

ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE
KOREAN MIGRATION TO HAWAII, 1901 - 1913

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MARCH 2000

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I. Introduction

On January 13, 1903 one hundred and two Korean immigrants disembarked the *SS Gaelic* destined for the sugar cane fields of Hawaii. They arrived in good health and were favorably received by the planters. After a long period of preliminary discussions and initial setbacks, the “experiment” to bring in these Korean laborers to offset the preponderance of Japanese labor was off to a good start. Though the Korean immigration to Hawaii would be brought to a premature halt by Japanese interference, between the years 1899 through 1905 more than 7,000 men, women, and children would emigrate from Korea to Hawaii.¹

Among these initial seven thousand immigrants, about four hundred had been converted to Christianity prior to leaving Korean soil. Thirty immigrants were even doing evangelical work prior to departure. Among the first group of Koreans to arrive aboard the *SS Gaelic*, more than half were Christians. Almost as soon as the first Koreans set foot on Hawaiian soil, they began to set up churches and missions leading to the conversion of many thousands of their fellow immigrants who followed them. While the estimates of the early Korean Christian population in Hawaii remain tenuous -- and the numbers of true conversions impossible to determine -- we can say with certainty that Christianity was the dominant religious and social institution among the Korean

¹ While still relatively few in number, Koreans would become the second largest ethnic group of laborers on the plantations in Hawaii by percentage, enough to seriously challenge the Japanese monopoly on labor. This aroused the government in Japan, and the Japanese in Korea placed pressure on a willing King to halt immigration to Hawaii. The King was happy to halt immigration after recent reports of Koreans being enslaved in Mexico.

immigrants.² Indeed, Christianity was to inscribe the Korean migration to Hawaii at all levels.

Both the plantation owners (the planters) and the Koreans themselves used Protestant Christianity, or its organization (the Church), as a tool to satisfy their own secular purposes. The direct and indirect influence of Christianity, both prior to departure from Korea and while the Koreans were in residence at Hawaii, was widespread. In fact, the Koreans brought with them no indigenous religious traditions. Formal apparatuses of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism were left behind along with the traditional topknot and *hanbok* (traditional Korean hairstyle and clothing). This stands in stark contrast to the immigration experience of other Asian nations. Most notably, Christianity had little or no influence during the emigration from both China and Japan. Even among the established Chinese and Japanese immigrant communities in Hawaii Christianity held little sway. Buddhism was the dominant socio-religious institution among the Japanese immigrants, while secular associations and brotherhoods mainly served the needs of the Chinese immigrants.

Regarding the Japanese immigrant community Conroy argues that “Christianity at this time was to build no bridge between the East and the West. Its converts, few and uncertain, could not stand the test when the big, powerful, and *Japanese* Hongwanji Buddhist mission began proselytizing in 1897. The Christian work of a decade was half

² “One third of all the Koreans in Hawaii are professing Christians. They dominate the life in the camps on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, and Maui . . .” (*The Korea Review*, 6:2, p. 405). Bernice Kim goes so far as stating that one and all professed to become Christians (Bernice Kim, “The Koreans in Hawaii” (master’s thesis, University of Hawaii 1937).

undone . . . it was Buddhism that was to claim the religious affection of the Japanese community.”³

The Chinese, on the other hand, brought with them no organized religion; rather, they imported many clan affiliations and secret societies. These voluntary associations then filled the void left by the absence of organized religion. Among the early Chinese immigrants who came to Hawaii few had experienced much contact with Westerners and virtually none with Christians. Therefore, in contradistinction to the Korean Church, the Chinese Christian churches in Hawaii and the mainland are indigenous to the Chinese-American community and not imported from China.⁴

What were the historical forces at work that caused this unique phenomenon to occur in the history of Asian immigration to Hawaii, i.e., the influence of Christianity during the Korean immigration to Hawaii, and why did it continue to exert such strong influence among the Korean community? I do not deny the profound spiritual benefit or comfort that many Koreans no doubt experienced through conversion to Christianity; however, it is beyond the ability of the historian to look into the heart. For purposes of the present paper, I will look only at the secular uses of Christianity during the first wave of the Korean migration to Hawaii.⁵

The planters used Christianity for two purposes. Although there is no evidence they specifically sought out Christian missionaries, the missionaries, nonetheless, played a significant role in the Korean migration. First, in Korea, it was a missionary who was primarily responsible for gaining the approval of the Korean court and setting up the

³ Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Frontier in Hawaii, 1868 – 1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953): 96. Emphasis in the original.

⁴ Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong, 1960): 276 & 281.

immigration organizations. Missionaries also played an important role in the actual recruitment process. Second, the planters were willing to build churches, pay ministers' salaries, and otherwise contribute to the missions in Hawaii. In a tacit *quid pro quo*, the missions promised to encourage their Korean charges to be better workers, to stay on one plantation, and to practice temperance and other Christian virtues.

The Koreans themselves also used Christianity for various purposes. In addition to the traditional uses of religion such as caring for the sick and the needy, the Korean Church satisfied a host of other secular needs as well. These services included the following: the church provided a sense of community and other social functions; it preserved traditional Korean culture and values; it established schools; it acted at times as a quasi-government consulate; and when Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the church provided the organizational structure for anti-Japanese nationalist activities. During the period under review, the Koreans used the Church primarily as a means of acculturation to the Hawaiian/American climate with little or no nationalist activities. This is true even though the 1905 Japanese protectorate in Korea and other earlier interference by the Japanese inspired nationalist sentiment among the Koreans. However, after the arrival of Syngman Rhee in Hawaii in 1913, nationalist activities within the Church skyrocketed. The post-1913 uses of Christianity by the Koreans for nationalist purposes will be addressed in a subsequent essay.

II. Background

Christianity had rocky beginnings in Korea. First imported and embraced by elite Koreans who learned of the new theology during tribute missions to China, it was largely

⁵ Most scholars see in the Korean migration to American either three or four waves, depending on how they choose to divide the migration. The first wave begins around 1899. It involves a few ginseng merchants

abandoned after discovering Christianity required them to cease ancestor veneration. However, some continued to embrace the new religion and begged the church to send missionaries and priests. The church in China attempted to comply by sending the requested fathers. However, Christianity was soon proscribed as subversive when word reached the palace that people were smashing ancestor tablets and calling on Western intervention in Korea. There followed a storm of persecution and martyrdom. This left the church in Korea weakened, with only a few loyal followers among the *chungin* (lit. middle people. The mid-level clerks and administrators).⁶ Christianity would not see any substantial increase in membership until the arrival of the Protestant missionaries in the late 19th century.

On May 22, 1882, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed between the United States and Korea paving the way for the arrival of American Protestant missionaries. The first draft of the treaty contained a provision prohibiting missionary activity; however, the Americans removed that point and the treaty as signed is silent on the issue of religion -- there was no specific prohibition nor allowance. Nonetheless, Article IV states, "All citizens of the United States of America in Choson (Korea), peaceably attending to their own affairs, shall receive and enjoy for themselves and everything appertaining to them the protection of the local authorities and the Government of Choson, who shall defend them from all insult and injury of any sort." This provision then gave ample justification to missionaries to live in Korea, if not to evangelize.

and the sugar laborer migration for 1902 - 1905.

⁶ Carter J. Eckert, et. al. *Korea, Old and New: A History* (Seoul, Korea: The Korean Institute, 1990): 183.

By the summer of 1884, two years after the signing of the treaty, the Methodists began operating schools and clinics in Korea. In September 1884, Dr Horace Allen arrived in Korea. Almost immediately Dr. Allen became influential in Korean domestic affairs and would use this influence in the future Korean migration to Hawaii.⁷ Though the laws proscribing Christianity were still on the books, “by 1890 the anti-foreign law had by common consent become a dead letter and was superceded by a general goodwill. Evangelistic activities were . . . openly carried on throughout the country.”⁸ By 1902, Protestant missionaries had setup churches, hospitals, and schools in most urban centers throughout the peninsula and had gained a substantial following among the urban dwellers.

III. Uses of Christianity

In Korea. By the early 1890s, the Japanese had become the largest ethnic group on the plantations and were using this strength to agitate and strike for better wages and working conditions. As early as 1896 the planters began looking at Korea as a possible source of cheap labor to offset the preponderance of Japanese labor.⁹ Though the reasons remain unclear, the attempt to acquire Korean laborers was tabled for a couple years. However, by 1901 the planters began to take serious steps to initiate recruitment of Korean labor. The first step was to ensure that there would be no problems forthcoming from the American federal government. To this aspect, the planters were given

⁷ Paek, Nak-chun, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832 – 1910* (Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1987. Originally published, 1927): 86. Patterson, Wayne. *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896-1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988). Harrington, Fred Harvey. *God, Mammon and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

⁸ Paek, *Protestant Missions*, 163.

⁹ Giffard to Irwin, November 18, 1901. Walter M. Giffard Papers (University of Hawaii Archives). See also, Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896 – 1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988).

assurances that the Koreans would not be treated as Chinese (thereby excluded due to the Chinese Exclusion Act) and provided they are “able bodied men and able to obtain employment after arrival, and also provide[d] that no contract, written or implied be made with them prior to their departure from Korea.”¹⁰ As the mood in America regarding emigration from Asia was vacillating, the planters felt they needed to take advantage of this window quickly.

The next step was to find an agent to represent their interests in Korea. They first appealed to American businessmen in Korea, but they were reluctant to participate. Their reluctance was most likely due to the fact that American immigration laws would most likely be broken. Serendipitously, Horace Allen was passing through Hawaii on his vacation home and made the acquaintance of several of the planters. Allen agreed to represent the planters’ interests in Korea. Allen eventually provided such invaluable services to the planters that had the planters been unable to obtain the services of Dr Allen the character of the Korean migration to Hawaii would have been of a completely different order, had it taken place at all.

Wayne Patterson outlines four key services that Allen provided for the planters.¹¹ First, Allen was instrumental in obtaining approval from the Korean court to establish an official immigration office. This was without precedent in Korean history. Though Koreans had immigrated in the past, primarily to the Russian Far East and Manchuria, they had done so without the approval of the court. Second, he selected the recruiter and secured for him the official franchise from the Korean court. Third, he intervened on

¹⁰ Giffard to Irwin, November 25, 1901. Emphasis in original.

¹¹ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 19-30. The following discussion of planter activity in Korea is heavily indebted to Professor Patterson.

behalf of the planters in Washington, D.C. And fourth, he helped the planters evade American immigration laws.¹² In addition to these four services, Allen was also instrumental in convincing the American missionaries in Korea that immigration would be in the best interest of the Koreans.

On his return to Korea, Dr Allen attempted to enlist an American businessman to act as recruiter. His first choice, however, a Mr. Townsend, refused to act as recruiter or intermediary because he (correctly) assumed that the actions taken by the planters were in violation of US immigration law.¹³ Next, Allen turns to David Deshler who eagerly accepts the responsibilities. With the aid of Dr Allen, the Korean court granted Deshler the exclusive franchise to recruit would be emigrants and to create and operate the *Yuminwon* (Office of Immigration).¹⁴

With capital provided by the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA), Mr Deshler set up two companies headquartered in *Chemulpo* (present day *Inch'on*), the second largest urban center outside of Seoul. The East-West Development Company handled the details of recruitment and immigration while Deshler's Bank handled various financial aspects such as providing loans for passage fare and pocket money to show to the American immigration officials. At one point Deshler tried to force repayment of the loan from the Korean migrants. However, very few paid and Deshler was forced off the plantations. Since this was an illegal loan in the first place, the planters and Deshler were forced to write off the loans as a cost of importing labor.

After establishing his two companies, Deshler needed interpreters, both for recruitment and to accompany the laborers to Hawaii. Since the primary source of

¹² Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 23.

¹³ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 24.

English language instruction was from the Christian missionaries, it is not surprising that Deshler found Christian converts to serve as interpreters. The initial interpreters were Mr. Chong In-su and Mr Hyon Son, who was a parishioner of George Heber Jones' Methodist Episcopal Church. These men would help recruit Korean workers and accompany the first ship to Hawaii.

Though advertisements were placed in newspapers and on conspicuous locations throughout the city, this method proved ineffective over the long run. Most Koreans either did not believe the recruitment propaganda or were simply afraid to travel to such distant unknown locations. Another stumbling block to recruitment was the fact that to the traditional Korean, immigration was tantamount to abandoning one's ancestors, which was anathema to Korean Confucians. All of these obstacles, however, were overcome when the recruiters turned to their own parishes.

With the direct involvement of the American missionaries, the Christian character of the Korean migration began to take shape. Though not all missionaries in Korea were of one mind, the Presbyterian missionaries in the North were generally opposed to immigration, Methodist missionaries such as George Heber Jones and others succeeded in convincing many Korean converts to make the attempt. One Korean immigrant remembered that "much of the recruitment activities of those representing the Hawaii Sugar Plantations had taken place in the Christian Churches in Korea with the active encouragement and support of the American missionaries"¹⁵

Though the Presbyterians tried to discourage immigration, they were ultimately unable to turn the tide. Professor Patterson points out several reasons why they were

¹⁴ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 47. .

¹⁵ *75th Anniversary of Korean Immigration to Hawaii, 1903-1978* (Honolulu: Anniversary Committee), 17.

opposed to immigration. Rev. Samuel H. Moffet in Pyongyang argued that the Koreans went as contract laborers and were unwitting participants in the violation of immigration laws. Also, Moffet assumed that the Korean immigrants to Hawaii would be “liable to suffer ill usage or be demoralized”¹⁶ Rev. William Baird, also a Presbyterian, raised other objections. He feared the loss of the converted, not only to Hawaii but to the Methodists as well. He also argued that sugar plantations were not the best place for the development of Korean Christians.¹⁷

A Methodist Reverend, on the other hand, Rev. George Heber Jones, was very enthusiastic about the immigration experiment. Not only did he encourage his parishioners to immigrate, but he also wrote articles extolling the work the Koreans were doing in Hawaii. Thus, Rev. Jones “advised his church members to join the emigrants to Hawaii” arguing that the weather was agreeable in Hawaii, Koreans Christians could set up a church and evangelize (the outcome of which Jones must have been well pleased), life in the West would make them better Christians, and finally, they could obtain a Christian education.¹⁸ Indeed, Jones was so gung-ho he saw the first ship off, delivering tracts and saying prayers.

If the missionaries exerted a direct influence over the Korean Christians, they also exerted a more subtle and indirect influence. Koreans at about the turn of the century were witnessing the ineluctable emasculation of their decrepit kingdom at the hands of Western and Japanese imperial powers. The resulting chaos or impotence in the face of foreign (Japanese) threat undermined the existing social order and caused many to abandon it in favor of new social and religious institutions. The arrival of Western

¹⁶ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 73-74.

¹⁷ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 74-77.

missionaries provided the perfect outlet for some of the disillusioned and the missionaries were only too happy to make the leap between belief in Christianity and Western prosperity. Indeed, in an article written for *The Korea Review*, Rev. Jones speaks in unmistakably ¹⁹Weberian terms when he points out the absence of the work ethic and the “time is money” concept, etc., in Korea. He argued that these virtues are quickly instilled in the Korean upon arrival in Hawaii. In short, Koreans saw the affluence of the American missionaries and wanted to go to America. The vast majority of the early Korean immigrants to Hawaii then learned about the United States and immigration opportunities through contact with American Christian missionaries or their Korean converts.

The planters in Hawaii. Almost as soon as the first immigrants landed in Hawaii, they began setting up congregations, missions, and churches. Establishment of churches and congregations became the pattern of the Koreans and soon there existed churches on every plantation. Homer Hulbert, editor of *The Korea Review*, wrote in 1906 of an experience he had on the plantation at Mokuleea. “[T]hat night in the little chapel erected by the Koreans themselves I baptized the baby with several adult Koreans.” He continued, “One third of all the Koreans in Hawaii are professing Christians. They dominate the life in the camps on the Islands of Oahu, Kauai and Maui where they are stamping out gambling and intoxication.”²⁰ That same year Rev Jones reported on his visit to Hawaii. “The Korean seeks the Christian church when abroad. In Hawaii little congregations of them are found everywhere. In the evening the sound of their hymns can be heard in most camps,” then he could not resist adding an underhanded

¹⁸ Patterson, *The Korean Frontier*, 49.

¹⁹ G. H. Jones, “Koreans Abroad,” *The Korea Review* 6, no. 12 (1906): 446 – 451.

complement, “for as in Korea so in America, they love to make a ‘joyful noise’ even though they do not ‘sing.’”²¹

This natural tendency of the converted Koreans to organize congregations was certainly encouraged and supported by the planters themselves. No doubt this was at least in part attributable to the missionary background of planters, many of whom were missionaries or the children of missionaries. However, there is clear evidence that the planters used Christianity for reasons other than concern for the salvation of their Korean laborers. The planters made monetary and in kind contributions to the nascent Korean Church with the understanding that the Church and its ministers would encourage the workers to remain on the plantation, to work hard, etc. With the US immigration laws' prohibition of contract labor, the Church became a welcome ally in encouraging the Koreans to stay on the plantation, rather than hop from plantation to plantation or worse migrate to the cities or mainland.

After only a year of Korean immigration, and perhaps sooner, the planters made monetary donations to the mission for the upkeep of the mission and salaries of the Korean ministers, though in this early period the donations were apparently made on an occasional or as needed basis rather than on a fixed monthly salary. By at least 1911, however, and probably sooner, most plantations began making regular donations.

On December 9, 1904, we get the first hint of the *quid pro quo*. Rev. John W. Wadman, Superintendent of Hawaiian Mission, sent a note to the manager of the Waipahu Plantation as a follow up to a conversation regarding construction of “the building.” We do not have access to the details of this conversation, but considering the

²⁰ Homer B. Hulbert, “The Koreans in Hawaii,” *The Korea Review* 6, no 2 (1906): 401-405.

²¹ G. H. Jones, “Koreans Abroad,” *The Korea Review* 6, no. 12 (1906): 446 – 451.

tenor of Rev. Wadman's subsequent communications and mention of "the building" we can assume it was a solicitation of donations for building a church. Rev. Wadman stated in his note that "I have endeavored to stir them [the Korean laborers] up and get them to try and do better – all of which they promised to do – including the interpreter." In the same note he promises to send the Korean Pastor to the plantation once or twice a week "to get these men to do better and help all he can to bring about a better state of things." Without specifically mentioning any *quid pro quo*, he simply closed by stating "I will call after 2 or 3 weeks and have a chat with you about the building."²²

By 1906, the requests for donations became considerably less subtle. On May 11, 1906 Rev. Wadman began his letter with, "I am in financial distress over my mission work among the Koreans." He continued,

[T]he needs are so great at the different plantation among these poor helpless people for where I am trying to do all in my power both religiously and educationally that the success of the undertaking is really embarrassing. In all cases the managers are exceedingly kind and help (indecipherable) considerably with donations to the work.²³

On July 2, 1906 he wrote to remind the plantation manager of the promised assistance.

Quite a while ago you wrote me that my request for a little financial assistance for the Korean mission work would be presented to the Board of Directors and you would (indecipherable). I trust it has not been forgotten and as I am in great difficulty at present and need a little help. I shall be very glad to hear from you at your earliest convenience and do hope your reply will be favorable.²⁴

²² OSC 5/12 "Correspondence" 1904, HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

²³ OSC 5/18, Correspondence, 1906, HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

²⁴ OSC 7/2, Correspondence, 1906, HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

By 1911, the plantations were making contributions on a more regular basis. On May 19, 1911, the Olaa Sugar Company responded favorably to a request for assistance from Rev. John W. Wadman. As the letter is short it is reproduced here in its entirety.

In further answer to your letter of the 7th instant regarding the Korean Mission here, beg to say that we have been advised by Messrs Bishop & Company, Agents, Olaa Sugar Company to make a contribution of \$15.00 per month toward the mission, the contribution to be as from January 1st 1911. Please say how you wish us to disburse this money, whether to pay it to the Korean Minister here or to remit to you direct.²⁵

In many places throughout the HSPA archives the *quid pro quo* becomes even clearer. The planters support the missions with donations of cash, lumber, and land. In return the missions promised to encourage the laborers to stay put, to “do better,” and to “stamp out intoxication.” The planters, however, were not the only ones to make beneficial use of Christianity. The Koreans themselves also used Christianity for various secular purposes, though the historical record is not as complete on this score.

The Koreans in Hawaii. The Koreans in Hawaii formed a Diaspora community. That is, they were a relatively small minority group living outside their homeland in a country where, due to racial, language, and social barriers, were unable to blend in with the predominant society. Further, by 1910 most Koreans were unwilling or unable to return to their homeland. This forced them either to create or to import their own social associations and institutions. The Koreans overwhelmingly turned to Christianity or at least its organization to fill this role. While many customs and institutions were certainly imported, Christianity largely infused them all. The secular uses of Christianity by the Koreans in Hawaii can be broken down into four broad categories: social construction, aid and benefit, unofficial consulate and mediation, and lastly, Korean nationalism. As

²⁵ OSC 5/19, Correspondence, 1906, HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

mentioned above, the role of Christianity vis-à-vis Korean nationalism will be reserved for a subsequent essay.

By social construction I mean those organizations and discourses which provide order and meaning to the community. The organization of Christianity was used by the Koreans in Hawaii to replace a sense of order lost after leaving Korea and a sense of community. Further, the various Korean secular associations merged, or at least had strong connections, with the Korean Christian Church.

Traditional Korean society was very stratified and hierarchical. Society was divided into three hierarchical classes: *yangban* (nobility), *sangmin* (commoners), and *paekjang* (outcasts). This class system then was subdivided even further into smaller grades and divisions. In addition to this social stratification, the extended family, following Confucian dicta, was also very stratified and hierarchical. The head of the clan, usually the eldest male, demanded absolute filial piety. Any younger clan member was expected to show reverence and obedience to any older clan member. This was in keeping with two of the Cardinal Confucian relationships, Father to son, and elder brother to younger brother.

Until 1913, the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed the largest percentage of Korean Christians in Hawaii. While the Methodists had active missions both in Korea and Hawaii, so did other denominations. Clearly, there was something more than coincidence in the Methodist character of the Korean Christian community. Since the Congregationalist denominations such as the Baptists did not appeal to the Koreans until long after acculturation, I believe that it was the hierarchical nature of the Methodist

Church that appealed to the Koreans. The Church hierarchy mimicked and provided a replacement for the traditional Korean social stratification.

Why did the Koreans overwhelmingly join the Methodists rather than the Presbyterians or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church),²⁶ or other Episcopal-type churches with a presence in Hawaii at this time? Several reasons account for this phenomenon. First, as discussed above, the Presbyterians missionaries were opposed to immigration while the Methodist missionaries actively supported it. Therefore, Methodism acted like a filter in the Korean migration to Hawaii, screening out or converting the other denominations. Upon arrival in Korea, the Methodists maintained their strong hold on the Korean through a behind the scenes deal with other denominations. The Methodists made a comity agreement with the Presbyterians to the effect that the Methodists would have exclusive charge over the Koreans while the Presbyterians would have exclusive charge over the Chinese.

The LDS Church has been a proselytizing church since its inception on April 6, 1830. By the time the Koreans arrived in Hawaii in 1903 the LDS Church had a strong presence in Hawaii. (The LDS Church would not be on the Korean Peninsula until after the Korean War). However, the LDS missionaries in Hawaii assumed they were called²⁷ to proselytize exclusively among the native Hawaiians. No proselytizing, therefore, was done on the plantations. There is record of LDS proselytizing among the Japanese

²⁶ The LDS Church is not Episcopal in the traditional sense, the Bishops are actually the last of the Church government hierarchy -- it is, however, definitely hierarchical in structure, with a president, Apostles, Stake Presidents, etc.

²⁷ Missionary work in the LDS Church is always temporary, not a lifetime vocation. "Called" then is the terminology used meaning to issue an assignment.

laborers by 1919 but nothing serious until at least the 1930s. There is no record of proselytizing among the Korean laborers at all.²⁸

The Church also strengthened the sense of community among the Koreans in Hawaii. It filled this role in the obvious ways of providing the social organization and physical buildings in which to meet. In addition, it also played a less obvious role but one of critical importance in establishing community. Factionalism was an important element in the history of early modern Korea. Fiercely maintained factions evolved over questions of philosophy and governing ideology and between geographic regions. The Church was one important factor in mitigating these old inveterate factions allowing a more unified front during this early period. In the writings of Rev. Jones we find the following:

The old sectional differences seem very insignificant to the Korean as he looks at them through the vista of 8,000 miles. In a meeting which the writer addressed on the Island of Maui the fifty Koreans present came from twelve of the thirteen Provinces of the Korean Empire. The great unifying force is naturally the Christian Church and it is in the Korean Christian community that these things find their manifestation.²⁹

Ironically, as early as 1918 factionalism will begin creeping back within the Korean Christian community over the question of autonomy and flamed by Korean nationalism.

Before continuing with the secular uses of Christianity, a brief discussion is in order regarding secular associations and their links with the Church. Koreans in Hawaii set up many associations, some traditional and some unique to their new circumstances. These included business organizations, women and youth organizations, nationalist federations, quasi-government, newspapers, etc. Eventually, each plantation had its own associations and unofficial governing structures, the history and details of which need not

²⁸ Britsch, R. Lanier. *Moramona: the Mormons in Hawaii* (Laie, Hawaii : Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1989): 143.

concern us here. Suffice to say that by 1907 steps were taken to merge all the various groups under one umbrella association – the Korean National Association.

The boundaries separating the Korean National Association and the Church have always been fuzzy. The Church and the Association worked in tandem to accomplish their secular goals. However, to date no clear link between the two organizations has been shown. I believe that such a link existed and is important in understanding the social character of the Korean community in Hawaii.

Given the demographics of the Korean community, we can assume that the leadership of the Korean National Association were all Christian. Beyond this however, we find further direct and indirect evidence of an organizational link. First, in the 75th *Anniversary Memorial* of the Korean immigration a Mr. Ahn remembers that the “various neighborhood clubs called tong-hwi [sic, tong-hui] were organized – wherever more than ten Koreans resided. This was the basic social unit of the Korean community where the political, cultural and *religious* education was carried on . . .”³⁰ Second, in the HSPA archives are found letters addressed to the plantation managers jointly signed by Mr. Nai Soo Yee, President of the Korean National Association and Mr C.H. Min, Pastor of the Korean Church. And lastly, the stated objective of the Korean National Association could almost be a page from the Ecumenical Council. “The objects of this Association . . . are to educate the young, to encourage industry, to promote goodwill and confidence between the Koreans and their employers, to prevent the use of intoxicating liquors and opium, and to prevent the commission of crime.”³¹ Clearly, the Church and the Korean

²⁹ G. H. Jones, “Koreans Abroad,” *The Korea Review* 6, no. 12 (1906): 446 – 451.

³⁰ *75th Anniversary of Korean Immigration to Hawaii, 1903-1978* (Honolulu: Anniversary Committee), 34. Emphasis added.

³¹ HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

National Association had at least a tacit, if not explicit, pact to further the causes of the Koreans in Hawaii and Korean nationalism in general. For the remaining three uses of Christianity then to speak of one, i.e., the Church, is to understand a participation of the other, i.e., the Association.

Aid and Benefit. Temporal aid and benefit are practices traditionally assumed by the Church and it should surprise no one that the Koreans used their Church to this effect in Hawaii. Accordingly, I will not use space here to address the charities for the aged, infirm, or destitute, which the Koreans certainly had; rather, I will address those aspects that seem more unique to the Korean community in Hawaii, namely Church Schools.

One scholar writes, “Korean community leaders maintained traditional Korean values by establishing Korean and religious and cultural institutions wherever Korean immigrants lived.”³² The Koreans in Hawaii used the Church to maintain traditional Korean values through the establishment of Church schools. These schools were not mere Sunday Schools, but rather schools where Korean children could learn the language, culture, and history of Korea. These schools were affiliated with the Church and were supported by the Koreans themselves with an occasional donation from the planters. Church meeting houses were the usual meeting location for these schools and every Korean church on the islands sponsored some kind of school. About 1906 the Korean Compound was set up under the aegis of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Hawaii as a boarding school for students who could come to Honolulu. By 1913 this school will be the breeding ground for divisiveness, but at this time it was without question a unifying force for the Korean immigrant community.

³² Bong-youn Choy. *Koreans in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc.): 78.

Unofficial Consulate and Mediations. To understand why the Koreans in Hawaii looked to the Church to represent their interests before the planters and territorial government it is necessary to understand the political situation on the Korean peninsula. As early as 1876 Japan forced Korea to sign an unequal treaty that significantly weakened Korea's ties to China.³³ By 1905, Japan had set up a protectorate relationship over Korea usurping her foreign relations authority. And within five years Korea completely lost her sovereignty to Japan. Although the Treaty of Amity and Commerce signed with the United States clearly gave Korea the option of setting up embassies and consulates, Korea's inexperience in Western international law and her own domestic conflicts prevented Korea from setting up a consulate early on. Koreans abroad did all within their power to convince the Korean court of this vital need. Unfortunately, by the time the Korean court agreed to set up an embassy and consulates, Japanese interference in Korean affairs effectively strangled the idea and by 1905 Korea lost the window of opportunity.

The Japanese government claimed sovereignty over Koreans residing abroad and publicly stated that Japanese consulates would also serve the interests of Koreans. The Koreans, however, wholly rejected this idea and never sought Japanese protection. Still, one would expect to find some evidence of Japanese intervention on behalf of the Koreans. Other than a controversial contribution to the Methodist Church on behalf of the Koreans, I have found no evidence the Japanese consul exerted any pressure on the HSPA on behalf of the Koreans. There are numerous letters from the Japanese consul to various plantations on behalf of workers with Japanese names, but no Kim's, Lee's, or

³³ Japan learned early and well Western imperial techniques.

Ch'oe's appear on Japanese Consulate letterhead. The Koreans would have to solve their own problems without the weight of government.

The Koreans quite naturally used the Church and other associations to fill this role. As problems arose, the Koreans involved would turn to their minister for mediation or support. If the problems involved the plantation management the minister would write a letter directly to the manager attempting to find a solution. Indeed, as part of the *quid pro quo* arrangement discussed above, the Korean minister often tried to intervene prior to the occurrence of a problem by establishing temperance policies and camp bosses.

On July 31, 1909 in a letter addressed to Waipahu Plantation Company, the Korean National Association and The Korean Christian Church jointly attempted to mediate between the plantation managers and the laborers. This letter was apparently sent due to “discouraging reports from them [the Korean laborers] and from you.” In addition there was a specific problem the letter attempted to redress. Apparently, Koreans were being prevented from doing something other nationalities could freely do. Unfortunately, the letter is not very clear on that issue. To solve this problem and prevent future occurrences they advertised that they can “. . . make Koreans better laborers and profitable workmen on your plantation.” In order to do this they asked to be able to appoint a “camp boss” from among the Korean laborers “to look after the drinking and gambling in the camp and maintain order.”³⁴ In Korea, each village had a local informal governing structure. This system was transplanted to Hawaii where each small Korean community would elect their own village headman. I suspect the plan to appoint a “camp boss” was merely an attempt to legitimize the existent Korean village governing structure.

The Christian tone of this letter is unmistakable. If it was not for the less than perfect English one would think it was a track right from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. While the following quotation demonstrates the nature of the described mediation, I think it is interesting in and of itself:

Please allow us to appoint one good able Korean to look after the drinking and gambling in the camp and maintain order. Look out for gambling, Sir: no wonder, why, some Koreans slept in the field as you said; they can't help it but slumbering or sleeping in the field, because they spent their nights in gambling. Let us stamp out or prevent the strong drinking. It is vile and all the bad things come from it; quarreling is the most in consequence of it, otherwise Koreans are sober and quiet people. Therefor we dare say that if we can prevent these two things, we can make Koreans better laborers and profitable workmen on your plantation; in order to do these things, we beg your favor to authorize these men who will work with others in the fields and watch them in the day and stay with them in the camp at night and pick out every bad one and send him away if necessary.³⁵

This letter was followed by a letter of recommendation from the Bishop of Honolulu, Rev Harry B. Restarick.

In addition to the *quid pro quo* Christian bargaining, the Korean National Association did perform the services of a consul. On August 1, 1911 the Korean National Association sent a letter to the Olaa Sugar Plantation demanding back wages of a deceased Korean laborer. Though it is unclear how this affair turned out, this letter demonstrates that the Koreans were using their associations effectively to mediate between the plantations and the laborers, all without an official consulate.

IV. CONCLUSION

All migrations have their own histories and unique characteristics. The Korean migration to Hawaii was no exception. I have attempted to show the unique aspect of the history of the Korean migration was its strong, almost overwhelming, Christian character.

³⁴ HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

Christianity infused the Korean migration from beginning to end and through all levels of plantation life. It was to Christianity and the Church that Koreans turned to for socialization, aid and benefits, and internal and external mediation.

The strong Christian character of the Korean migration had its roots in two related historical forces. First, the Korean court ceased persecution of Christians and relaxed its prohibition against missionaries. Enter the Rev. Dr. Horace Allen, who, having ingratiated himself with the Korean king, was invaluable to the project of obtaining Korean laborers. Dr Allen was able to get the needed permission from the Korean king and he convinced other missionaries of the desirability of immigration; soon, the missionaries became the gateway for immigration to the United States. Second, the agents for HSPA in Korea recruited in the cities. Even without missionary involvement, this fact alone would have guaranteed a larger percentage of Christians. Many of Catholicism's only remaining converts were among the *chungin* who resided in the cities. Further, the Protestant missionaries were active mainly in the cities at that time.

Forty percent of the immigrants were already Christians by the time they landed. Due to evangelizing and not a little propagandizing, many more would convert on or soon after arrival in Hawaii. Because of this large percentage of Christians among the Korean population, it is not surprising that the Koreans would use the Church to their own purposes. Many of these uses were traditional, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, or taking care of the old and sick. However, due to the Koreans' Diaspora like situation, they expanded the role of the Church into almost every segment of life. I have shown where the Koreans used the Church to strengthen the sense of community by mimicking the traditional social order and mitigating factional differences. The Church

³⁵ HSPA Archives (University of Hawaii Archives).

was used to maintain traditional Korean values through the establishment of Church schools. And finally, the Koreans used the Church as a quasi-government consulate to mediate between internal quarrels and between laborer and plantation.

Lastly, this paper has attempted to make plain the *quid pro quo* relationship between the planters and the Korean Church. In the beginning years of the migration, the *quid pro quo* was often left unsaid, but I doubt it was ever lost on the planters. They were clearly aware that it was in their own best interest to have a religious labor pool infused with the Protestant Ethic. In later years, as the appeals for money become more desperate, the *quid pro quo* is spelled out – if you give us money, lumber, land, etc., we will give you a sober, compliant, and industrious work force. In sum, both the planters and the Korean immigrants used Christianity as a tool to serve their own secular ends.