure of Protestant denominations, as well as everyday church responsibilities, exposed clergy and congregants to democratic governance. Korean Christians themselves paid the salaries of church workers, oversaw the construction of churches, created networks of financial support for the poor, and spearheaded local evangelistic efforts.¹⁰⁴

These open admissions, however, belied problems that Korean Christian activism posed for missionaries. Speaking of the relationship between Christianity and democracy was hardly new or controversial. Addressing whether a more direct relationship existed between the Korean Church and the independence movement—that is, whether the Church had been politicized—posed a far more difficult task. Many missionaries responded by attempting to evade the question entirely. First, they stressed the national character of the Movement. Because the marches “spread to all parts of the country and among every class of the population,” there was nothing remarkable about the participation of Christians.¹⁰⁵ And since official church “organization and machinery” had not been used, it seemed unreasonable to shoulder blame on the Church at

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ J. Gordon Holdcroft, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 7, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

large.¹⁰⁶ Others noted that participation among Korean Christians was not even “universal.” Some pastors had attempted, albeit “with varying success,” to prevent their congregants from joining the demonstrations.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Despite their non-participation in the actual protests, missionaries played a singularly important role in raising awareness of the March First Movement. The wanton violence let loose on the demonstrators deeply appalled the missionary community, prompting them to marshal resources in the victims’ defense. They gave voice to the Koreans’ suffering and provided a countervailing narrative against Japanese propaganda. But while the humanitarian objectives of the missionaries’ accounts are clear, their views on the involvement of Christian community only call for further questions. In the eyes of the missionaries, what did it mean to “inject” oneself into the political sphere? What factors influenced their particular portrayal of Korean Christian activism? How do we account for the missionaries’ swift dichotomization of the Korean Christians’ religious and individual identities? In other words, how did missionaries define religion, politics, and the boundary between the two? These questions are beyond the scope of the March First documents alone. In order to address them, we must first understand how these questions are embedded in the historical trajectory of the missions-government relationship, as well as in the development of the missionaries’ religious and political discourse.

¹⁰⁶ Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission, “The present movement for Korean independence in its relation to the missionary work of the Presbyterian church (U.S.A.).”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

2. “Render unto Caesar”

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. -Matthew 10:16*¹⁰⁸

Missionaries’ own historical experience deeply informed their writings on the March First Movement. The delicate question of politics, for instance, had been a specter over missions since their very establishment. Missionaries engaged with political authorities as a matter of survival. However transcendent the missionaries’ goals may have been, they nonetheless toiled in the temporal realm. Building mission stations, churches, schools, and hospitals; itinerating in the countryside; publishing and disseminating religious tracts; and holding public gatherings all required deft navigation of the political environment. But while missionaries often courted the favor of ruling powers, they did not necessarily assent to a clear position of subordination. The boundaries demarcating what belonged to Caesar or to God, so to speak, were often ambiguous and open to contestation as the missionaries sought to defend against encroachments upon the religious sphere.¹⁰⁹ To fully understand the missionaries’ response to the March First Movement, we must first go back to trace the historical trajectory of the missions-state relationship, as well as the ways in which confrontations between the two took shape on the discursive plane.

¹⁰⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references henceforth will use the King James Version.

¹⁰⁹ The full verse reads: “And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.” Luke 20:25.

The Missionary Enterprise

The story of the Korea mission is inseparable from that of the nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement. The period between 1880 and 1930, often referred to as the “heyday” of missionary activity, saw a dramatic transformation in the character and scope of overseas missions. The number of missionaries sent abroad nearly doubled, from 15,000 to over 29,000, as did the amount of funding for their work, from approximately nineteen million dollars to over forty-one million. The national make-up of missions also changed significantly, as British predominance gave way to American influence. By 1928, Americans came to represent nearly forty-eight percent of all foreign missionaries.¹¹⁰ Missions shed its former obscurity, becoming an established fixture in America’s cultural and religious landscape.

One of the principal figures propelling this growing interest in foreign missions was Arthur T. Pierson. Ministering the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pierson was a prolific writer, a charismatic preacher, and eventually the editor-in-chief of the leading missionary periodical, *The Missionary Review of the World*. He also had close connections with some of the leading evangelicals of the day, including D. L. Moody, George Müller, A.J. Gordon, and James H. Brookes. In July 1886, Pierson received an urgent request from Moody to help lead a Bible conference in Northfield, Massachusetts for student leaders of the collegiate YMCA.¹¹¹ His primary responsibility was lecturing on biblical prophecy, but Pierson made his real impact speaking to students at a special evening session on the imperative of world missions. John R. Mott, later the head of the YMCA, described Pierson’s lecture as a “thrilling address,” “the

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Underwood, *Challenged Identities*, 26.

¹¹¹ Dana L. Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A. T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 145.

keynote which set many men to thinking and praying.”¹¹² Two weeks later, one hundred students (also known as the Mount Hermon Hundred) committed their lives to missions. They immediately began recruiting students at colleges and theological seminaries across the nation. In 1888, their efforts gave birth to the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), an organization that by 1910 enlisted over 5,000 students for world missions.¹¹³ Over two hundred of those students were Korea missionaries.¹¹⁴

The ideas that so galvanized the Mount Hermon Hundred came in part from *The Crisis of Missions*, a book Pierson had been completing when Moody invited him to the conference. On the surface, Pierson’s writings may appear no different from others in the genre. It describes the plight of the heathens, pagans, and Muslims in distant lands, as well as the biblical imperative to go “into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹¹⁵ The power of his message, however, drew largely from his reinterpretation of the Great Commission for the average Christian. Prior the 1880s, the prevailing view held that missionaries were “quite a separate class in the Christian ministry,” “distinctly called out...to consecrate their lives to the missionary work.”¹¹⁶ Pierson, in contrast, makes a forceful argument for its universal applicability. Not only was it the duty of “[e]very disciple” to “understand God’s plan for the evangelization of this world,”¹¹⁷ but support for missions was a defining characteristic of the “true discipl[e].”¹¹⁸

Robert Speer, another prominent proponent for missions, similarly remarked that “the burden of

¹¹² Ibid., 148.

¹¹³ Ibid., 149.

¹¹⁴ Sung-Deuk Oak, *Sources of Korean Christianity, 1832-1945* (Seoul: The Institute for Korean Church History, 2004), 500.

¹¹⁵ Mark 16:15, KJV

¹¹⁶ Stephen Livingstone Baldwin, *Foreign Missions of the Protestant Churches* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900), 41.

¹¹⁷ Arthur T. Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions: or, The Voice out of the Cloud* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1886), 23.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 325.

proof” now rested with each individual to demonstrate that “the circumstances in which God has placed [him or her] were meant by Him to keep [him or her] out of the foreign mission field.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, Pierson urged readers to seize the unique opportunity presented to the Church. Recent developments in the international politics opened unprecedented opportunities for missions, signaling providential favor.¹²⁰ It was now or never. God advanced in a “moving pillar” before their generation,¹²¹ those who “lag[ged] behind [would] be left behind.”¹²²

In addition to these emotional clarion calls, Pierson made powerful appeals to reason. In particular, he envisioned missionization as a distinctly quantifiable activity. Analyzing the state of missionary activity, Pierson gives the following assessment:

We may roughly estimate the souls that in Pagan, Moslem, Papal, and nominally Christian lands still need to be reached with a pure gospel at a thousand millions; and the whole number of missionary laborers, at thirty-five thousand. Could each of these carry on the work of evangelization, independently, each worker would have to care for nearly thirty thousand souls. As a matter of fact, more than twenty-five thousand of these laborers are unordained native assistants, fit only to aid trained workmen; so that we have not more than ten thousand missionaries, native and foreign, competent to conduct this work. Each of these must therefore assume an *average responsibility of one hundred thousand souls*; meanwhile, the total sum annually spent on foreign missions is about *ten millions of dollars*,--an allowance of *one cent a year for each soul of this thousand million!* [emphasis in original].¹²³

The heart of Pierson’s rhetoric lies in its cold calculability; the numbers speak for themselves.

There is a monumental quality to Pierson’s estimates—“a thousand millions” unsaved, “an average responsibility of one hundred thousand souls,” the pittance of but “one cent a year [spent] for each soul.” But more significantly, these figures function to rationalize the missionary endeavor. He transforms the once boundless “heathendom” with its “vast territories” into a single known numerical value and employs a simple calculation to unveil the pitiable state of foreign

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Underwood, 37.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹²¹ Ibid., 20.

¹²² Ibid., 27.

¹²³ Ibid., 321.

missions.¹²⁴ Moreover, Pierson also frames his call to action within the logic of this calculation. The problem of missions does not necessarily lie in the daunting size of task. However arbitrarily conceived, the number of unsaved souls remains constant in the text. Instead, the fate of missions hinges upon the only variable factor—the contribution of the Church. Though scathing in its critique of the Christian community’s “peril[ous]” “apathy,” this logic also empowers the reader.¹²⁵ It promises that if only the Church would “furnish men and money for this work,” “the evangelization of the world in this generation” could become a measurable, tangible reality.¹²⁶

Pierson also advocated that rational systematization be applied to the organization and practice of missions. He championed the idea of missionization as a veritable enterprise. Though disapproving of the materialism and spiritual shallowness that seemed to accompany America’s booming industries during the nineteenth century, Pierson was greatly impressed with the success and efficiency of their operations. Their undertakings were “colossal in capital, magnificent in plan, and world-wide in their extent.”¹²⁷ In other words, they provided the perfect model for world evangelization. Pointing out that even Nehemiah’s success in rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem resulted from “the perfection of his organization,” Pierson called for “[a] spirit of consecrated enterprise.” Divine will itself could be worked out through the rational “division of labor,” “co-operation” of workers under a single plan, and “concentration” of efforts in strategic locales. Thus through “the best and soundest business principles,” the Church had the potential to carry out the Great Commission with unprecedented speed and efficiency.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 311.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹²⁷ Pierson, 353.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.

These ideas became institutionalized in mission boards. In Arthur Judson Brown's words, the "sentimentalism in foreign missions" gave way to "a settled campaign."¹²⁹ Mission boards increasingly adopted empirical methods to carry out and evaluate the performance of missions. They "stud[ied] the broad principles of missions," gleaned lessons from missionary history, and "abandon[ed]" "defective" strategies in favor of "new ones which promise[d] better results."¹³⁰ Annual and quarterly reports from missionaries indicating changes in the number of converts, catechumens, native clergy, enrolled students, and patients also gave mission boards the data necessary to make informed decisions regarding funding and staff.¹³¹ A shift in the demographic makeup of the mission board also helped solidify these practices. The Presbyterian Church had invited lay input in missionary affairs since the establishment of the mission board in 1830, reserving ten of the twenty-one board positions for laymen. However, those filling the positions increasingly comprised of "bank presidents, successful merchants, railroad directors, great lawyers, [and] managers of large corporations," instilling a particular ethos to the manner in which missionary efforts was organized.¹³²

The Korea missionaries' lives and work were also deeply embedded in the rational machinery of the missionary enterprise. First, the system had determined their very appointment to Korea. The high cost of training, as well as acculturation to the host country (a process that often lasted two or three years) necessitated "rigorous" screening methods,¹³³ geographical placement based on greatest need, and life-time appointments.¹³⁴ And while all missionaries considered the evangelization of Korea as their ultimate goal, the need for efficient division of

¹²⁹ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Why and How of Missions* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1908), 59.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³³ Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, 67.

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Underwood, 99.

labor led to the separation of their specific fields of work into one of three categories: medical, educational, or evangelistic.¹³⁵

The need for efficiency also shaped missionaries' conversion strategies and methods for organizing native churches. Missionaries in Korea especially promoted the practices of self-propagation, self-support, and self-government. Known as the "Nevius Method," this strategy sought to ensure the long-term sustainability of Christianity by transforming it from an "exotic" foreign import to an "indigenous" entity.¹³⁶ Arthur Judson Brown, however, also promoted it for its sound pragmatism. Though the mission boards' coffers had grown to an unprecedented level, resources were not unlimited. Contrary to Pierson's idealism, he believed it would be "impossible" for Western churches to "send out and maintain enough missionaries" to reach the entire "the unevangelized world."¹³⁷ Employing native Christians, who not only "live[d] more economically" than missionaries, but also better understood the nuances of the country's cultural practices, presented the most viable option for large-scale missionization.¹³⁸

But despite their key roles in the enterprise of missions, Korea missionaries cannot be seen as mere cogs in the bureaucratic machine of missions. Some missionaries found the cold rationality undergirding missions unsettling at times. Samuel A. Moffett's article entitled, "Policy and Methods for the Evangelization of Korea," illustrates a different dimension of missions. He urged fellow missionaries:

Nothing should come in to prevent a close, intimate, loving contact with the people, a sympathetic entrance into their inner life, their ways of thinking, their weaknesses, prejudices, preferences, their trials and sorrows and spiritual struggles,--a real love and sympathy for them, not an abstract interest in them as so many heathen to be converted, baptized and reported upon as so much in the way of mission assets, but an unfeigned,

¹³⁵ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁶ Brown, *The Why and How of Foreign Missions*, 25.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 151.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 152.

living, personal touch and love and sympathy for individuals.¹³⁹

Moffett critiques the danger of dehumanization latent in the mundane, quotidian work of missions. Koreans, he reminded colleagues, were not merely objects of missionary activity. They were individuals of incalculable worth. Moreover, Moffett suggests that meticulously planned methods of evangelization are not effective in and of themselves. Rational strategies must never take precedence over the human element of their calling. Missionaries, above all, ought to employ “hand to hand, face to face, heart to heart dealing with individuals in a personal earnest way.”¹⁴⁰ Though it is difficult to tell the extent to which other missionaries, or even Moffett himself, put these words to practice, they do reveal the complexity of the missionaries’ positions even within the missionary enterprise. They negotiated their roles, shaping missionary activity on the ground according to their particular circumstances and perceptions of the Korean people.

The Politics of Missions

Protestant missionary efforts in Korea began relatively late compared to many other countries. By the time the Presbyterian Church commissioned Horace N. Allen as the first missionary to Korea in 1884, it had already established missions in Latin America, Syria, Iran, India, Siam, China, and Japan.¹⁴¹ There are several explanations for the belated entrance. First, the country itself was relatively unknown among Westerners. China and Japan had long captured the imagination of the Occident, but far fewer Westerners had even heard of Korea, let alone

¹³⁹ Samuel A. Moffett, “Policy and Methods for the Evangelization of Korea,” *Chinese Recorder* 37 (May 1906): 236-237.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁴¹ Paik, 93.

knew its location on a map.¹⁴² But more significantly, mission boards were keenly aware of the Korean government's historically antagonistic attitude toward both Western countries and Christianity.¹⁴³ Notorious as the "Hermit Kingdom," Korea did not sign a treaty with any Western power until 1882. In addition, the government had long perceived Catholic missionaries and native converts as threats to Confucian orthodoxy, subjecting them to harsh persecution from the beginning of the late eighteenth century.¹⁴⁴ During the Persecution of 1866 alone, more than eight thousand Catholics were executed.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, although the 1882 "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" gave America trade privileges and distinction as a "most favored nation," it was silent regarding religious proselytization.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Allen entered Korea not as a missionary, but as a physician to the American legation and introduced subsequent missionaries as representatives of charitable organizations.¹⁴⁷

Government opposition slowly gave way to a more favorable environment for missions. The law continued to forbid the proselytization of foreign religions, but the king and queen, came to see friendship with the missionaries as a way to strengthen their ties with the United States.¹⁴⁸ According to Lillias Underwood, a missionary who served as one of the queen's personal physicians, the royal couple saw America as a potential "ally and defender," or at the very least, a country that did not hold imperialistic designs on Korea.¹⁴⁹ Over time missionaries received tacit support for their work. They obtained permission to establish the first Western

¹⁴² Elizabeth Underwood, *Challenged Identities*, 46.

¹⁴³ Paik, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Eungi Kim, "A History of Christianity in Korea: From its Troubled Beginning to its Contemporary Success," *Korea Journal* 35 (Summer 1995), 36.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Paik., 69.

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Underwood, 65.

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Eungi Kim, "Political Insecurity, social chaos, religious void and the rise of Protestantism in late nineteenth-century Korea," *Social History* 26 (October 2001), 272.

¹⁴⁹ Lillias Underwood, *Fifteen Years Among the Top-Knots: Life in Korea* (New York: American Tract Society, 1904), 28.

hospital, official recognition for mission schools, and public esteem as “persons of privileged standing, akin to that of high-ranking government officials.”¹⁵⁰ In 1909, the government officially repealed the prohibitions against religious proselytization, promising non-interference and “[f]reedom of religious teaching” in registered mission schools.¹⁵¹

Missionaries indirectly helped secure this shift in attitude toward Christianity, going great lengths to secure the royal favor. Many contributed professional services, acting as court physicians, interpreters,¹⁵² and in exceptional cases, the King’s personal bodyguards and special diplomatic envoy to Washington.¹⁵³ Through these interactions, some missionaries also developed close personal relationships with the royal couple. As a favorite of the queen, Lillias Underwood often frequented the court. She affectionately recounted one such visit:

[O]ne day the queen asked why I had never brought [my son], expressed surprise that I considered an invitation necessary, and bade me bring him next day. I therefore took him to the palace, and no sooner had the coolies lowered my chair than the women, who were evidently on the watch for us, clutched him up and bore him away in triumph, I, his mother, knew not whither. . . . When I was called for a little later I found him with the royal party, the center of an admiring circle. . . . When we were ready to go, the king, to my amazement, actually knelt down in front of the baby, and with his own ‘jade’ fingers buttoned on the little coat and made a brave attempt to tie the cap strings, one of which, I blush to confess, in the unfamiliar tug was quite torn from its moorings.¹⁵⁴

Underwood’s anecdote presents an idyllic portrayal of the king and queen. They treated her young son (Horace H. Underwood) with incredible kindness and affection, even at the expense of court etiquette and standards of propriety. But more than simply revealing Lillias Underwood’s perception of the royal couple, this story reflects how she understood the relationship between the missionaries and the monarchy. Those who were part of the inner circle

¹⁵⁰ Kim, “Political Insecurity,” 272.

¹⁵¹ Harry A. Rhodes, ed., *History of the Korea Mission Presbyterian Church U.S.A., 1884-1934* (Seoul: YMCA Press, 1934), 497.

¹⁵² Kim, “Political Insecurity,” 272.

¹⁵³ Lillias Underwood, 156.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

of the court viewed their positions as exceptional and privileged.

Missionaries also made a point to publicly demonstrate their loyalty to the Korean monarchy. In 1886, the year King Kojong fled to the Russian legation, the missionaries organized a prayer meeting in celebration of his thirty-fourth birthday. As Lillias Underwood describes, her husband, Horace G. Underwood, believed it to be an opportune moment for Christians “to express their loyalty” while simultaneously “advertising Christianity more widely than ever before.”¹⁵⁵ He even wrote a hymn especially for the event, distributing thousands of copies throughout Seoul. Identifying the person of the king with the nation, the lyrics beseech God’s blessing for the monarchy and the Korean people:

For my dear country’s weal,
O God to Thee I pray,
Graciously hear. Without Thy mighty aid
Our land will low be laid.
Strengthen Thou this dear land,
Most gracious Lord.

Long may our great king live,
This is our prayer today
With one accord.
His precious body guard,
Keep it from every ill.
Heavenly Lord and King,
Grant him Thy grace.¹⁵⁶

The crowds’ singing created an exuberant atmosphere of patriotism. Not only had Underwood set the lyrics to the tune of “America,” but he organized the gathering in a large government building by the Independence Arch, the newly-constructed symbol of Korean strength and vitality.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 180-181.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 179.

A rapid series of political crises in Korea, however, challenged missionaries' political relationships. As Japan encroached upon Korea's sovereignty, supporting the monarchy became increasingly untenable and politically dangerous. The Portsmouth Treaty concluding the Russo-Japanese War in September 1905 recognized Japan's "paramount political, military and economical interests" in the Korean peninsula.¹⁵⁸ Soon thereafter, in November 1905, the Eulsa Treaty transformed Korea into a Japanese protectorate, bringing the country even further under Japan's influence. In July 1907, after an unsuccessful diplomatic mission to garner sympathy from representatives at the Second Hague Peace Convention, Emperor Kojong was forced to abdicate in favor of his son, Crown Prince Sunjong. And finally, in August 1910, the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty sounded the death knell for the Chosŏn Dynasty. After over five hundred years of rule, the dynasty fell, leaving Korea and the missionaries to the throes of colonial rule.

Some missionaries met these changes with considerable apprehension. The royal couple had given missionaries considerable freedom to carry out their work, and the fate of the mission under the new regime seemed uncertain. Moreover, missionaries sympathized with the Koreans' despair. Returning from a furlough shortly after the signing of the Eulsa Treaty, a teacher at Ewa Haktang wrote: "as I came again among a people I had learned to love and trust I found my first ministry was to be that of consolation."¹⁵⁹ Some missionaries also worried over the Koreans' welfare under colonial rule. An editorial published in the *Missionary Review of the World* in 1906 critiqued some of the regime's new policies, complaining of the "vexatious edicts" that regulated the minutiae of Koreans' lives, from length of tobacco pipes to the veiling of women; permitted soldiers to occupy houses and farms without compensation; and allowed forced

¹⁵⁸ "Treaty of Portsmouth," <http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Portsmouth> (accessed Jan. 31, 2011).

¹⁵⁹ J.O. Paine, "Back at Ewa Haktang," *Korea Mission Field* 2 (July 1906): 179.

labor.¹⁶⁰ Some missionaries feared that such laws would cause congregants to become “too distracted” to “give as much attention as usual to religion.”¹⁶¹

The majority of the missionaries, however, adapted and sought ways to advance their work under the changed circumstances. Many tried to be optimistic, emphasizing the potential for new opportunities under colonial rule. One Korea missionary remarked, “In the providence of God may it not be that Japanese rule is to open a still wider door of entrance and to render more stable the conditions under which that Church is to grow?”¹⁶² In fact, some missionaries depicted the political tumults as especially favorable moments to promote Christianity. In an editorial published just several years after the annexation, the author focuses his discussion on the Koreans’ sense of bereavement. He recounts how the people lost “everything [they] hold dear”—their “name,” “government,” “emperor,” and “voice” before the international community. “Korea as a nation,” he writes, is “dead.”¹⁶³ But rather than simply sympathizing with the Koreans or critiquing the new regime, the author details these “humiliation[s]” in great length to create a sense of anticipation for the work of God. The author maintained that the Koreans’ political defeats opened a unique “opportunity to proclaim Jesus Christ and his kingdom.” Missionaries, entering “the depths of...despair” “like an angel of light,”¹⁶⁴ would provide the Koreans a “King to the kingless,” “home to the homeless,” and “hope to the hopeless.”¹⁶⁵

More significantly, many missionaries severed ties with the *ancien régime* and expressed enthusiasm for Japanese rule. Their writings show a dramatic shift in tone regarding the Korean monarchy, almost as though missionaries suffered from a sort of collective amnesia. The

¹⁶⁰ “Signs of the Times,” *Missionary Review of the World* 19 (June 1906), 4-5.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶² C.C. Vinton, “To-day in Korean Missions,” *Missionary Review of the World* 19 (June 1906), 574.

¹⁶³ “Korea’s Humiliation and Christianity’s Opportunity,” *Missionary Voice* (April 1913), 238.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

formerly romanticized portrayals of the royal couple gave way to sharp critiques. In fact, references to the former government came to serve almost exclusively as a foil to the benefits of colonial rule. According to Arthur Judson Brown, while Emperor Kojong was a “man of flabby will and of hopeless incompetence as a ruler,”¹⁶⁶ Resident-General Itō Hirobumi was a “remarkable man,” a “foremost statesman,” “one of the very wisest and most progressive of the public men of Japan.”¹⁶⁷ Moreover, many lauded the Japanese government as a midwife of modernity. One missionary remarked:

Seoul was a city of officials, and office-seekers, and hangers-on. To-day it is a city of students, business bustle, and enterprise. What Korea could not do before, on her own initiative, and would not do on the advice of her friends, is now being done for her, before her very eyes, in her own land, and by a neighbor. They refused to lead. They now have the privilege of following.¹⁶⁸

Steeped in the patronizing attitude of Kipling’s “white man’s burden,” this comment captures many missionaries’ desire to demonstrate to the Western world, and perhaps to themselves as well, the benevolence and progressiveness of the new order.

The photographs accompanying missionaries’ writings illustrate perhaps even more powerfully the missionaries’ early support for Japan’s *mission civilisatrice*. Images of the old Korea stand in jarring juxtaposition to the new. Many depictions of life under the old regime emphasize its squalor, crowding, and general backwardness. Thatch-roofed houses and the pitiful plight of women typically symbolized the “vanished days of old Korea” (Figures 7 and 8). Conversely, images of Western-style buildings, as well as the transformation of Korean women into empowered, intelligent, and properly coiffed and dressed individuals declared Japan’s triumphant modernity (Figures 9, 10, and 11). Not unfamiliar with the common marriage of

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Mastery of the Far East*, 197.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

¹⁶⁸ “The Japanese in Korea,” *Missionary Review of the World* 20 (January 1907), 940.

imperialism and missions, many Korea missionaries praised Japan's "good work" as tangible aids to "the progress of the Gospel" and "the extension of Christ's kingdom."¹⁶⁹

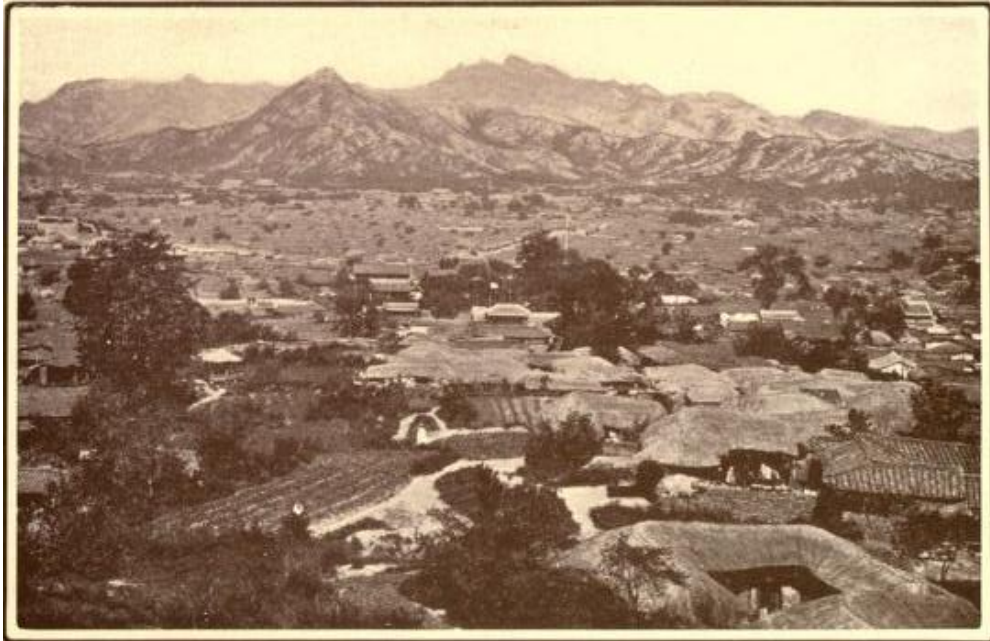


Figure 7: View of Seoul.
(Source: *Fifteen Years Among the Top-Knots*, xx.)



Figure 8: Korean Women Washing Clothes, Seoul.
(Source: *The Mastery of the Far East*, 66.)

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.



Figure 9: Building Design, Offices of the Government-General, Seoul
(Source: *The Mastery of the Far East*, 366.)



Figure 10: Post Office, Seoul
(Source: *The Mastery of the Far East*, 366.)

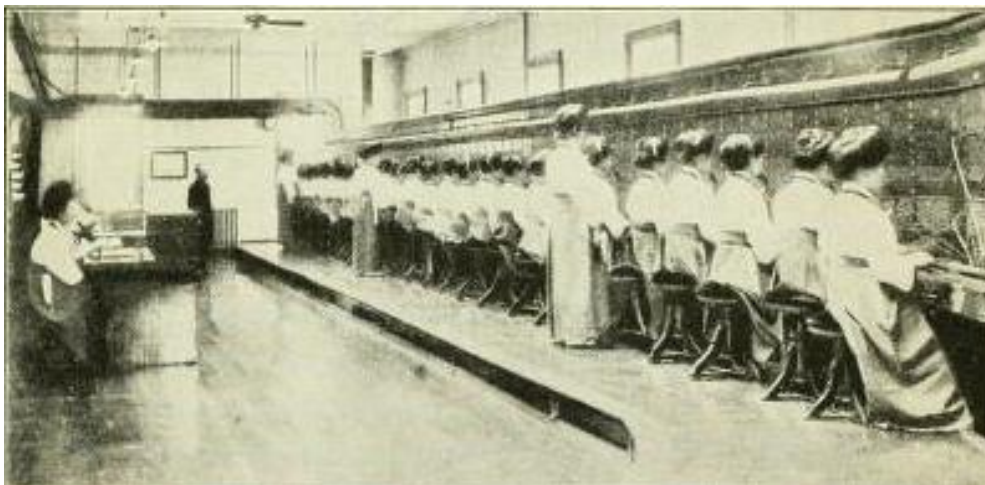


Figure 11: Korean Women Working at Post Office, Seoul
(Source: *The Mastery of the Far East*, 366.)

The Conspiracy Case

Despite the missionaries' glowing public statements about the colonial regime, their relationship soon grew tense. In September 1911, police officers began arresting large numbers of Koreans in Sŏnch'ŏn county, the provincial center of North P'yongan. The arrests quickly spread to the surrounding areas, and by the early winter of 1912, approximately 700 were imprisoned.¹⁷⁰ According to the authorities, a group of conspirators had attempted to assassinate Governor-General Terauchi as he passed through the railroad station in December 1910. Considering the high-profile assassinations carried out by Korean nationalists in the two preceding years, killing Durham Stevens, an American diplomatic advisor to the colonial government, and Resident-General Itō, the charge was serious indeed. But more alarming for the missionaries, accusations placed Korean Christians at the heart of the controversy. Not only were a disproportionate number of Christians implicated (135 of the 157 people brought to trial were Christians), but those arrested also included some of the most prominent pastors, elders, and teachers.¹⁷¹ Even worse still, George S. McCune, the missionary in charge of the Hugh O'Neill Jr. Academy in Sŏnch'ŏn, was also arrested as a "prime mover" of the conspiracy.¹⁷² In June 1912, 105 men were convicted of treason.

Missionaries reacted to the accusations with disbelief. Though they admitted to the patriotic sentiments held by some of the students, missionaries unequivocally argued for the Korean Christians' innocence. Regardless of the Koreans' political sympathies, an assassination attempt was not a "patriotic endeavor" but rather, "murder."¹⁷³ Perhaps "half Christians"¹⁷⁴ or

¹⁷⁰ Wells, 76.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² "The Korean Conspiracy Trial: Full Report of the Proceedings," *Japan Chronicle* (Kobe: Office of the 'Japan Chronicle,' 1912), 17-18.

¹⁷³ W.O. Johnson, "Letter from Severance Hospital, March 18, 1912," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

“ex-Roman Catholics,” as in the cases of Durham Stevens and Prince Itō, may have been willing to commit such sins, but true Christians were simply “not capable” of doing so.¹⁷⁵ From the perspective of the missionaries, the police inexplicably arrested many of the “best Christians”—“men of spiritual power and consecration to God,” “men who have learned to love their enemies.”¹⁷⁶ As for McCune, his colleagues found it “humiliating...that anybody in the Japanese Empire could have believed... that the Christian missionaries could be guilty of conspiracy to kill anybody.”¹⁷⁷ The accusations that he delivered an “inflammatory address,” supplied revolvers, and helped the conspirators identify the Governor-General at the railroad platform seemed preposterous.¹⁷⁸

The police officers’ use of torture to extract confessions further discredited the charges held against Korean Christians. Through conversations with released prisoners, missionaries learned of the application of “diabolically ingenious” methods. According to W. O. Johnson, a missionary doctor at Severance Hospital, many prisoners were “hung up from the ceiling on a high ring on the wall, head downwards by ropes tied around the ankles or more commonly by ropes tied around the thumbs and arm just below the shoulders.” Suspended in these positions, they would be beaten, burned with hot irons, and interrogated. During this “terrifying” process, a police officer would periodically say to the prisoner, ““Now did you not [redacted] so and so? Didn’t you tell that man so and so? If you confess and say, yes, I’ll have you taken down and make you comfortable at once.””¹⁷⁹ Unable to withstand the pain, many prisoners signed self-

¹⁷⁴ “Copy No. 2,” Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁷⁵ W.O. Johnson, Letter from Severance Hospital, March 18, 1912,” Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁷⁶ “Copy No. 2.”

¹⁷⁷ William N. Blair, *Gold in Korea* (Topeka: Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1957), 77.

¹⁷⁸ “The Korean Conspiracy Trial: Full Report of the Proceedings,” *Japan Chronicle* (Kobe: Office of the ‘Japan Chronicle,’ 1912), 17-18.

¹⁷⁹ W.O. Johnson, Letter from Severance Hospital, March 18, 1912, Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

incriminating statements. Johnson continues, recounting the case of Kil Chinyŏng, the son of the renowned pastor Kil Sŏnju:

Pastor Kil's son was kept for nearly three months at Police Headquarters and tortured many times. He finally told them 'Now I am all worn out, my flesh is too weak I cannot endure it any longer. I have as yet told only the truth and confessed to no sin. But from hence-forth I am going to say 'yes' to everything you ask me and so escape further pain. I shall confess to every question you ask me.'¹⁸⁰

After five weeks of torture, Kil Chinyŏng eventually died of his wounds. Those who survived, however, unanimously denied their confessions in court.

The unwarranted violence against Koreans elicited deep compassion from the missionaries. In the words of one, their hearts "ache[d]" to think of the "suffering" of their "brothers beloved."¹⁸¹ But despite their sympathy for the Koreans' plight, many found it difficult to come to their aid. Prisoners were forbidden from seeing or communicating with anyone from the outside, and missionaries only rarely managed to obtain permission to deliver food and clothing.¹⁸² Frustrated with their own sense of powerlessness, missionaries tried to marshal the influence and resources of others. They searched (in vain) for diplomatic recourse, corresponded with the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference, and appealed to the mission board and their home churches about the unfolding events. Some of these missives came to the attention of influential lay leaders. For instance, Charles Eliot, the celebrated president of Harvard University, personally travelled to Korea to observe the legal proceedings.¹⁸³ In October 1912, the mission boards operating in Korea called a special conference in New York to discuss the case, inviting many distinguished guests like: Seth Low, a former mayor of New York City; John W. Foster, a former Secretary of State; Arthur Hadley, the president of Yale University; and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ "Copy No.1," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁸² "Copy No. 28," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁸³ Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea*, 123.

James Brown Scott, a legal advisor to the American representatives at the Hague Peace Conference.¹⁸⁴

At the close of the conference, representatives drafted a policy paper outlining recommendations for the appropriate course of action in Korea. But instead of launching a call to action, the leaders stressed caution and patience. The memo opposed entangling the U.S. government in the internal affairs of a foreign country; suggested that Korea missionaries cultivate stronger ties with Japanese Christians; encouraged greater communication between missionaries and Japanese authorities; and discouraged any action that may cause “unnecessary embarrassment” to the government. Indeed, there was but one single mention of the Koreans’ suffering. Moreover, reluctant to mount an open critique of the colonial regime, the author of the memo merely suggests that the first trial convicting 105 Koreans “did not do justice to the real spirit and purpose of the Japanese Government and people” and expresses “confidence” that the government will “remed[y]” “any injustice that may have been committed.”¹⁸⁵ For the lay and mission board leaders, the Conspiracy Case posed a threat first and foremost to the relationship between the newly-established colonial power and the missionary body. Anxious to safeguard the future of the Korea mission, conference members urged cooperation and compromise.

While their contacts in America deliberated, missionaries also directly lobbied Japanese government officials. In many respects, missionaries’ letters paralleled the sentiments put forth in the conference. Deferent in tone, the letters make prolific statements of loyalty to the state, sympathize with the difficulties of governing a new colony, and praise the regime’s success in bringing about social and economic progress to Korea.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, missionaries also treaded

¹⁸⁴ “Minutes of the Confidential Conference on the Situation in Korea at the Aldine Club, New York, October 11, 1912,” Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 8. 1:4, BTS.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ “Copy No. 8,” Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

carefully on the subject of Koreans' suffering. They shifted direct culpability away from the government, blaming "rumors" for terrorizing Koreans and used the passive voice to describe how "[p]eople were thrown into the depths of despondency."¹⁸⁷ Upon receiving a copy of A.M. Sharrocks' letter to Komatsu Midori, the Director of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs in Seoul, Arthur Judson Brown lauded its "courteous," "temperate, dignified and thoroughly respectful language."¹⁸⁸ In fact, he was so impressed with the propriety of the letter that he sent a copy to the Japanese *Chargé d'Affaires* in Washington, D.C. as representative of the missionaries' views on the Conspiracy Case.

But more than mere tokens of respect or efforts to curry the favor of the government, the missionaries' honeyed words were also highly strategic. Contrary to their avowed intention to simply "throw some light on the problem," missionaries used their letters to advocate on behalf of imprisoned Koreans.¹⁸⁹ Beginning the letters with professions of loyalty was necessary not only to open a discussion of this sensitive, but also to make the authors appear less biased when presenting the Koreans' cases. More significantly, the fawning words served as subtle vehicles for critique. Sharrocks describes the Koreans' understanding of the Conspiracy Case as follows:

[T]he people have thought of all sorts of surmises and of course these pass about as rumors... As many of those arrested here have been Christians, the saying has gone out that it is intentional persecution of the Church. 'The Japanese don't like the church and want to kill it.'¹⁹⁰

By categorizing the statements as "rumors," Sharrocks both shields and confronts the government. On the one hand, it gives officials the benefit of the doubt. But on the other, it allows Sharrocks to voice vehement critique without fear of reprisal.

¹⁸⁷ A.M. Sharrocks, Letter to Mr. Komatsu, Dec. 16, 1911, Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁸⁸ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to the Korea Mission, Feb. 19, 1912, Record Group 140, 16:10, PHS.

¹⁸⁹ A.M. Sharrocks, Letter to Mr. Komatsu, Dec. 16, 1911, Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

If activism characterizes missionaries' correspondences with government officials, a sense of perplexity marked letters circulated within the missionary community. They struggled to make sense of the affair, as well as what it portended for the fate of Korean Christianity. Considering the weak evidence for any assassination plot, why did the accusations emerge? More importantly, why did the police target the Church? Was it, as the Koreans believed, a persecution of Christians? In Arthur Judson Brown's view, the case did not reflect a systemic antagonism toward Christianity but simply the misconduct of "hostile and overzealous police."¹⁹¹ As evidence, he cited correspondences and meetings with sympathetic Japanese elite, and more importantly, noted that churches in Japan faced little hostility from the government. G.W. Fulton, a missionary stationed in Japan, was similarly reluctant to shoulder blame on the Government-General. In fact, he held the Korea missionaries themselves responsible for the debacle. The missionaries held too great an influence over the Koreans, and the government saw them as a "disturbing element in Japanese sovereignty." In his words, the missionaries were like "an unwonted lover coming into the family to monopolize the affections of a wife only too ready to turn against her husband."¹⁹² According to these views, the solution was straightforward; in the future, the missionary body had to demonstrate more clearly its complete loyalty to Japan.¹⁹³

But for many Korea missionaries, the answer was not so simple. The various explanations did not quell their lingering anxieties about the government's true attitude toward the mission. Considering the enormous costs wrought by the Conspiracy Case, missionaries could not help but wonder whether the harm was intentional. First, the wholesale arrest of students and teachers brought mission schools to a standstill. Recalling a law prohibiting any ex-convict from working as teachers, one missionary feared that the losses for educational work

¹⁹¹ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 572.

¹⁹² G.W. Fulton, Extract from letter to Mr. Speer, Sept. 6, 1912, Record Group 140, 16:10, PHS.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

would be irretrievable.¹⁹⁴ In addition, the imprisonment of Church's best leaders threatened the self-propagation of Christianity, the primary model of evangelization in Korea.¹⁹⁵ One missionary lamented, "Some of my work is being so badly crippled I don't know when it will get on a self-supporting basis again."¹⁹⁶ More tellingly, many missionaries began to interpret the Conspiracy Case as a part of a broader narrative of tension between the missions and the state. They found the affair eerily similar to the government's attempt to integrate Korean churches into the state-sponsored Congregational Church,¹⁹⁷ compelling Christians to bow to the Japanese Emperor's portrait,¹⁹⁸ and officials' general disrespect toward the Christian Sabbath.¹⁹⁹

The Conspiracy Case also began to hint at a discursive contestation between the missionaries and the Government-General. Among the several sensational charges held against George McCune, one in particular held the attention of the officials and the missionary community. According to the procurator, McCune radicalized his students by recounting an Old Testament narrative of "a weak man killing a mighty warrior"—the story of David and Goliath. The treason was obvious. David, the "brave man," clearly symbolized Korea and Goliath, Japan.²⁰⁰ The students could not have been but incited to rebellion. McCune adamantly denied any such intent, claiming that the story was purely spiritual and without political consequence. But in asserting the religious nature of the biblical story, McCune did not merely correct a

¹⁹⁴ "Copy No.1," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁹⁵ "Copy No. 2," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ In 1911, the Japan Congregational Church began sending missionaries to Korea. While it had originally confined its activities to Japanese residents in the peninsula, it soon expanded its work to include native Koreans as well. Not only did the Congregational Church support colonial rule, but it received special privileges from the government. Missionaries feared that the state ultimately sought to replace native Korean churches with those affiliated with the Congregational Church. See also, Takayoshi Matsuo and S. Takiguchi, "Japanese Protestants in Korea, Part One: The Missionary Activity of the Japan Congregational Church in Korea," *Modern Asian Studies* 13 (1979).

¹⁹⁸ "Copy No. 10," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

¹⁹⁹ "Copy No. 25," Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

²⁰⁰ "The Korean Conspiracy Trial: Full Report of the Proceedings," 18.

misreading on the part of the officials.²⁰¹ He also implicitly challenged the government's very participation in scriptural interpretation. Agents of the state "unfamiliar with Christian terminology" had no right to engage, let alone exercise dominance in religious affairs.²⁰²

The Conspiracy Case ended in considerable embarrassment for the colonial government. Not only did officials never find a single murder weapon, but international pressure made it difficult for the original court ruling to stand.²⁰³ In the words of one missionary, government procurators made a "travesty" of the legal proceedings,²⁰⁴ prompting many to question whether any conspiracy had ever existed in the first place.²⁰⁵ In 1913, ninety-nine of the original 105 convicted persons were acquitted, and in 1915, the remaining six received official pardons. Many observers saw the conclusion of the Conspiracy Case as a triumph for justice. According to Arthur Judson Brown, the conclusion of the case "cleared the air considerably." It taught "the Japanese that the missionaries were not hostile to Japanese rule," while simultaneously "emphasiz[ing] to the missionaries the necessity for special care in their dealings with officials."²⁰⁶ For many missionaries, however, the Conspiracy Case came to represent the first in a long series of strained interactions with the government.

Educational Controversy

With the memory of the Conspiracy Case still vivid in people's minds, the government again antagonized the missionary community. The Government-General began enacting a series

²⁰¹ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 569.

²⁰² Ibid., 569.

²⁰³ Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea*, 121.

²⁰⁴ Wells, *New God, New Nation*, 76.

²⁰⁵ Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea*, 124.

²⁰⁶ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 573.

of laws affecting virtually every sphere of missionary activity. The Regulations for Medical Practice (1913) specified onerous standards for doctors and hospital facilities,²⁰⁷ and the Regulations for Religious Propagation (1915) subjected the minutiae of proselytizing activity to state approval.²⁰⁸ But most vexing to missionaries, the government promulgated the Revisions in Regulations for Private Schools (1915). The new laws mandated that all teachers undertake Japanese language study, that schools “posses[s]” “estates sufficient for its establishment and maintenance,”²⁰⁹ and that even private missionary schools cease “religious teaching or ceremonies.”²¹⁰ Indeed, while each regulation placed new burdens on missionary work, the educational ordinances emerged as the center of a new controversy between the missionaries and the authorities.

The colonial regime ostensibly had but benevolent motives for the educational reforms. In the words of Governor-General Terauchi, the “welfare of a state” and the “advance[ment]” of a civilization depended on the “quality of [its] individuals.”²¹¹ The development of “knowledge, abilities, virtues and character,” therefore, was of paramount importance to the state, necessitating “fixed” and standardized policies.²¹² Requiring teachers to learn Japanese and carry out instruction in the language would help “mak[e] Koreans loyal and good subjects of the Empire”; mandating that schools have “sufficient funds” ensured that the schools would be “adequately equipped”; and removing religious elements from private schools would promote a

²⁰⁷ Government General of Chosen, *Annual Report on Administration of Chosen, 1914/15-1915/16* (Seoul, 1916),

²⁰⁸ “Regulations for Religious Propagation,” MF POS 103, PHS.

²⁰⁹ Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea* (New York: International Press, 1926), 196.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

²¹¹ Terauchi Masatake, “Instruction by the Governor-General to Local Authorities,” MF POS 103, PHS.

²¹² *Ibid.*

“uniform and complete education” across the country. And as a gesture of its magnanimity, the government would even grant a ten-year grace period to put these policies into practice.²¹³

The government may have recognized early on the religious ban’s potential to fuel controversy. Preemptively addressing criticism, officials provided additional justifications couched in the language of Western liberalism. Officials often appealed to the Enlightenment principles of secularism, even explaining the educational reforms using the language of the American Constitution’s Establishment Clause. According to Terauchi, the principle driving the policies had long been established “to keep education independent from religion.”²¹⁴ The new policy was just as timeless, and no less legitimate, than the American “separation of church and state.” Lastly, the regime presented itself as the defender of pluralism. In an editorial from the *Seoul Press*, the author mused,

Now let us suppose that Japan...adopted any one sect of Buddhism as the state religion and caused it to be taught in the schools. In such case, not only students belonging to other sects of Buddhism but also those following different Christian denominations would find themselves in an extremely unhappy plight.²¹⁵

He argues that the regulation does not encroach upon religious organizations, but rather secures the interests and freedoms of each in a multi-confessional society. The “complete separation of education and religion” served to enable individuals to “freely receive education and as freely believe in the religion of their own choice, allowing neither of the two to interfere with and control the other.”²¹⁶

As the government anticipated, many missionaries balked at the educational ordinances. On the most basic level, the educational reform posed significant hardships on missionaries. Even the least onerous of the regulations—learning Japanese—was no simple task. Missionaries

²¹³ Terauchi, “Instruction by the Governor-General to Local Authorities.”

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ “*Seoul Press* article,” 3 April 1916, MF POS 103, PHS.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

toiled for many years to master Korean, and studying another language (especially one with three different scripts) would be a tremendous undertaking and a distraction from their many other responsibilities. The mandate for “sufficient funds” also posed several problems. First, missionary schools often did not have very stable sources of income. While Korean churches supported primary schools, funding for secondary education largely came from Western benefactors. As Horace H. Underwood writes, the government’s ability to “deny a charter to institutions without endowment” placed missionary schools in a precarious position.²¹⁷ Moreover, the ban on religious education threatened to further exacerbate their plight. As Arthur Judson Brown explained, not only did American churches “firmly believe that religious teaching [was] an integral and indispensable part of a sound education,” but they did not “deem it their duty to expend money on schools” that did not preach “the name of Christ.”²¹⁸ If missionaries conformed to the ban on religious education, they could expect sizable, if not debilitating, reductions in funding. Lastly, because the grace period applied only to already-licensed schools, it represented little more than a thinly-veiled ultimatum. Schools operating without permits or with pending applications faced the immediate choice of “organiz[ing] or reorganize[ing] in conformity to the new ruling or clos[ing] at once.”²¹⁹

Though significant, these grievances only hinted at what was at stake for the missionary community. Missionaries had praised and welcomed the colonial government’s civilizing mission, but their understanding of educational work actually aligned closely with those of the home churches. They were not interested in education for its own sake. Samuel A. Moffett put plainly, “Reformation is not redemption. Salvation from sin, not mere moral reformation, is the essence of the Gospel message. Civilization is not Christianity... Education is not

²¹⁷ Horace H. Underwood, 197.

²¹⁸ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to Midori Komatsu, June 1, 1915, MF POS 103, PHS.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 198.

regeneration.”²²⁰ Missionaries engaged in educational work for the winning of souls. According to one missionary, the goals of Christian education were threefold: “to train native helpers,” “to bring the non-Christian youth of the community under systematic religious influences,” and “to assist in the development of self-supporting and self-propagating churches.”²²¹ Just as education formed the crux of the colonial agenda, it held an almost existential importance for the missionary enterprise. In Horace H. Underwood’s words, the “very life of the future church” hung in the balance.²²²

Making matters worse, many of the missionaries doubted whether the government actually even believed in the “fundamental principle[s]” that it so forcefully propounded.²²³ For instance, William M. Baird, the president of the Sungsil Academy in P’yŏngyang, complained of the regulations’ double standards. While forbidding Christian instruction, officials simultaneously maintained a textbook on morality promoting “the duty of ancestral worship and emperor worship,”²²⁴ acts “universally regard[ed]” as religious.²²⁵ Moreover, private schools in Japan proper operated under wholly different rules than in Korea. According to Kajinasuke Ibuka, the president of a Christian academy in Tokyo, not only were they permitted to include religious instruction, but the distinction between public and private schools was “less than nominal.”²²⁶ For missionaries, the Government-General’s language of Western liberalism rang hollow and held little weight.

Moreover, the government’s argument for secularism posed greater problems than simple insincerity. Missionaries were keenly aware of its potential for coercion. On the surface,

²²⁰ Samuel A. Moffett, “Policies and Methods for the Evangelization of Korea,” 289.

²²¹ J. F. Goucher, “Missions and Education,” *Gospel in all Lands* 26 (August 1901), 314.

²²² Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea*, 201.

²²³ Terauchi, “Instruction by the Governor-General to Local Authorities.”

²²⁴ William M. Baird, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, July 6, 1915, MF POS 103, PHS.

²²⁵ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 600.

²²⁶ Kajinasuke Ibuka, “Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, 25 November 1915,” MF POS 103, PHS.

secularism merely purported to create separate spheres for religion and the state. Colonial officials argued that the “clear” “demarcation between the two forces” would prevent either from “infring[ing] the domain of the other.”²²⁷ The missionaries understood, however, that the boundaries between the two were not natural or self-evident, but rather unilaterally devised by the state. According to Brown, the government “narrow[ly] and artificial[ly]” dictated the meanings of the secular and the religious, the public and the private.²²⁸ By demanding that missionaries stay in “their proper sphere of religious propagation” and leave “education entirely in the hands of the government,” the government relegated missionaries to a subordinate and marginalized position.²²⁹

As in the Conspiracy Case, the missionary community did not passively accept the government’s aggression. Brown remarked in an uncharacteristically defiant tone:

But the secularization of our mission schools is precisely what we wish to avoid, and ‘confusing’ instruction in religion with the ‘work of the school’ so that ‘it would be difficult to distinguish this from the work of the school’ is precisely what we have done and wish to continue to do.²³⁰

But even more than statements of non-compliance, missionaries challenged the government’s discursive maneuvers with assertions of their own. First, they rejected the state’s defense of negative freedoms. According to Brown, officials need not demand individuals’ freedom from religious coercion, for “[m]issionaries could not if they would force any one to be a Christian and they would not if they could.” Additionally, the government did not take measures for civil society’s freedom from the violence of “[inter]religious quarrels,”²³¹ for despite the nature of their occupation, missionaries did not “have the slightest objection” to the teaching of Buddhism

²²⁷ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to Midori Komatsu, June 1, 1915, MF POS 103, PHS.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ “*Seoul Press* article,” 3 April 1916, MF POS 103, PHS.

²³⁰ Arthur Judson Brown, “Japanese Nationalism and Mission Schools in Chosen,” *International Review of Missions* (1916), 75.

²³¹ “*Seoul Press* article,” 3 April 1916, MF POS 103, PHS.

in other private institutions.²³² Responding to the government's discursive tactic, missionaries pushed their own cause in the name of positive freedoms. Brown argued that educational freedom entailed religious instruction, and religious freedom, the liberty to run its own schools.²³³

Ultimately, Presbyterian missionaries rebuffed the demands of the Government-General. Although the Methodist missions made a compromise, transferring chapel services to other buildings and churches and religious instructions from the schools to other buildings and religious instruction to voluntary classes outside the normal academic schedule, Presbyterian missionaries flatly refused.²³⁴ The controversy was a matter of principle. As Horace H. Underwood describes, any compromise would suggest that the issue was not indeed a "question of conscience."²³⁵ Rather than conforming to the new regulations, Presbyterian missionaries chose to shut down the Presbyterian Academy for Boys and the Southern Presbyterian Academy for Girls, two fast-growing schools in Sŏnch'ŏn that had been awaiting their permits. More tellingly, missionaries also co-opted the grace period for their own advantage. They used the extension not to reorganize licensed schools as demanded by the government, but to wait for the administration's change of heart.

Conclusion

Many missionaries pointed to their singular interest in spiritual matters as evidence for their complete detachment from politics. But as we see in this chapter, it was precisely their deep

²³² Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to Midori Komatsu, June 1, 1915, MF POS 103, PHS.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea*, 203.

²³⁵ Ibid., 202.

commitment to their work and their particular sense of urgency to evangelize the world that drew them to interact with political actors. The tenuousness of the missionaries' position demanded that they deftly maneuver relationships with the powerful. Simultaneously, as missionaries perceived increasingly aggressive government encroachment upon the religious sphere, they vigorously defended their interests. We will revisit these themes in the next chapter as we examine the discursive tactics undergirding missionaries' writings on the March First Movement.

3. Discursive Boundaries

*The true position of the missionaries is probably more of a matter of discussion over the nation than ever before and all to the good of the cause we represent.*²³⁶

—Herbert E. Blair

During the March First Movement, references to the Conspiracy Case and the Educational Controversy emerged frequently in the missionaries' writings. On the most basic level, making parallels with these familiar events enabled missionaries to help readers more clearly understand the events transpiring in Korea. The gendarmes' cruel treatment of demonstrators was reminiscent of the torture inflicted on imprisoned Koreans, and the harsh treatment of Christian demonstrators little different from the targeted arrests of Korean Christians. However, the missionaries also perceived deeper connections between the Movement and the preceding conflicts. In their eyes, all three incidents resulted from the same underlying cause—military rule. Since annexation, the Government-General viewed Korea as an “arrow pointed at the heart of Japan” and treated it accordingly.²³⁷ Seeking to secure unchallenged authority over the colony, it carried out a policy of “cultural assimilation” that assailed the Koreans' language, customs, and national history.²³⁸ To the missionaries' great alarm, the Church fell straight onto the regime's marching path. With its connections to foreigners and largely autonomous organization, the Korean Church challenged the regime's vision of total

²³⁶ Herbert E. Blair, Letter to his father, April 30, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

²³⁷ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 153.

²³⁸ Shin Yong-ha, *Formation and Development of Modern Korean Nationalism* (Seoul: Dae Kwang Munwhasa, 1990), 367.

control.²³⁹ In the missionaries' eyes, the Government-General used incidents like the Conspiracy Case, the Educational Controversy, and the March First Movement as displays of power to a stubbornly unassimilated organization.

In chapter one, I discussed the role that missionaries played in a key moment in Korean history; in this chapter, I re-examine the March First documents from the vantage point of the missionaries. Without a doubt, the missionaries' primary objective during the movement and its bloody aftermath was to find a way to put an end to the gendarme atrocities. But as missionaries spoke up for Koreans, they also found ways to address their own steadily intensifying anxieties about the state. In their writings, the missionaries responded against the government's increasing hostility toward their labors, as well as the more abstract, subtle aggression of secularization. In fact, two of the more perplexing aspects of the missionaries' narratives—their portrayal of Korean Christians and their professions of neutrality—not only become clearer when examined through this lens, but they also serve to illustrate how missionaries resisted the colonial regime in the discursive plane. As we began to see in the previous chapter, missionaries challenged the seemingly fixed boundaries demarcating religion and politics to defend their interests and assert a greater place in the public sphere.

²³⁹ In one letter, missionaries excerpted an article published in the *Japan Chronicle* that illustrates this idea: "But a creed which is independent of the state, which is private obligation on individuals, which does not invite policemen to its meetings, which involves the inconvenience of the white man being scattered throughout the land, witnessing things that are not for publication but only for practice,--why, in a land where the gendarme is the personification of paternal benevolence and the police inspector a deity, such a creed does not properly fit into the scheme of things." "Letter to Boards Having Mission Work in Korea," MF POS 103, PHS.

“For it is Written”

Many Korea missionaries came of age during the contentious debates that began in the late nineteenth century among theological liberals (modernists) and conservatives. The two groups contested a central question regarding scriptural interpretation: what exactly did the Bible represent? While modernists held that the Bible represented a historical model of religious experience, not a record of dogma to be taken literally,²⁴⁰ conservatives staunchly argued that it was indeed the infallible word of God.²⁴¹ For the latter, their very religious identity hinged upon this belief. By questioning biblical inerrancy, the modernist view threatened to undermine Martin Luther’s principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)²⁴² and subsequently, the very foundation of traditional Protestant belief.

The Korea mission, for the large part, identified with the theological conservatives. The majority of missionaries graduated from conservative seminaries, and their particularly strict views on scriptural text were widely known.²⁴³ In his description of the Korea missionaries, Arthur Judson Brown not only likened the missionaries to “Puritan[s],” but also noted their objection to higher criticism and liberal theology as “dangerous heresies.”²⁴⁴ And unlike the relatively peaceful cooperation between conservatives and liberals in American or British evangelical churches, he continued, “in Korea the few men who hold the ‘modern view’ ha[d] a

²⁴⁰ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 34.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁴² During the Reformation, the core Protestant theological tenets came to be summed in the “Five *solas*”—*sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *sola Christus* (through Christ alone), and *sola Deo gloria* (glory to God alone). See also, David S. Katz, *God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), xx.

²⁴³ Sung-Deuk Oak, *Sources of Korean Christianity: 1832-1945* (Seoul: The Institute for Korean Church History, 2004), 501-503.

²⁴⁴ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 540.

rough road to travel, particularly in the Presbyterian group of missions.”²⁴⁵ In their zeal, missionaries even attempted to pressure the mission board and wealthy benefactors to ensure that new recruits to Korea would be of similar theological orientation. For instance, at Horace G. Underwood’s request, Lyman Stewart, the president of the Union Oil Company, made the belief in “the complete inspiration of scriptures” one of the conditions for his \$78,000 donation to the mission.²⁴⁶

Missionaries encouraged a similar faithfulness to biblical text among their converts, and the Korean Church became renowned for its singular devotion to Scripture. During the 1910s, more Bibles were sold in Korea per capita than in any other mission field in the world, the ability to read the Bible was a prerequisite for baptism, and Korean Christians astonished missionaries and foreign visitors with their vast knowledge of Scripture.²⁴⁷ Some individuals committed long passages and even entire books of the Bible to memory.²⁴⁸ One visitor marveled that Bible concordances were virtually obsolete in some churches. Ministers could just as easily turn to members of the congregation to find the exact location of a particular scriptural verse.²⁴⁹ But more than mere familiarity, Korean Christians were seen to have accepted Scripture “without a question” and to its very letter.²⁵⁰ Brown described that for the Koreans, “[t]he accounts of the Garden of Eden, the experience of Jonah, the virgin birth of our Lord, the resurrection of Lazarus, and of the gates of pearls and streets of pure gold in the Heavenly City” represented “historical description of actual facts.” He also claimed that nowhere outside of Korea was there “greater strictness of Sabbath observance, rigidity of doctrinal conviction, and inflexibility of opposition

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Elizabeth Underwood, 52.

²⁴⁷ Ryu, 392.

²⁴⁸ C.S. Deming, “The Korean Christian,” *The Korea Mission Field*, June 1906, 152-4.

²⁴⁹ Carpenter, 291.

²⁵⁰ Anna W. Pierson, “Korea—The Land of Opportunity: Invest Now. Big Returns!” *Missionary Review of the World* XXXIV-4 (April 1911), 271.

to anything that does not accord with the accepted type.”²⁵¹ Indeed, while Brown too marveled at the Korean Christians’ devotion, his one critique charged that they were perhaps excessively narrow-minded in their attitude toward theological differences.²⁵²

In this context, perhaps it is unsurprising that missionaries proffered scriptural references to discuss their views on the relationship between Christians and the state. In particular, they frequently cited the Pauline injunction enjoining submission to temporal powers:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God... For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil... Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same... But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake... Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.²⁵³

The power of this passage appears to draw from its absolute mandates. Universal in scope, the exhortation speaks of “all” powers, commands “every soul,” and condemns “[w]hosoever” transgresses it. It also makes unqualified statements about the behavior of temporal powers—rulers cannot but mete “terror” for “evil” and confer “praise” for “good.” More significantly for believers, Paul portrayed obedience to the state as a matter of moral significance. Because God himself “ordain[s]” rulers as his “minister[s],” disobedience would result in both temporal and spiritual consequences.

As though the weight of scriptural command would not permit them to do otherwise, the missionaries avidly promoted submission to the Government-General. Not only did they preach the command from the pulpits,²⁵⁴ but William B. Hunt recalled days spent “Bible in his hand,” “going from one sarang [reception room in a Korean home] to another urging Koreans to submit

²⁵¹ Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 540.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 541.

²⁵³ Romans 13:1-7, King James Version

²⁵⁴ “Copy No. 25,” Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

to Japanese rule.”²⁵⁵ In Hunt’s words, despite the difficulties of preaching submission among Koreans, he had been “sure” that “in the long run,” his efforts advanced “the only Kingdom which will bring peace to this sin torn earth.”²⁵⁶

Missionaries also presented a similarly clear picture of the Korean Christians’ response to the Pauline injunction. According to their accounts, while most Koreans certainly did not welcome their plight as a nation, opposition to colonial rule among Christians for the most part lasted only until the annexation.²⁵⁷ The few who continued to display a “tendency toward a political spirit” were either denied “responsible positions in the Church,”²⁵⁸ or in some extreme cases, excommunicated.²⁵⁹ But by and large, missionaries asserted that the Korean Church “in good faith accepted the situation,” even seeking to “influence the minds of the people to such submission, leading to a quiet, settled, pacified condition.”²⁶⁰ Recalling in his book the conversations he shared with Korean Christians during a visit to the peninsula, Arthur Judson Brown remarked, “[w]ithout exception they replied that loyal recognition was the duty of every Christian and in line with the teaching of Christ.”²⁶¹

The March First Movement shattered these portrayals of loyal obeisance. Especially embarrassing for Brown, his comments on Korean Christians’ views on the state proved problematic just shortly after the publication of his book. When the first demonstrations broke out, the overwhelming participation of Korean Christians was undeniable. Even missionary writings underwent a dramatic shift during this period. References to the Pauline injunction, to a large extent, disappeared. Missionaries ceased to reference submission in their writings and

²⁵⁵ William B. Hunt, “Personal Report of William B. Hunt for 1918-1919,” MF POS 103, PHS.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ “Copy No. 8,” Record Group 140, 16: 9, PHS.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 566.

²⁶⁰ “Copy No. 8,” Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

²⁶¹ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 566.

never charged Christian demonstrators with disobedience to Scripture. Instead, they asserted that Korean Christians joined or abstained from the movement based on personal religious convictions and individual conscience.²⁶² Charles E. Sharp described a conversation with a Korean pastor as follows:

This man came in not to discuss what he should do, but to discuss the principles governing a Christian's relation to the State. After the discussion he went away and spent the whole night in prayer. The next day he returned, and said his duty was clear, and that he had given up his body to serve his country in this movement.²⁶³

Instead of enforcing the Pauline injunction, Sharp merely notes in a roundabout way that the two discussed general "principles" of proper Christian behavior. And rather speaking of excommunicating or dismissing the pastor from his position, Sharp makes note of his thoughtful and conscientious deliberation.

More tellingly, patriotism even adopted a religious quality in some missionary writings. As Herbert E. Blair described the crowds of demonstrators that converged in the Taegu market place, he focused his attention on two Korean Christians who found themselves in the center of the scene:

[T]he roar of the endless 'Mansey' began to swell louder and louder. Then after about five minutes the center began to move and the crowd lifted high two men. It was Mr. B's cook...and the other was Elder Kim of the South Church... It was the first time in years that the pent up feeling of love for their land had broken its bounds and now come what might, the die was cast, the Elder's life was offered and he was ready to pay the price with his life. As the crowd carried him on their shoulders he swayed back and forth, too, yelling and beating the air with his arms and swaying his head to and fro [sic]. He was drunk with the wild danger and hope and love. With a mighty roar the crowd moved toward the bridge... They flowed like a living river over the bridge and into the wide street.²⁶⁴

This account reads much like a depiction of religious revival or ecstasy. Blair describes Elder Kim's patriotism as the release of a "pent up feeling of love," and there is a distinctly

²⁶² "Report of the Pyengyang Station, 1918-1919," MF POS 907.r9, PHS

²⁶³ Charles E. Sharp, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, June 4, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

²⁶⁴ Herbert E. Blair, "Elder Kim," 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

otherworldly quality to his behavior. Evidently “drunk with...hope and love,” Kim “beat[s] the air with his arms” and “sway[s] his head” back and forth. In addition, Blair saturates his account with biblical language and imagery. Not only does Elder Kim embody the Christian paragon of self-sacrifice, but considering the significance of water imagery in Scripture, Blair’s reference to “a living river” when describing the demonstrators further emphasized their spirituality and moral legitimacy.

Considering the conservative theological views of the missionary community and the Korean Church, how do we account for these sharp changes? If the missionaries believed in the immutability and self-evidence of scriptural text, why do we not see a similar consistency in their religious discourse? Examining the ambiguities latent in the Pauline injunction may provide one explanation. Despite the Apostle Paul’s unequivocal language, the meaning of his command has been the subject of endless debate among theologians.²⁶⁵ For instance, while the logic of his argument hinges upon the justice of temporal authorities, he does not address the obvious realities of those who are unjust. He also does not provide a precise definition of “submission.” Rendering “custom,” “fear,” and “honour” to authorities can be interpreted to permit a wide range of actions. Biblical submission did not necessarily equate to unquestioned obedience to government dictate. As one missionary put it, there was a distinction between “opposing wrong” and “opposing the government.” One could not justifiably engage in the latter, but it was “the duty of missionaries to oppose evil wherever it exist[ed] and under whatever auspices.”²⁶⁶ Moreover, considering the non-violent nature of the demonstrations, the missionaries were perhaps willing to see the protests as a relatively benign expression of patriotism. In theory, the principle of *Sola Scriptura* emphasized the self-evidence of the Bible, but in practice, even those

²⁶⁵ Robert H. Stein, “The Argument of Romans 13:1-7,” *Novum Testamentum* 31 (October 1989), 325-326.

²⁶⁶ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East*, 566.

who considered themselves theologically conservative found considerable room for interpretation.²⁶⁷ Within the Pauline injunction itself, there were sites of fluidity that invited, perhaps even required, the reader's interpretive engagement. This explanation, however, raises further questions. What prompted missionaries to wield scriptural authority to demand submission in the first place? Why did they emphasize the injunction's self-evidence and play down its inherent ambiguities?

One way to address these questions is to examine the correspondence of the injunction's wax and wane in the missionaries' writings with distinct periods in the history of the mission. The Pauline injunction began to emerge in earnest during the early period of colonial rule as missionaries sought to replace ties with the old regime for the new, and appeared with greatest frequency during the 1912 Conspiracy Case.

As the arrests of alleged conspirators became increasingly pervasive, missionaries often referenced the injunction when writing to Japanese officials regarding Korean Christians. In a letter to Komatsu Midori, the Director of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs, A. M. Sharrocks had but the highest praise for Mr. Hyang, an acquaintance who had recently been arrested. In Sharrocks' words, Hyang was "an upright, earnest, law-abiding citizen," someone "who would rather die than do [what] he knew to be wrong." During periods of high tension and anxiety, he gave "some of the most helpful talks to the people and especially to the school children, urging them to obey the authorities and be in subjection to the powers that be, etc."²⁶⁸ Since a conspiracy against Terauchi's life never actually existed, there is no doubt of Hyang's innocence. The degree of Hyang's actual loyalty to the state and the extent of his advocacy for the Pauline injunction, however, are less certain. The reader has to choose whether to take Sharrocks at his word.

²⁶⁷ Karen Armstrong, *The Bible: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2007), 175.

²⁶⁸ A.M. Sharrocks, Letter to Mr. Komatsu, Dec. 16, 1911, Record Group 140, 16:9, PHS.

But considering the missionaries' primary objective of exonerating Korean Christians, Sharrocks may have had a vested interest in emphasizing Hyang's obedience to the injunction. The missionaries commonly cited their personal familiarity with imprisoned Christians when appealing for their release, claiming to "know them, . . . their parents and playmates, even their inmost thoughts." According to missionaries, if there had been "any serious plot" they would have "know[n] something about it."²⁶⁹ Emphasizing the power and agency of Scripture vis-à-vis believers may have served as a rhetorical tool to lend greater weight to these statements.²⁷⁰ Assuming the self-evidence of the Pauline injunction, religious piety would be synonymous with an attitude of loyal obedience to the state. An upstanding Christian like Mr. Hyang, then, could not possibly have committed high treason.

Similarly pragmatic concerns may have contributed to the disappearance of the injunction during the March First Movement. While continuing to profess absolute submission may have enabled missionaries to curry favor with authorities, it would have simultaneously caused a long-term paralysis of evangelistic work. During the Conspiracy Case, the missionaries worried about the future of the self-propagation model when authorities imprisoned just over a hundred Christians. Not only did greater numbers of Korean Christians participate in the Movement, but so did many prominent members of the clergy. Reverend Kil Sŏnju and Yang Chŏnbaek, two of the leading pastors in Korea, were signatories of the Declaration of Independence. According to

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Many contemporary scholars have examined the assumptions literalism makes about the power and authority of religious texts. According to Vincent Crapanzano, literalism gives written words an "illusory stability and independence," suggesting that the meaning of a text is "ultimately decidable." See also, Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2001), 4. Talal Asad argues that such an attitude toward religious text makes certain assumptions about the agency of texts vis-à-vis the reader. It claims that the former has greater agency than the latter. The text exercises its ability to produce certain beliefs and behaviors, while the reader remains "passive" before the text. See also, Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10.

one missionary, their involvement “did more to turn the hearts of the Christians all over the country to the Movement than anything else.”²⁷¹ Critiquing demonstrators on religious grounds would have meant alienating and discrediting those largely responsible for the growth of Christianity in Korea.

Missionaries expressed particular interest in Reverend Kil Sŏnju’s role in the Movement. At the time of the demonstrations, Kil was serving as the minister of the P’yŏngyang Central Church, one of Korea’s largest churches and the center of the 1907 revival. But his renown did not simply derive from his ministry over a famous church; his own conversion story was legendary. According J.S. Gale’s account, although Kil was raised in a “heathen home,” he became convinced early on of the existence of “a Great Being somewhere.”²⁷² He earnestly studied the Confucian classics and Taoist texts, even spending one hundred days in prayer and fasting at a Buddhist temple.²⁷³ All to no avail—spiritual solace eluded him. Upon a friend’s repeated pleas, Kil decided to explore Christianity as well. One night, he was awakened to the sound of God’s voice calling his name. The room itself “transfigured, and a glory light shone all about [him].”²⁷⁴ And as the “light entered his soul,” his physical eyes grew dimmer.²⁷⁵ As one missionary writes, however, his blindness did not hinder Kil from spreading the Gospel. He became “one of the brightest ornaments and greatest men of the Korean Protestant church.”²⁷⁶ His preaching made “hearers smile”; his faith was like “a grip of steel”; and his prayers were “as

²⁷¹ Herbert E. Blair, Letter to his father, April 30, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

²⁷² J.S. Gale, “Elder Keel,” *Missionary Review of the World* 30 (January 1907): 493.

²⁷³ In Soo Kim, *Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism, 1885-1920: A Study of the Contributions of Horace G. Underwood and Sun Chu Kil* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 110.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 494.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Charles F. Bernheisel, “Rev. Kil Sunju,” *The Korea Mission Field* 32 (February 1936), 29. See also, In Soo Kim, *Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean Nationalism*, 109.

simple as [those of] a child.”²⁷⁷ Kil was the nation’s very own Apostle Paul, the face of Korean Christianity to the wider world. Critiquing Kil for his leading role in the Movement would have amounted to a symbolic blow to the Church, as well as a repudiation of the missionaries’ own accomplishments in the peninsula.

Indeed, maintaining a positive public image of the Korean Church was an important part of the missionaries’ work. The Korea mission represented the largest mission under the Northern Presbyterian Mission Board, receiving nearly ten percent of its budget and missionary personnel.²⁷⁸ However much missionaries disparaged Korea’s backwardness and squalor, they effusively praised its burgeoning Christian community. Stories of the Korean Church travelled widely, capturing the imaginations of home churches and mission board administrators. With its rapid growth and genuineness of faith, it was the very likeness of the first-century church. As Horace G. Underwood writes, the story of Christianity in Korea “has read almost like a fairy tale” and “veritably...seemed like a chapter from the Acts of the Apostles.”²⁷⁹ Similarly, one visitor to Korea remarked:

No land interested me more than Korea. Korea was the goal of my desire. Seoul and Pyeng Yang held me almost spellbound... The character of the converts, the pressing into the kingdom, the immense harvests just crying out for gatherers,... the splendid promise just ahead, and the imperative call of the present hour...tremendously impressed me. What magnificent returns would follow an investment in Korea just now!²⁸⁰

While this account speaks to the deep impression that stories of Korean Christians made on people’s minds, the last sentence of the passage also sheds light on the relationship between missionary portrayals of Korean Christians and the demands of the missionary enterprise.

According to William N. Blair, the mission board provided for the missionaries’ livelihood and

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 495.

²⁷⁸ Elizabeth Underwood, *Challenged Identities*, 54.

²⁷⁹ Horace G. Underwood, “Korea’s Crisis Hour,” *Korea Mission Field* 4 (Sept., 1908), 130.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

some general support, but it was the missionaries who shouldered the “greater burden” in fundraising. They had to obtain funds for equipment; the construction of schools, churches, and hospitals; housing for new missionaries; as well as other miscellaneous expenses.²⁸¹ Thus, missionaries not only had to “kee[p] supporters in the homeland interested through letters and addresses while on furlough,” but they also had to demonstrate the profitability, so to speak, of their field. Many benefactors of foreign missions, Arthur Judson Brown once remarked, were of the “utilitarian types” who demanded assurances that “their money accomplishe[d] something” and “yield[ed] tangible return.”²⁸² Because donors rarely continued to fund “apparently unproductive fields,” reporting on the “successes achieved” represented the “the surest method of inducing them to increase their gifts.”²⁸³ Even the extraordinary circumstances of the March First Movement did not interrupt the missionaries’ concerns for the future of the Korea mission. Their annual station reports illustrate the missionaries’ efforts to continue their work, their hopes for expanding the mission, as well as their quotidian financial needs.²⁸⁴ Tarnishing the Korean Christians’ reputation would have added perhaps insurmountable challenges to the missionaries’ work.

There were also more fundamental issues of church and state underlying the missionaries’ changing religious discourse. Since the Conspiracy Case, missionaries expressed serious apprehension over the colonial regime’s treatment of Scripture. Government accusations regarding subversive Bible passages and references did not end with the story of David and Goliath. Plainclothes police officers routinely sat in on church services, reporting objectionable

²⁸¹ William N. Blair, *Gold in Korea* (Topeka: Central Distributing Department of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1957), 86.

²⁸² Arthur Judson Brown, *The Why and How of Missions*, 20.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Seoul Station, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., “Missions in Seoul, Korea, 1919: Effect of Independence Movement,” Yonsei University Digital Archive.

teachings to higher authorities. In one church, a Japanese spy heard a man praying, “Grant us the desires of our hearts.” Immediately thereafter, he was summoned to the police station for questioning and was ultimately “charged with publicly praying for independence.” To make matters worse, the Sunday school lesson for that day centered on the theme, “Jesus welcomed as king.” According to the missionary account, while the Quarterly innocently “explained that Hosanna meant mansei, that is Hurrah [emphasis in original],” authorities struck at the “coincidence” that the leaflets “contained this much-to-be-detested-word.”

The missionaries deeply resented these encroachments. In their eyes, the episodes did not represent innocent misunderstandings of overly anxious officials. When police officers stubbornly rejected missionaries’ explanations regarding the true spiritual meaning of the biblical references, they usurped final authority over the meaning of religious text. The secular state intervened where it had no right. In response to the intrusions, the author of the account fumed in outrage, “Koreans are no longer able to express themselves with reference to even their spiritual needs [emphasis in original].”²⁸⁵ In this context, it may not be surprising that the missionaries refused to dutifully echo officially-sanctioned references to Scripture. The Government-General publicly urged Christians to “remember” the command given by “our Saviour” to “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”²⁸⁶ and to “remain loyal to the powers that be.”²⁸⁷ While missionaries had cited the same Bible verses in the past, they sounded different from the lips of colonial officials. During the March First Movement, they became an instrument of power and a justification of atrocities. In ceasing to profess and enforce the Pauline injunction, the missionaries tacitly rejected the state’s manipulation of Scriptural text.

²⁸⁵ “Takahashi Visits Presbyterian Churches,” 6 May 1919. PHS RG 140, B16, F16.

²⁸⁶ Kiyoshi Nakarai, *Relations between the Government and Christianity in Chosen* (n.p., 1921), 28.

²⁸⁷ *The Korean Independence Agitation; Articles Reprinted from the “Seoul Press”* (Seoul: The “Seoul Press” Office, 1919), 16.

Demarcating the Political

Much like the Pauline injunction, the dictates of the U.S. government first appear to set certain inviolable limits on the missionaries' behavior. In certain respects, the survival and success of the missionary enterprise in Korea hinged almost as much upon the missionaries' relationship with the American legation as with domestic authorities. Because the Treaty of Amity and Commerce made no mention of religious propagation, the mission's legal basis was but a loose interpretation of America's trade privileges as a "most favored nation."²⁸⁸ More significantly, the U.S. government also pledged its citizens living overseas the protection of their persons, property, and the "the right, whether he be a tradesman or churchman, to follow his calling."²⁸⁹ If missionaries found themselves in situations of distress, the legation promised to come to their aid. These guarantees, however, came with a price. Anxious that overzealous or careless missionaries would embroil the United States in foreign controversies, the State Department strictly forbade missionaries from engaging in political activities.²⁹⁰

During the March First Movement, the American legation stressed the need for neutrality even more emphatically. As the colonial newspapers circulated accusations against American missionaries, the inflammatory articles found their way to the desks of embassy officials and Washington bureaucrats. Members of the legation officially expressed confidence in the American missionaries' innocence, but they nonetheless reiterated their instructions regarding neutrality.²⁹¹ In a letter to Korea missionaries, American foreign minister John M. B. Sill stated

²⁸⁸ Elizabeth Underwood, *Challenged Identities*, 72.

²⁸⁹ John W. Foster, "The Government of the United States and American Foreign missionaries" in *Report of Commission VII* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 126.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁹¹ Leo Bergholz, "The Consul General at Seoul (Bergholz) to the Secretaries of the American Mission Stations in Korea," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913-1921*, Vol. II (1934), 459.

unambiguously that it “behoove[d]” “loyal citizens” living abroad to heed “scrupulous abstention from participating in the domestic concerns” of their host country.²⁹² Should missionaries act otherwise, he continued, they would do so “at their own risk and peril.”²⁹³ The U.S. government would wash its hands of responsibility for their welfare. As gendarmes engulfed the peninsula in wanton violence, danger threatened to spill into the missionaries’ lives as well. Missionaries professed “strict neutrality” partly as a matter of real physical necessity.²⁹⁴

Indeed, at times, the missionaries professed neutrality at the expense of their own personal sympathies. Detailing the atrocities committed against Koreans, Sadie N. Welbon expressed the frustrations and difficulties posed by maintaining this stance:

“As Dr. Moffitt [sic] says, ‘We are not in politics’. But how long we can keep out while we are seeing things that make one’s blood fairly boil is going to be a question. We have, among the Japanese, a great many warm friends who deplore what is being done, but they, like we, must keep out.”²⁹⁵

Welbon first wonders whether missionaries would be able to remain apolitical for long, but her next sentence reveals that neutrality was not much of a choice. It was a binding obligation and duty. Another missionary grappled with the same dilemma:

Of course the fundamental question has been as to whether the missionaries and the Mission Boards should declare themselves and work for Korean independence... Apart from all questions of sympathy with the aspirations of the Koreans...our missionaries have naturally felt that they could not say a word on this first question. If they should declare themselves in favor of Korean independence and work for it, they would inevitably have to leave Korea.²⁹⁶

Despite signs of equivocation in the two correspondences, both actually shed light on the real limitations missionaries faced when considering how to respond to the Movement.

²⁹² John M. B. Sill, “The Minister in Korea (Sill) to American Residents in Korea” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913-1921*. Vol. II (1934), 459.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ James Gordon Holdcroft, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 7, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

²⁹⁵ Sadie N. Welbon, Letter to friends, March 3, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS

²⁹⁶ “Letter to Dr. John Willis Baer,” Sept. 12, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:15, PHS.

Contemplations of joining the Movement remained wishful thoughts, and their deliberations always came to the same conclusion—they had to remain neutral.

The colonial regime, however, did not share the American legation's view of neutrality. While it kept missionaries from aiding Korean independence, in the eyes of the colonial regime, mere neutrality was not enough. As editorials in the *Seoul Press* expressed, neutrality was the “[t]echnically” correct stance, but it actually represented an act of cowardice.²⁹⁷ According to one article, the missionaries refused to fully cooperate with the government for fear of losing their influence among Koreans. Neutrality, then, was but a guise to pander to the Koreans' affections.²⁹⁸ Another editorial went further to say that true “moral courage” required missionaries to “enlighten misguided Koreans on the folly and uselessness of their agitation,”²⁹⁹ and to “point out to them frankly the errors they may have committed.”³⁰⁰ As fellow laborers in the project of civilizing Koreans, the authors argued, missionaries had a duty to support the government's pacifying efforts.

The missionaries responded by maintaining that their duty to neutrality even held greater sway than the demands of the Government-General. They cited several justifications for maintaining neutrality. Because the demonstrators were a part of a national movement, trying to stop them “would be useless.” And not only were the missionaries vastly outnumbered, but they did not want to risk becoming the target of a hostile backlash. Lastly, it was simply “forbidden by [their] home government.”³⁰¹ However much the colonial government may have disputed the first two rationales, the last was irrefutable. While some missionaries struggled with their

²⁹⁷ “Neutrality of Missionaries,” *Seoul Press*, March 28, 1919.

²⁹⁸ “What Foreign Missionaries Can Do Now,” *Seoul Press*, March 22, 1919.

²⁹⁹ “Neutrality of Missionaries.”

³⁰⁰ “What Foreign Missionaries Can Do Now.”

³⁰¹ James Gordon Holdcroft, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 7, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

inability to help Koreans, they also found neutrality rather convenient at times. Neutrality effectively excused missionaries from open colonial collaboration.

These discussions of neutrality seem to presuppose a clear understanding of politics among all the actors involved. On the most basic level, for the U.S. government to strictly forbid missionaries from political activity, and the missionaries to voice assent, they would have to agree to a common understanding of what constituted the political. Indeed, when missionaries defended their position of neutrality, the missionaries often spoke of politics as a concrete and apparent entity—they had no desire to “mix in politics” or intervene in “purely political problem[s].”³⁰²

In practice, the idea of politics actually had an unstable, even chameleon-like quality to it as each group shaped it for its own ends. The American government, for instance, advanced a rather inclusive view. Instructing against political activity, it forbade missionaries from: “any expression of opinion or... advice concerning the internal management of the country”³⁰³; “any thing which might be interpreted as support or encouragement to the popular movement”³⁰⁴; and any activity unrelated to their religious “avocations” of “missionary work, or teaching in schools, or attending the sick.”³⁰⁵ In other words, the missionaries were strictly confined to their officially enumerated religious activities.

Missionaries, on the other hand, referenced politics in a much narrower way. Often times, they used the term ‘politics’ simply to refer to the sensitive question of Korean independence. William Hunt’s statement, “I must not meddle in politics,” served but to preface his refusal to

³⁰² Charles E. Sharp, Letter to friends, April 28, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

³⁰³ Sill, “The Minister in Korea (Sill) to American Residents in Korea.”

³⁰⁴ Roland S. Morris, “The Ambassador in Japan (Morris) to the Acting Secretary of State,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913-1921*, Vol. II (1934), 460.

³⁰⁵ Sill, “The Minister in Korea (Sill) to American Residents in Korea.”

comment on “whether the request for independence [was] a good thing.”³⁰⁶ Mrs. R.O. Reiner similarly remarked: “We are not supposed to mix in politics and we are not, we are not taking sides in the question of independence.”³⁰⁷ The two terms functioned synonymously; in other words, politics with a capital ‘p’—the politics that weighed heavily on everyone’s mind—was Korean independence.

Although the missionaries’ portrayal of politics excluded them from the singularly important political question of the day, it did not necessarily signal a position of subordination. The act of defining politics or religion itself held significant implications. During the Educational Controversy, Arthur Judson Brown complained about the Government-General’s sophistic depiction of religion. He remarked, “The church is first defined in a narrow and artificial way . . . , and then it is told that its liberty is unimpaired within the limits of the definition.”³⁰⁸ Through discursive sleights of hand, the colonial government sought to confine and tame religion. The missionaries’ portrayal of politics may represent an act of mimesis. By narrowly restricting what could be considered political, they asserted the right to participate in the public sphere, in the demarcation of religion and politics.

Indeed, using this narrow definition, the missionaries ventured on topics that would have otherwise been denied them. The American government warned missionaries against publicly opining on the “internal management” of their host country, but the missionaries did just that. For instance, they had no qualms about discussing politics in Japan proper. They denounced the military administration of Korea and called for the establishment of a civil government. Arthur Judson Brown described his views on the issue as follows:

³⁰⁶ William B. Hunt, “Personal Report of William B. Hunt for 1918-1919,” MF POS 103, PHS.

³⁰⁷ Mrs. R.O. Reiner, Letter to her mother, March 9, 1919, MF POS 103, PHS.

³⁰⁸ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to Komatsu Midori, June 1, 1915, MF POS 103, PHS.

We have also been careful to distinguish between the civil and military parties among the Japanese. The former is composed of enlightened and progressive men who feel as we do about the outrages that have been committed in Chosen. The latter includes a large number of men who are thoroughly Prussian in their temper and conduct. The civil party was gaining in influence and power when the uprising in Chosen occurred, and gave the militarists full scope for their brutal methods.³⁰⁹

Addressing the family and friends of the Korea missionaries in America, Brown may have felt at greater ease in making such emphatic statements about the military regime. More widely disseminated documents, however, echoed similar ideas. Singling out “the military spirit and method” of the colonial regime as the “real cause of the tragedy,” a press release circulated by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ claimed that conscientious observers of the unfolding events all “call[ed] in no uncertain tones, . . . for the abolition of the military regime.”³¹⁰

In addition to critiquing military administration, missionaries even voiced dissent regarding the expansion of the Japanese Empire. As one of the victors in the First World War, Japan stood to gain significant territorial holdings through deliberations at the Paris Peace Conference. The regime’s brutal treatment of Koreans, however, raised serious misgivings among some missionaries. In one letter, William N. Blair quoted a colleague who, describing the Japanese as “despicably mean, cruel, vulgar and savage,” concluded that they were uncivilized, unfit “to govern another people,” and thus unqualified to be given the “right to be given control of the Pacific Islands.”³¹¹ Another missionary similarly wrote to Brown:

The greatest political [sic] in the world to-day is China. Japan has won first blood over there in the Shantung matter. I sincerely hope that the advantage is only seeming, and that the Allies have agreed among themselves upon some plan which will ensure the integrity and independence of China. . . . If not, and Japan is able to play off the different powers against themselves, and get a free hand here in the Orient, . . . then instead of facing German militarism, . . . it is Japanese militarism that the world . . . will be called upon to deal

³⁰⁹ Arthur Judson Brown, Letter to the Relatives and Friends of the Chosen Missionaries, June 30, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:15, PHS.

³¹⁰ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, “Japanese Statesmen and Newspapers Condemn Korean Atrocities: Little Improvement Yet in Korea,” August 18, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:15, PHS.

³¹¹ William N. Blair, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, July 12, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

with.³¹²

Speaking on the “right” to “govern” and the “integrity” of a sovereign state, these missionaries touched upon issues at the very foundation of politics. In their eyes, the March First Movement signaled the Japanese Empire’s loss of legitimacy as a colonial power. While the missionaries continued to remain silent on the specific topic of Korean independence, they expressed in no unclear terms that Japan should not be allowed to extend their rule of terror elsewhere.

As private correspondences, these scathing letters probably did not circulate widely outside the missionary community, if at all. There is also little indication that missionaries ever made similarly explicit statements in the foreign press. However, they may have communicated their opposition through more subtle means. Not only did their penetrating depictions of gendarme violence expose serious flaws in Japan’s colonial administration, but as noted in chapter one, missionaries commonly used the epithet “Prussian” to characterize the regime. Considering that Japan aspired to acquire Germany’s holdings in China, the missionaries’ writings underhandedly challenged its imperialistic aspirations.

Negotiating definitions also enabled the missionaries to restrict the scope of the political realm’s reach. For Frank Heron Smith, the ardent Japan sympathizer, the participation of Korean Christians revealed just how politicized the Church had become. He writes, “[w]ere the Korean Church really free from politics- it would have no trouble with the government.”³¹³ That churches often functioned as starting points of demonstrations and “practically all the rioters were Christians” served as clear evidence for the complicity of the Korean Church.³¹⁴ But as previously noted, other missionaries dismissed the charge, pointing out that Korean Christians had made no use of church machinery, there were “no known cases” where “church meetings

³¹² Charles E. Sharp, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, May 29, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:13, PHS.

³¹³ Frank H. Smith, Letter to Sidney L. Gulick, Oct. 15, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

themselves [took] on a political character,” and political discussions had been “uniformly discouraged in church buildings.”³¹⁵ Thus, Christians acted but as individuals when participating in the demonstrations. In the P'yŏngyang Station's annual report, one missionary wrote emphatically:

No distinction has been made between the individual Christians who have joined the demonstrators and the Church as an official body. The Church has in no way whatever had a part in the movement. . . . Nevertheless many of the leaders of the Church have, as individuals, decided to join the movement. But this is quite a different matter from the Church's deciding to do so as an official body. Whether these individuals did wrongly or not is a question which each one of them must decide according to his own conscience. The Church as a Church is innocent.³¹⁶

What was at stake in the dispute went beyond mere semantics. To an extent, the definition of what constituted the Church determined the extent to which it could be accused of politicization. Under Smith's loose definition (in which the congregants reflected the character of the Church) whenever a number of Christians engaged in politics, the colonial government could charge the Church itself of political activity. Under the P'yŏngyang missionaries' more precise definition of the “official body” of the church, however, the regime could not easily mount the accusation.

In some ways, missionaries did not simply redraw the bounds of the political realm; they suggested that it could be transcended. American embassy officials did not always find the missionaries' professions of neutrality very convincing. For instance, when a group of missionaries visited Japan, they informed Ambassador Morris that they wanted to meet with Japanese Christian leaders to discuss plans to “secure the co-operation of the best Japanese in a humane effort to eliminate barbarous methods in the suppression of the revolt.” In the words of J. Gordon Holdcroft, the ambassador “practically forbade” the visit, and in the end, the

³¹⁵ Executive Committee of the Chosen Mission, “The Present Movement for Korean Independence in its Relation to the Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

³¹⁶ “Report of the Pyengyang Station, 1918-1919,” MF POS 907.r9, PHS.

missionaries acquiesced to the prohibition.³¹⁷ But while missionaries may have yielded in this case, they found other ways to raise awareness of the Koreans' plight. They certainly would not accept the American legation's pressures to remain silent. In their exposés, the missionaries argued that the atrocities removed the March First Movement from "the realm of mere politics." As a question of "humanity," it knew no such bounds.³¹⁸ Just as the civil servant, citizen, or clergyman in Immanuel Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" would engage in public reason by assuming the universal identity of the scholar, the missionaries also asserted their right to public discourse by adopting the identity and obligations of humanity.³¹⁹ And as long as they spoke on its behalf, conventional categories of politics and religion did not apply.

Conclusion

As the demonstrations died down, the missionary community drafted a report proposing changes that they desired the government to put in place. The local press hinted at discussions among colonial officials and policy-makers in Japan proper regarding administrative reforms for Korea, and missionaries seized the opportunity to express their views as well. Fifteen pages in length and methodically organized according to spheres of missionary activity, the document

³¹⁷ J. Gordon Holdcroft, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, April 7, 1919, Record Group 140, 16:14, PHS.

³¹⁸ Charles E. Sharp, "Letter to Friends," 28 April 1919, PHS RG 140, B16, F13.

³¹⁹ An excerpt from the essay reads: "The public use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. The private use of reason, on the other hand, may often be very narrowly restricted...By the public use of one's reason I understand the use which a person makes of it as a scholar before the reading public. Private use I call that which one may make of it in a particular civil post or office which is entrusted to him... Many affairs which are conducted in the interest of the community require a certain mechanism through which some members of the community must passively conduct themselves with an artificial unanimity, so that the government may direct them to public ends...But so far as a part of the mechanism regards himself at the same time as a member of the whole community or of a society of world citizens, and thus in the role of a scholar who addresses the public...through his writings, he certainly can argue without hurting the affairs for which he is in part responsible as a passive member. Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" Modern History Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-whatis.html> (March 5, 2011).

listed the missionaries' evidently numerous and long-standing grievances. The complaints dealt with a host of issues, everything from everyday vexations to the seriously disconcerting: having to report on the minutiae of missionary activity; learning a second foreign language (Japanese); obtaining permits for building or altering churches; interferences with roadside preaching; interdiction on house churches, outstanding reparations for damaged church edifices; police presence in church services; bowing to the Emperor's portrait; as well as the ban on religious teaching in classrooms. According to the missionaries, these injustices together amounted to the denial of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.³²⁰

As we examined in this chapter, however, this list of grievances simply made explicit what the missionaries had been doing all along in their narratives on the Movement. On many levels, they resisted the state's encroachments upon the religious sphere, as well as its steady efforts to marginalize it from the public sphere. The March First Movement represents a unique historical moment where the struggles of the missionaries and the Koreans went hand in hand. While missionaries helped shed light on the suffering of Koreans, it was the Koreans' remarkable exhibition of dissent that gave missionaries a platform to demand redress for their own grievances.

³²⁰ "An Opinion of Missionaries as to What Changes are Desirable in the Existing Laws and Attitude of the Government toward the Christian Church and Mission Work in Korea," MF POS 103, PHS.

Epilogue

Historians often mark 1919 as the end of the “dark period” of Japanese colonial rule in Korea. Responding to international critique over the March First Movement, as well as long-standing debates among Japanese policy-makers regarding colonial governance, Prime Minister Hara Takashi ushered in a new era of “Cultural Rule.”³²¹ In August 1919, Hasegawa Yoshimichi stepped down from his post, and Admiral Saitō Makato succeeded him as Governor-General. Although his appointment did not signal a transition to civilian rule, Saitō did promise sweeping reforms and a more conciliatory attitude toward Koreans. Government officials ceased to wear military uniforms or carry swords, schools for Korean students were expanded, local governments recruited greater numbers of Korean bureaucrats, the ban on vernacular publications was partially lifted, and under certain restrictions, Koreans were allowed to participate once more in social organizations.³²²

Despite these changes, Korea nonetheless remained under the thumb of a police state. Anxious to prevent the recurrence of a mass movement, Saitō worked to bolster the efficiency and skill of the regime’s mechanisms of control.³²³ The reach of the police network, for instance, expanded dramatically after the demonstrations. Between 1919 and 1920, the number of police stations rose from 151 to 251, and the number of substations increased even more, from 686 to 2,495.³²⁴ The colonial regime intended to thwart opposition before it even took root.

³²¹ Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 124.

³²² *Ibid.*, 127-128.

³²³ Carter J. Eckert, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishers, 1990), 282.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

Missionaries continued to complain of police violence well after the demonstrations ceased. Some charged that the reforms looked far more impressive on paper than was in practice. According to one missionary, the changes had been “so mild” that he was convinced it merely served the “purposes of propaganda.” Not only were Koreans “in no sense satisfied,” but missionaries also continued to face “serious hindrance[s]” to their work. Antagonism toward the regime, “[t]he old mistrust, fear of duplicity and lack of faith regarding Japan,” he wrote, would thus remain during the years to come.³²⁵ Indeed, in 1938, government efforts to compel Christian participation in Shinto ceremonies resulted in another heated controversy between the Church and the Government-General,³²⁶ and in 1942, all foreign missionaries were forced to leave Korea entirely.³²⁷

How, then, should we assess the missionaries’ connection with the Movement? Do we evaluate the extent of their success in ending police violence? Or do we examine instead the degree to which they achieved religious liberty for the mission and the Korean Church? Can either approach accurately gauge the historical significance of their writings?

Regardless of what they actually achieved, the missionary narratives on the Movement are important for their insights into the interactions between church and state. The missionary community did not agitate for Korean independence. Nor did it position itself to become a political organization. Missionaries did, however, strategically engage with political actors to promote their interests, and more significantly, tried to participate in drawing the bounds between religion and politics. As Casanova notes, the line delimiting each is hardly fixed, but rather is often characterized by “ambiguity, flexibility, permeability and often outright

³²⁵Norman C. Wittemore, Letter to Arthur Judson Brown, December 3, 1920, Record Group 140, 16:20, PHS.

³²⁶Blair, *Gold in Korea*, 103.

³²⁷Ibid., 111.

confusion.”³²⁸ Whatever we make of the missionaries’ successes or failures, we cannot ignore the voice they asserted in their writings. Moments of critique and protest may be significant in and of themselves, even if they are ultimately quashed or if they emerge only ever so subtly in professions of loyal obeisance.

³²⁸ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 13.

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