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Progressive Presbyterianism: Missionaries, Modernization, and Protest on the Korean Peninsula, 1884~1919

Nicholas W. Gentile

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores Presbyterian missionary work in Korea during the Progressive Era from 1884 to 1919.¹ It argues that progressive American Presbyterians developed unique methods of proselytizing, methods that promoted (1) modernization along Western lines and (2) protest against Japanese colonialism. By employing the Nevius System, encouraging literacy and capitalism, and providing expanded opportunities for women, they disseminated a Christianity that helped to modernize Korea in the Western image. By engaging in the “Million Souls for Christ This Year” Campaign of 1910, sharing negative attitudes toward imperial Japan, and, especially, catalyzing the March First Movement of 1919 through a message that inspired Wilsonian self-determination, they formed the backbone of the protests against colonial Japan.

A contextual study of the memoirs of three pioneering Presbyterian missionaries – Horace N. Allen, Annie L. A. Baird, and Horace G. Underwood – demonstrates that American Presbyterians in Korea during the Progressive Era were more than disseminators of conservative Protestant theology, however. Along with preaching the Bible’s inerrancy and literalism, progressive Presbyterians promoted (1) modernization along Western lines and (2) protest against Japanese colonialism. Their commitment to improving the lives of all Koreans by preaching Christ crucified was influenced by their cultural context. Allen’s Things

1. For the purposes of this paper, the terms “Progressive Era,” “progressive,” and “progressivism” refer to a commitment to social progress that acclaimed historian of progressivism Daniel T. Rogers defines expansively and inclusively as a commitment “less to an abstract principle than to a distinctive place at history’s leading edge” in improving life for all people, without exception. See Daniel T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 52.

Korean (1908), Baird’s *Inside Views of Mission Life* (1913), and Underwood’s *The Call of Korea* (1908) show that they preached a progressive social gospel along with the good news of Jesus.

MODERNIZATION ALONG WESTERN LINES

The Presbyterian progressives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries entered a nation of Korea that was already churning in a maelstrom of reform. They did not introduce modernization; they joined it. Modern Korea was born during the Kabo Reforms, 1894-1896, during which King Kojong of the Joseon Dynasty, influenced by modernizing

CONTENTS

- 1 Progressive Presbyterianism: Missionaries, Modernization, and Protest on the Korean Peninsula, 1884~1919**
Nicholas W. Gentile
- 10 Journeying in Asia: Incarnational Living in Hope**
Lawrence Ko
- 14 Igniting Intergenerational Mission in a Japanese Context**
Micaela Braithwaite
- 17 The Holy Spirit and Missio Dei**
Humphrey Iheukwumere Okerefor & Timothy U. U. Oguzie
- 25 Mission: Contextualizing Theology & the Gospel**
Chester Jae Young Choi

Japan's victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War and the autonomy China granted to Korea, appeared to direct sweeping changes. In reality, the Japanese ambassador to Korea and his lackeys in Seoul, directed the weak Kojong, who, as a puppet in power, danced their jig when they pulled the strings. As historian Bruce Cumings explains, "Otori Keisuke, the Japanese minister, and a host of Japanese and Korean aides" sent "reform after reform to Korea under the signature of Kojong (who duly signed every one, and no doubt any autumn leaves that wafted across his desk)."² Over two hundred reforms brought Korea into the modern age by abolishing "class distinctions, slavery, the exam system, even the clothes Koreans wore, even the long pipes that symbolized yangban [Korean aristocracy] status," and even the signature topknots of the Joseon.³ The Kabo Reforms also established Korea's independence from China (even as they reflected Japan's tightening grip on the peninsula), a constitutional monarchy, a modern fiscal system (complete with modern taxation, banking, coinage, weights and measures, and Western calendaring), modern police and military forces, a modern educational system, and a modern judicial system, which included laws to protect children, widows, and families.⁴

The Nevius System

One way that the Presbyterian progressives joined and influenced the modernization of Korean society was through the Nevius System. The Nevius System was the brainchild of John L. Nevius, an American Presbyterian missionary in China for four decades. Nevius organized his congregation of Chinese converts according to Western principles of representation, self-sufficiency, and stewardship. As Allen remembered, "In the spring of 1890, Dr. and Mrs. Nevius, of Chefoo, China, visited Seoul, and in several conferences, laid before the missionaries there the methods of missionary work known as the Nevius method."⁵ By 1891, his methods had diffused throughout the Presbyterian missions in Korea, where the missionaries in Pyongyang were his most ardent disciples. As Kim and Kim summarize, the Nevius congregations in Korea were characterized by "a strong, independent native church which was missionary in its own right and not dependent on the foreign mission" and a superintendent who was trained by the American missionaries but who was paid by his own congregation and who exercised "pastoral responsibility over [a] 'circuit' of churches."⁶ The Western ideals that the Nevius System

inculcated dovetailed nicely with the modernization of the Kabo Reforms because they diffused power and responsibility among the many, rather than concentrating them among the few. Koreans who accepted a Western-style king in parliament in Gojong's new constitutional monarchy were more ready to accept a Western-style superintendent who acted with the advice and consent of the Presbyterian missionaries to lead his circuit's congregations. The two Western systems, both new and both modern, developed simultaneously.

The Nevius System's diffusion of power among all levels flew in the face of the top-down hierarchy of pre-modern Korean society. In pre-modern Korea, social status was hereditary and rigid. Yangban, the group of Confucian scholar-officials who formed the Korean aristocracy of the Joseon period, remained yangban throughout the generations and worked with their heads, while peasants remained peasants throughout the generations and worked with their hands. Power and privilege were divided along these hereditary lines, and an exceptionally bright peasant rarely crossed the social chasm and became a yangban. As scholars of history and literature Yongho Ch'oe, Peter Lee, and Theodore de Bary explain, this "social hierarchy remained largely intact until it shattered under the impact of the modern world at the end of the [Joseon] dynasty. ... A small hereditary elite of Confucian scholar-officials continued to monopolize office-holding and dominate land-owning while preserving the status distinctions that set it apart from the rest of society."⁷

In 1908, Underwood noted that the Nevius System disrupted the traditional social hierarchy and replaced it with a modern division of labor in which Korean converts shared power in the local ecclesiastical organization. As he explained, "In a peculiar way has it been demonstrated in Korea that from the very start the growth of the Church has been due to the 'laymen's movement.'"⁸ In 1913, Baird painted a clearer picture of the scope of the "laymen's movement"—the meaningful participation of Korean converts in their local congregations—by stating that "the seven city churches with congregations totaling about four thousand" were "very largely in the hands of Koreans."⁹ Indeed, as Allen summarized in 1908, missionaries created seminaries for the express purpose of educating the "native ministry that shall do the actual work among the people of the interior."¹⁰ Sharing power, rather than concentrating it in a religious aristocracy of American missionaries, was a Western, modern notion that encouraged self-respect and self-sufficiency for a people who had been taught

2. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005), 120.

3. Ibid.

4. Carter J. Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishers for the Korea Institute, Harvard University, 1990), 225-228.

5. Horace G. Underwood, *The Call of Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 109.

6. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 73-74.

7. Yongho Ch'oe, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds., *Sources of Korean Tradition*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 144.

8. Underwood, *The Call of Korea*, 124.

9. Annie L. A. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1913), 87.

10. Horace N. Allen, *Things Korean: A Collection of Sketches and Anecdotes Missionary and Diplomatic* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 184.

the traditional Confucian ideals of deference to, and reliance on, the elite.

Literacy

Alongside with promoting a Western, modern ideology of power-sharing in ecclesiastical organizations, Presbyterian missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood encouraged the sharing of power by promoting literacy. Literacy grants access to knowledge, knowledge fosters self-sufficiency, self-sufficiency creates independence, and independence is power. Missionary literacy programs put this type of power into the hands of the Korean masses, male and female. As Kim and Kim assert, "They introduced mass adult education in the form of Bible classes," and "thus Protestant churches became centers of literacy."¹¹ Koreans attended the classes and learned to read "by hundreds, and sometimes by thousands, ... some of whom walked more than a hundred miles to get to them," and it must have been a moving sight to view a sea of peasants, clothed in traditional white, being empowered by the gift of literacy.¹² In 1913, Baird recounted the thirst for knowledge that animated these early converts by telling the story of one who attended the "Workers' Class": "This class is attended by women from far beyond the limits of our territory, who come to prepare themselves by a two weeks' course of training to teach country Bible classes during the year. One woman in attendance in one recent class walked a distance of three hundred and thirty-three miles over rough mountain roads, the journey consuming twenty days. She said she 'had teaching to do and wanted to learn how.'"¹³ This woman understood that literacy brought power: the power to help herself and the power to help others. The diffusion of education among the masses—for example, Underwood recorded that Presbyterian missionaries in Pyongyang taught over 10,000 Koreans in 191 classes in 1907, alone—changed Koreans, who then changed Korean society.¹⁴ Theirs is one of Western modernizations' greatest success stories—and one of the greatest success stories of progressive Presbyterians in Korea.

Capitalism

Along with promoting modernization along Western lines through the power-sharing of literacy, progressive Presbyterian missionaries encouraged the growth of capitalism in Korea. Korean exposure to capitalism had increased rapidly following the 1876 Treaty of Kanghwa, which created diplomatic and trade relationships with modernizing Meiji Japan. As Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary explain, "Impressed by Japan's modernization, ... Koreans wanted to learn and adopt Western ideas and technologies."¹⁵ Japan's

growing capitalist ventures inspired progressive Koreans to develop along similar lines, and the Kabo Reforms, according to historian Carter J. Eckert, established "an important role for state capitalism in the development of modern industries and transportation networks under government auspices, while private capitalist ventures were facilitated by removing existing legal restrictions on the activities of merchants and artisans," as well as the creation of modern monetary, banking, and weights/measures systems.¹⁶ Such was the economic milieu when Presbyterians made inroads into Korea at the end of the nineteenth century.

When progressives like Allen, Baird, and Underwood entered the Land of the Morning Calm, they inadvertently strengthened the capitalist development of Korea. The U.S. government, especially during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (September 1901-March 1909), did not encourage missionaries to be ambassadors for capitalism. In fact, Roosevelt believed that the nation had limited interests in East Asia (aside from the Philippines) and refused commitments in Korea; however, many of the gospel principles taught by the missionaries seemed to support capitalism.¹⁷ As Ryu asserts, "The missionaries' emphasis on diligence, frugality, and hard work, as well as their teachings that praised honest worldly gains, gave a clear message especially to ambitious and motivated Koreans," who "were learning the capitalist spirit."¹⁸ American missionaries came to Korea from a "world drenched with the capitalist spirit," a Western society that often conflated riches with righteousness and poverty with sin.¹⁹

Missionary anecdotes demonstrate the "capitalist spirit" of their modern Christian worldview. For example, in 1908, Allen told a story about a woman in Korea that illustrated the "refrain of a recently popular song," which promised that "if ye work all day ye'll have sugar in yer tay [tea]." He shared that this woman's industry and frugality enabled her to provide "tea every day," sometimes even with sugar, for herself and her small children and that her "cheerful tale" of success in "earning a living for herself" represented the compensation that results from "hard labor and pinching economy."²⁰ In 1913, Baird recounted that Koreans associated the Christian way with great temporal riches, including the goods of a capitalist market. As she remarked, missionaries "present to their eyes a picture of unimagined wealth.

209.

16. Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, 226.

17. George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 377.

18. Dae Young Ryu, "Understanding Early American Missionaries in Korea (1884-1910): Capitalist Middle-Class Values and the Weber Thesis," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 113, no. 1 (January-March 2001), 17-18, <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/20190>.

19. *Ibid.*, 15.

20. Allen, *Things Korean*, 23.

11. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 87.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 76-77.

14. Underwood, *The Call of Korea*, 111.

15. Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary, *Sources of Korean Tradition*,

The mere possession of such everyday articles as chairs, tables, rugs, and a sewing machine puts us far off into the region of unattainable riches, and the plainest missionary home is still a palace in the eyes of the native."²¹ Modernizing Koreans believed that the hard work and frugality of Allen's Christianity would lead to the prosperity of Baird's. Though unintentional, the message was clear: American Protestants preached the way to wealth, and the way to wealth was capitalism. As Ryu summarizes, "Few can doubt that the missionaries' capitalist gospel inspired many ambitious Koreans to join the church and led them to worldly success. This explains why middle-class Koreans, or the most motivated and pragmatic among the Koreans, became the mainstay of the Korean churches."²²

Opportunities for Women

Together with the inadvertently encouraging development of Western capitalism in modernizing Korea, Presbyterian missionaries brought progressive opportunities to women in the Land of the Morning Calm. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, as opportunities for women (especially suffrage²³) were debated at home, missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood provided an empowered space for women abroad. As historian Donald N. Clark explains, though women were ineligible to become ordained ministers, they could become missionaries, Sunday School teachers, Bible class leaders, service group leaders, etc., which offered a "special opportunity to function as a fully franchised professional" in the evangelism and education of "Korean girls and women at homes, in schools, and in churches throughout the country" – an indispensable service because, according to Korean custom, males "were barred from contact with respectable Korean women."²⁴ In 1913, theologian Walter Rauschenbusch explained that these expanded opportunities for women were a major part of the "social movement" of progressive Protestantism: "In our age of social

transformations what other social process is of equal import? ... In our American Protestant churches women, who have been mute and passive in the church for ages, have found a voice and have freely uttered their religious ideas and sentiments, molding the vital and working religion of the country."²⁵ The same year, Baird noted that Christianity had had a similar effect on Korean women when she said that "until the introduction of Christianity the one reason in Korean minds for the existence of women was the exercise of the maternal function. To be a mother was their one claim to consideration."²⁶ Protestant Christianity honored motherhood but also encouraged women to see themselves as having value – independent of any role – as beings whom God created in His image, beings who could be born again through Christ to become His spiritual children. Humans – male and female – mattered so much to God that, out of love and mercy, He sent His Only Begotten Son to spill His precious blood for them, to save them from sin and death. As Underwood explained in 1908, the "introduction of the Bible" into Korean society had taught women these astonishing truths, which demonstrated that they deserved "increased respect and consideration."²⁷ Perhaps this progressive view of women was one reason why a Korean official told Underwood that "the spread of Christianity is the hope of my country. ... If the people of my country become Christians, my country, too, will advance."²⁸

The most common opportunity that progressive Protestants provided for Korean women to act on their newfound Christian dignity was that of the role of a Biblewoman. As Clark explains, "Biblewomen were workers paid by the mission to act as assistants to missionary women doing evangelistic work. ... The foreign women depended on them and respected them both for their dedication as Christians and their strength as women."²⁹ Moving beyond traditional Korean gender norms, Biblewomen gained autonomy and exercised power in their local communities as they earned incomes through being language teachers and cultural interpreters for foreign missionaries; conducting classes that taught reading, theology, leadership skills, and maternal and child health to Korean women; recruiting audiences for the missionaries; and providing interpretation at meetings.³⁰ As Underwood summarized in 1908, the many uses of Biblewomen made them "almost indispensable" to the work of American Presbyterian missionaries in Korea.³¹

21. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 25.

22. Ryu, "Understanding Early American Missionaries in Korea (1884-1910)," 18.

23. For example, twenty-eight of the twenty-nine U.S. states that passed full, primary, or presidential suffrage prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (passed in June 1919; ratified in August 1920), which secured the franchise for American women, passed those forms of suffrage for women during the Progressive Era (c. 1890-1920). The only one that did not was Wyoming, which had granted full suffrage for women in 1869. Utah granted it in 1870, it was rescinded, and then the territory granted it again in 1895. Washington granted it in 1883, it was rescinded, and then the state granted it again in 1910. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin granted full, primary, or presidential suffrage to women. See Holly J. McCammon et al., "How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements, 1866-1919," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 1 (February 2001), 52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657393>.

24. Donald N. Clark, "Mothers, Daughters, Biblewomen, and Sisters: An Account of 'Women's Work' in the Korea Mission Field," in *Christianity in Korea*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 168.

25. Walter Rauschenbusch, "Some Moral Aspects of the 'Woman Movement,'" *The Biblical World* 42, no. 4 (October 1913), 195, 196, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3142396>.

26. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 18.

27. Underwood, *The Call of Korea*, 117.

28. *Ibid.*, 39, 40.

29. Clark, "Mothers, Daughters, Biblewomen, and Sisters," 170.

30. *Ibid.*, 170-171.

31. Underwood, *The Call of Korea*, 116.

In 1913, Baird provided a telling look at the impact that Biblewomen had when she told the story of “old Sin Ssi.” (old Miss Sin) Sin Ssi fulfilled her role as a Biblewoman with power and conviction as a teacher alongside Baird at Wednesday Bible classes. Baird explained that, at one of these classes, Sin Ssi took an “opportunity ... for testimony” to tell a story about two families who lived in a small mountain village. In her story, a carpenter visited the area and told the village about God’s Son, who “should himself receive the punishment due to us, so that we, taking advantage of his atonement, could find our way to God.” Lives changed as the two families found Christ, and the community became more giving. “Her lips had hardly closed over the story,” Baird recounted, “when contributions of clothes and money began to pour in. In a very few moments the sum total of contributions, in addition to some things which had already been given, amounted to fifteen yang (about one dollar), besides a promised heap of half-worn garments.” Many members of the Bible class, inspired by Sin Ssi’s words, then took the donations to a small mountain village (Sam Do Kan), where “they stayed for a month, teaching and preaching as they could find or make opportunity.”³² Sin Ssi is but one example of the many Korean Biblewomen who exercised great influence in their progressive roles as female teachers and leaders. Their newfound Protestant Christianity provided social spaces within which they were agents who exercised authority and power as paid ministerial assistants, thus bucking traditional Korean gender roles.

PROTEST AGAINST JAPANESE COLONIALISM

Alongside with promoting modernization through Western lines by encouraging the Nevius System, literacy, capitalism, and opportunities for women, progressive Presbyterian missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood promoted protest against Japanese colonialism. Following two decades (c. 1890-1910) in which Japan and Russia had meddled in Korean affairs, with each foreign power vying for supreme influence on the peninsula, Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and gained imperial hegemony over the Land of the Morning Calm. Progressive President Theodore Roosevelt inserted himself into the negotiations between the two imperial powers during the Treaty of Portsmouth (New Hampshire, 1905), for which he would receive a dubious Nobel Peace Prize. As Cumings astutely asserts, “Diplomatic notes exchanged between Roosevelt and the Japanese (the Taft-Katsura agreement) acknowledged a trade-off between the Philippines and Korea: Japan would not question American rights in its colony, and the United States would not challenge Japan’s new protectorate. ... Japan had a ‘free hand’ in Korea after 1905” — all the way until it annexed the peninsula by force of arms

32. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 121-127.

in 1910.³³ Cumings calls 29 August 1910, the date that Sunjong, the Joseon dynasty’s last ruler and Kojong’s intellectually disabled son, abdicated the throne under Japanese pressure, leaving the once-proud nation as a colony, “the darkest day of any subsequent year for Koreans.”³⁴

During the ensuing thirty-five years of Japanese imperialism in Korea (1910-1945), the American response to colonialism in the Land of the Morning Calm was mixed. Cumings notes that, initially, “almost every Westerner supported Japan’s ‘modernizing role’ in Korea, from callous diplomat to earnest scholar to Christian missionary. ... The ‘progressives’ of the time were no better — or maybe worse,” as they praised the “‘rising star of human self-control and enlightenment [Japan]’” for the “‘benevolent bureaucracy of the future socialist state.’”³⁵ Japanese imperialism was “for Korea’s own good,” so it was acceptable, even laudable.

As Koreans protested the forceful taking of their independence, however, the Japanese responded with a decade of ruthless violence to bring their new colony into submission, which drew criticism from progressives who liked the end (modernization) but not the means (dictatorship and suppression). Ch’oe, Lee, and de Bary explain Japan’s response to Korea’s angry reaction to annexation by stating, “The Japanese governor-general was a virtual dictator in Korea as he ruled without a legislature, and all the nine governor-generals who served in Korea were army generals except for one navy admiral. The first decade of Japanese rule was particularly harsh as Japan tried to subdue Korea with brutal force.”³⁶ Japanese aggressions against colonial Korea during the first decade peaked in 1919 in response to the March First Movement when “virtually the entire Korean population rose up in peaceful demonstrations for Korean independence,” only to be “crushed by the Japanese.” The movement marked a shift in the progressive response to Japanese imperialism in Korea, a shift that progressive President Woodrow Wilson catalyzed with the calls for national “self-determination” that he made in his “Fourteen Points” speech from 8 January 1918. Though Japan’s treatment of its Korean colony over the next quarter century would pass through phases of conciliation (e.g., 1919-1927) and repression (e.g., 1936-1942), progressives rarely returned to their initial praise of the annexation of Korea following the March First Movement.³⁷ The following declaration from the progressive First Korean Congress in Philadelphia in 1919, comprised

33. Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, 141-142.

34. *Ibid.*, 145. Japan had forced Kojong to renounce rule in July 1907. In January 1919, he died suddenly at the age of 66. Many Koreans suspected that he had been poisoned by Japanese imperialists, and his putative murder ignited the firestorm of protests known as the March First Movement. See Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, 277-78.

35. *Ibid.*, 142-143.

36. Ch’oe, Lee, and de Bary, *Sources of Korean Tradition*, 210.

37. *Ibid.*

of about seventy Korean expatriates living in the United States, Hawaii, and Mexico, is representative of the critical response that more progressives adopted following the March First Movement:

*The Korean people patiently suffered under the iron heel of Japan for the last decade or more, but now they have reached the point where they are no longer able to endure it. On 1 March of this year some three million men, mostly of the educated class and composed of Christians, Heaven Worshipers, Confucians, Buddhists, students of mission schools, under the leadership of the pastors of the native Christian churches, declared their independence from Japan and formed a provisional government on the border of Manchuria. Through the news dispatches and through private telegrams we are informed that so far thirty-two thousand Korean revolutionists have been thrown into dungeons by the Japanese, and over one hundred thousand men, women, and children have been killed or wounded. The Koreans have no weapons with which to fight, as the Japanese had taken everything away from them since the annexation, even pistols and fowling pieces. What resistance they are offering now against the Japanese soldiers and gendarmerie is with pitchforks and sickles. In spite of this disadvantage and the horrible casualties among the Koreans, these people are keeping up their resistance, and this demonstration is now nationwide, including nearly all provinces. Japan has declared martial law in Korea and is butchering these unfortunate but patriotic people by the thousands every day.*³⁸

By the time that progressive Koreans like the members of the First Korean Congress denounced Japanese atrocities in colonial Korea, progressive Protestant Christianity had become a catalyst for social protest in the Land of the Morning Calm. As Eckert explains, "The remarkable appeal of Protestantism in Korea was partly due to a psychological factor: the feeling of many Koreans that conversion to Christianity was an act of penance for the failings of their traditional society that had led to the loss of Korea's nationhood."³⁹ In an interesting reversal of regular roles, in Korea, Christianity was not a tool for Christian imperialists to use in the assimilation of non-Christian native populations (as in European colonialism in North America, South America, Africa, etc.); it was a tool for the Christian native population to use in resisting non-Christian imperialists. "By spreading Western liberal ideas," Eckert argues, "missionaries ... played an important role in arousing a national consciousness among the Korean people. The political activities of Korean converts ... were both inspired and informed by their Christian beliefs."⁴⁰

The "Million Souls for Christ This Year" Campaign, 1910

38. First Korean Congress, "An Appeal to America" (Philadelphia, 1919), in *Sources of Korean Tradition*, ed. Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary, 342.

39. Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, 250.

40. *Ibid.*, 249.

One example of Protestant Christianity arousing national consciousness during the first decade of Japanese colonialism in Korea is the "Million Souls for Christ This Year" campaign, which focused on non-Christian Koreans whose hearts were "broken" — shattered by sadness, in one sense, and prepared for the planting of God's Word, in another — by the "moment of 'supreme national hopelessness.'"⁴¹ As Baird explained in 1913, "When we first reach heathendom and find ourselves confronted by millions of people without God and without hope in the world, few or no Christian schools, little or no Christian literature, practicing filthy and barbarous methods of medicine, and with the only hope, humanly speaking, for the amelioration of these conditions resting with a handful of missionaries, we may be tempted to forget that 'he who believeth doth not make haste.'"⁴² The 1910 campaign, which printed one million copies of the Gospel of Mark in Korean with the goal of disseminating them to one million despairing Koreans, may have been an example of missionaries forgetting injunction, but sowed seeds of hope, seeds that grew into a flowering of resurgent nationalism and resistance to Japanese imperialism.

Protestant missionaries in Korea, working ecumenically under the direction of the General Council of Evangelical Missions in Korea, organized the nation's two hundred thousand Christians, who provided, by year's end, over one hundred thousand days of service spent in revival meetings, street contacting, and house-to-house visits. These activities taught Koreans hymns like "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which sounded to colonized Koreans more like an anthem and reason for militant resistance than a worship tune. Moreover, Bible stories like Moses leading Israel out of bondage, little David defeating big Goliath, and Daniel's prophecies about the Kingdom of God breaking up and overthrowing the kingdoms of the world gave oppressed Koreans motivation, moral authority, and even encouragement to throw off the shackles of Japanese imperialism.⁴³ As Kim and Kim assert, "Not surprisingly, these activities antagonized the Japanese authorities, who were suspicious that this was some kind of revolutionary movement, and they intimidated those involved. Uniformed military police, along with spies, attended the special church services [for the "Million Souls for Christ This Year" campaign], and pastors were required to report to the police the names of converts, who were sometimes threatened and harassed."⁴⁴ Though Protestant missionaries in colonial Korea did not promote nationalism directly — their primary purpose was to preach salvation through Christ — the Bible they disseminated was filled with stories that encouraged oppressed persons to seek freedom, both spiritual and physical, in the message of the Christian

41. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 107.

42. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 30-31.

43. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 107-108.

44. *Ibid.*

gospel.

Missionary Attitudes Toward Imperial Japan

Though progressive Protestant missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood did not promote Korean nationalism directly, their negative attitudes toward Japanese colonialism likely encouraged the distaste for bondage inherent in their message. As Underwood explained in 1908, even before annexation when Korea was a protectorate of Japan, "Matters are no better than before, in many places worse," due to the "rapacity of both [Japanese] officials and colonists." He then clarified his position by stating, "The conditions are certainly worse than they were, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the controlling power will make good her loud promises to the world and see that common justice is done in Korea."⁴⁵ In the same year, Allen's negative assessment of Japanese rule in Korea matched Underwood's. As the missionary and doctor asserted, "This time Japan is taking no chances in Korea. The country is to be hers to exploit for herself. ... After her brilliant war with Russia [the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905], Japan is in no mood to accept any marked interference."⁴⁶ Did negative missionary attitudes towards the Japanese influence Korean converts? In 1913, Baird provided a pregnant answer when she wrote, "Sometimes it takes years for us to comprehend what living epistles we are to our adopted people. Every look, word and action was noted, commented on, repeated to others, and often, perhaps, misconstrued."⁴⁷

As "living epistles," progressive Presbyterian missionaries gave Koreans several compelling reasons to resist Japanese imperialism. Kim and Kim explain that though "the Presbyterian Church of Korea ... opted for 'loyal recognition' of Japanese rule, ... mainstream Protestant Christianity (Presbyterian and Methodist) continued to pose a threat to the Japanese project in Korea for several reasons."⁴⁸ As they summarize, "First, because most Christians resisted Japanization. ... Second, the churches represented a different source of authority. ... Third, the churches constituted the largest organized Korean community. ... Fourth, the churches continued to invite foreign missionaries who ... had links with the world church and influence with foreign governments."⁴⁹ For these reasons and to colonized Koreans, Protestant missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood represented a message that was compatible with, and catalytic for, self-determination, nationalism, anti-colonialism, alternative governmental forms, safe spaces to organize and plan resistance, philosophies of liberty and freedom that were in opposition to imperialism, and hope in the possibilities of international assistance and, ultimately, Christ's

deliverance from even political bondage (through His Second Coming).⁵⁰ For example, as Kim and Kim state, leading progressive Presbyterians "preached especially in this period on the story of the Exodus from Egypt and frequently compared the Korean people to Israel suffering under the pharaoh and expecting their delivery. These parallels naturally led to messianism and the expectation that God would deliver the Korean people into the promised land not metaphorically but literally. ... Despite the dire political situation, Christians continued to hold out hope of national salvation."⁵¹

Christian Participation in the March First Movement (1919)

The March First Movement provides the most cogent example of the effects of progressive Christianity on Korean nationalism during Japanese imperialism's first decade in the Land of the Morning Calm. The largest demonstration in modern Korean history, in which millions of Koreans took to the streets in 211 out of 218 counties to shout "Daehan dongnip mansei!" ("May an independent Korea live for ten thousand years!")⁵² and protest Japan's presence, began with a declaration of independence from colonial rule. As the Japanese imperial police prepared to strike, progressive Korean students defiantly read the declaration aloud at Seoul's Pagoda Park on 1 March 1919, thus giving the movement its name.⁵³ The declaration, which was largely the work of twenty-nine-year-old scholar Ch'oe Namseon, begins,

*We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people. We proclaim it to the nations of the world in affirmation of the principle of the equality of all nations, and we proclaim it to our posterity, preserving in perpetuity the right of national survival. ... We claim independence in the interest of the eternal and free development of our people and in accordance with the great movement for world reform based upon the awakening conscience of mankind. This is the clear command of heaven.*⁵⁴

Thirty-three men signed the declaration, and sixteen of them were Christians, including the progressive Presbyterian minister Kil Seonju. In explaining the role of Korean Christians in the March First Movement, theologian Wi Jo Kang asserts that they "were active participants in this independence movement. ... Many Christian churches became gathering places for demonstrators and to hear the declaration of independence read. The [Japanese] government placed primary blame for the protests on the Christians and retaliated against them. ... Practically every Christian

45. Underwood, *The Call of Korea*, 39.

46. Allen, *Things Korean*, 249-250.

47. Baird, *Inside Views of Mission Life*, 20-21.

48. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 110.

49. *Ibid.*, 110-111.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 113.

52. Eckert et al., *Korea Old and New*, 278.

53. Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary, *Sources of Korean Tradition*, 335.

54. "Declaration of Independence" (1 March 1919), in *Sources of Korean Tradition*, ed. Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary, 337.

pastor in Seoul was arrested and jailed. ... In some localities the police arrested all church officers."⁵⁵

For the part that progressive Korean Christians had played in the March First Movement, Japanese imperialists exacted brutal retribution. Over the course of the next seven months, Japanese forces arrested 3,804 Presbyterians (including 134 senior leaders), murdered forty-seven more, and destroyed twelve Presbyterian churches. Other Christian denominations faced similar atrocities.⁵⁶ Why did the Japanese target Christians, especially Protestants? Kim and Kim answer the question by explaining, "Christians were among the main instigators. ... National Christian networks played an important part in the [March First Movement's] spread. ... Numerically, Christian participation in the movement was disproportionately strong. ... The [movement] was very important for Korean Protestantism because it further re-established the link between the churches and nationalism."⁵⁷ For these reasons, they continue, the Japanese "regarded Christians as the main instigators" and "deliberately targeted Christians for arrest: of the 489 clergies, half were Protestant ministers [while only 0.3 percent were Catholic; Catholic Koreans were often pro-Japanese]. Virtually every pastor in Seoul and Pyongyang were imprisoned, and so were many other church workers. In some areas of the provinces it was reported that people were stopped, beaten, and rounded up simply because they were Christians."⁵⁸ The most horrific crime committed against Korean Christians during this period occurred in the village of Cheam-ri, near Suwon, on 15 April 1919, when Japanese soldiers ordered all male Christians into a Methodist church, shot up the building once the group of about thirty was inside, finished off the wounded with cold steel, and then torched the church for being a symbol of resistance in what one farmer called "a Christian village."⁵⁹ There were no survivors.

Primary sources from the oral histories of Protestant Koreans who lived through the horrors of the Japanese response to the March First Movement add even more depth and richness to the story. Reacting to President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech of January 1918, which promised that a "general association of nations" (the League of Nations, a precursor to the interventionist, global governance of the United Nations) would work for self-determination for colonized countries like Korea,⁶⁰ progressive Korean Protestants like Kang Byung Ju protested against the Japanese imperialism with vigor. As Kang remembered, "We each had a Korean flag in

our hand—everyone had flags. We waved our flags and people impulsively jumped up to the podium and shouted speeches about the sorrow and anger at losing our country. ... We all shouted independence slogans until our voices cracked."⁶¹ Lee Ha Jun explained that his patriotism came from secret Bible study meetings with his friends, who attended his private Protestant school. As he stated, "We met at my house on the pretext of learning the Bible—Mr. Ham [a Korean nationalist who attended their meetings] was a Bible authority, but in addition, he explained the predicaments that we Koreans were in at the present time, and said we had to be wide awake, and alert, to push things through for the good of Korea. His words impelled us to action, and it was all in the form of a Bible study."⁶² Kim T. also attended a private Protestant school, founded by the activist Cho Man Sik, and received a similar dose of nationalism mixed with Christianity. Of the nexus between progressive Protestantism and anti-imperialism, he asserted, "While [at my school] I became aware of discrimination. ... They heightened our awareness of and pride in being Korean and fostered a sense of active resistance to the Japanese. Mr. Cho [Man Sik] himself came once a week and gave us an inspirational talk. He could not come out and say that the Japanese were our unwelcome masters and we should resist, but in the form of a sermon from the Bible, he said those things. We did not mistake his message."⁶³ With these recollections in mind, it is not surprising to note that many Christians felt like Sin Kwang Seong, who remembered that "my only dealings with the police were because we were members of the Christian church. There was no other reason for them to bother me."⁶⁴ To their colonizers, Christians, especially Protestant Christians, had become synonymous with progressive causes like Wilsonian self-determination, which made them easy targets.

CONCLUSION

Events from the first thirty-five years of Protestant missionary work in Korea (1884-1919) demonstrate the global reach of Western progressivism. Presbyterian missionaries in the Land of the Morning Calm during the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially, brought with them the philosophies and practices of progressive reform, a social gospel aimed at improving life for all people. This study of the memoirs of three of these Presbyterian missionaries—Horace N. Allen, Annie L. A. Baird, and Horace G. Underwood—places them in the context of the progressive winds that powered preaching of Christ in Korea. As a product of the times in which they lived, their progressive Protestantism promoted (1) modernization along Western lines and (2) protest

55. Wi Jo Kang, "Church and State Relations in the Japanese Colonial Period," in *Christianity in Korea*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 102.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 119, 121, 123, 124.

58. *Ibid.*, 124.

59. Kang, "Church and State Relations in the Japanese Colonial Period," 103.

60. Kim and Kim, *A History of Korean Christianity*, 119.

61. Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 50.

62. *Ibid.*, 89.

63. *Ibid.*, 46.

64. *Ibid.*, 102.

against Japanese colonialism, along with religious conversion. By employing the Nevius System, encouraging literacy and capitalism, and providing expanded opportunities for women, they disseminated a Christianity that helped to modernize Korea in the Western image. By engaging in the “Million Souls for Christ This Year” Campaign of 1910, sharing negative attitudes toward imperial Japan, and, especially, catalyzing the March First Movement of 1919 through a message that inspired Wilsonian self-determination, they formed the backbone of the protests against colonial Japan. Progressive Protestantism during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century did far more than lay the groundwork for a nation (South Korea) whose population is more than a quarter Christian today.⁶⁵ The Protestantism of the Progressive Era, as it was preached by Presbyterian missionaries like Allen, Baird, and Underwood, helped to fashion a modern Korea, especially in the South, that looks more like the America of Roosevelt and Wilson, with its progressive, interventionist ideas about individuals, government, and society, than the traditional, isolationist Joseon Kingdom from which it sprang.

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Nicholas W. Gentile
ngentile48007@ucumberlands.

Nicholas W. Gentile wrote this article as a PhD student at University of the Cumberlands, where he explored Christian mission leadership, Korean missiology, and American religious history, including the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

⁶⁵. Grayson, “A Quarter-Millennium of Christianity in Korea,” 22.