*Korean Christian Nationalists and Canadian Missionaries*

1919 – 1945

Voices from the Helen Fraser Macrae Oral History Project

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Helen Fraser Macrae, the daughter of two Canadian Presbyterian pioneer missionaries in northeastern Korea, Duncan and Edith Macrae, was born in Hamhŭng in 1910.[[1]](#footnote-1) She left Korea when she was a teenager but remained a Koreaphile throughout her life. Macrae’s affection for the country of her birth compelled her to spend much time reflecting on childhood experiences and gathering material evidence related to the Canadian missionary movement. She donated all she had assembled to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia with the primary objective of preserving the legacies of the missionaries and Korean Christians as well as providing future scholars of the Canadian mission to Korea with sources upon which they could base their studies.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Helen Fraser Macrae fonds, similar to others of its kind, is comprised of letters, articles, books and photographs but it is different in so far as it contains cassette tape recordings of Christian converts.[[3]](#footnote-3) Macrae conducted audio interviews with Koreans who had lived and worked with the Canadian missionaries during the first half of the twentieth century in effort to document the native side of the mission story and thus make her collection as comprehensive as possible.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Macrae usually allowed her subjects to speak freely on any topic without interruption, but she did try to guide them toward issues she considered both important and obscure in the documentary records. Some of the most common sets of questions she asked the Koreans were in regard to their struggles with and persecution by the Japanese imperial authorities between 1919 and 1945 as well as the attitudes they had about the Canadians. Even though not all the interviewees gave detailed replies to these questions, enough information was given that an overall assessment of their answers can be made. Many of those who elaborated on their opinions either explicitly or implicitly identified themselves as Christian nationalists.[[5]](#footnote-5) They had remained loyal to their church and nation while living under an imperialist regime which was hostile to both. Throughout the entire colonial period the Japanese specifically targeted Korean Christians because of their supposed allegiance to the western imperialists and their very real, albeit non-violent, patriotism. More than a few of Macrae’s respondents had been imprisoned and tortured by the Japanese for their faith as well as their anti-colonial activities.

Unsurprisingly, the Koreans portrayed the Japanese in an almost entirely negative light. Their perceptions of the missionaries were more complex. The Canadians were judged primarily by way of their contribution to the advancement of the Korean nation and the level of respect they exhibited for Koreans and their culture. Generally, all expressed a deep gratitude for missionary assistance in their struggle against the imperial regime.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Canadians had been among the most vociferous opponents of the atrocities the Japanese committed against the Koreans during the 1919 Independence Movement and the Chientao invasion one year later.[[7]](#footnote-7) The respondents also felt indebted to the missionaries for the hospitals and schools they had built to serve the Korean people. Education was particularly prized by the Christians because they considered it to be one of the main ingredients which fostered the preservation of Korean civilization during the colonial period. Yet many of the Koreans also articulated their frustration and disappointment at what they saw as a lack of appreciation for Koreans and Korea on the part of some missionaries. This was deeply disturbing to the interviewees because they adamantly believed that Korea was just as deserving of respect as any other nation in the West or elsewhere.

I will analyze the responses that the Koreans gave in regard to their attitudes about the missionaries and the experiences they had under the Japanese imperialist system in order to illuminate the nationalist-Christian nexus that existed in the Canadian missionary sphere of operations in northeastern Korea and Manchuria between 1919 and 1945. Particular attention will be paid to the Korean discussion of their participation in the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919 and the experiences they had during the 1930s until the end of the Pacific War – the era when the colonial government had strongly enforced its assimilation policies.[[8]](#footnote-8) Respecting the Korean view of Canadians, much attention will be given to the early 1920s – the nadir of Korean-Canadian relations, imperialism as well as the daily interactions between missionary and convert.

The link between the rise of Korean protestant Christianity and the nationalist cause has received much treatment by scholars. Historians such as Kang Wi-jo and Choi Jai-keun, as well as many others have argued that one of the main reasons why the Koreans embraced Christianity was their belief that it was a potential source of power which could enable them to reclaim their nation.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Japanese and the Chinese on other hand were much more skeptical because they thought it was tied to Western imperialism. After the Japanese took control of Korea, the Church was the only establishment not dominated by the colonial government and as such became a meeting point for Korean nationalists.[[10]](#footnote-10) Historian Kenneth M. Wells has convincingly demonstrated that Christians were certain the philosophy and institutions of the Church (especially the schools) would inevitably help them overcome Japanese imperialism and build not only an independent nation, but a far better nation than had existed previously.[[11]](#footnote-11) The connection between Korean Christianity and nationalism becomes even more apparent when considering that 16 of the 33 leaders of the seminal event of nationalist history, the March 1st 1919 Independence movement, were Christians.

Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” combined with rumors that former Emperor Kojong had been poisoned by the Japanese in January 1919 provided the impetus for nationalist leaders to plan an uprising. They launched the Independence movement in Seoul in the afternoon of March 1st and soon thereafter it spread to all corners of the peninsula. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets waving Korean flags and demanding the withdrawal of the imperialists. Even though the movement was non-violent the colonial government quickly crushed it by killing thousands and imprisoning many more. Korean prisoners were often deprived of the basic necessities of life and tortured. The Canadian missionaries in 1919 have garnered attention by historians because many of them had publicly protested against the inhumane treatment of the Koreans at the hands of the gendarmes. Frank W. Schofield, a medical missionary based at the Severance Hospital in Seoul, is particularly famous because he spent all of 1919 attempting to make Japanese brutality an international issue.[[12]](#footnote-12) Detailed accounts of the Korean-Christians living in the northeast who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the nationalist cause are not as well known as the Canadians who tried to protect them because, they, unlike the missionaries, did not leave behind much of a paper trail. Helen Macrae’s oral history project rectified this situation to some extent.

Korean Christians in Canadian mission territory were well informed about the plans to hold demonstrations – unfortunately, no one Macrae interviewed specifically mentioned how they obtained this information. It is highly probable that Kil Son-ju, the “father of Korean Christianity” and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, helped provide the faith and conviction the members of his flock would need to carry out their insurgency in March – he conducted revivals in the northeast in January, but the interviewees made no reference to him.[[13]](#footnote-13) Kim Sang-pil, who was a teacher at a Canadian missionary high school in 1919, did however provide details concerning the preparations of the Sŏngjin protests.[[14]](#footnote-14) Kim asserted that a few days before March 1st he told the Canadian medical missionary Robert Grierson that he had to go to Seoul for a few days, but did not tell the missionary why he was leaving in effort to save him from being placed in a potentially precarious position. Kim stated that he kept Grierson ignorant of his plans because he knew that if and or when his activities were discovered by the police, missionaries would inevitably be questioned.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Kim took part in the Seoul demonstrations and then immediately proceeded north to trigger the uprising in Sŏngjin. He and some of his Christian comrades quickly made thousands of copies of the Declaration of Independence in Grierson’s basement (with the missionaries’ knowledge)[[16]](#footnote-16) and on the following day helped lead the inhabitants of his town on the streets demanding that the Japanese colonial government be disbanded.[[17]](#footnote-17) Japanese reaction was swift and merciless – within a very short time the protesters were beaten into submission by the authorities.[[18]](#footnote-18) Kim Sang-pil, along with many others, was arrested, imprisoned and tortured. He was reluctant to go into detail about his experiences as a prisoner, but he made sure to mention that his ordeals at the hands of the Japanese did not deter him from remaining a staunch nationalist. He continued to propagate the cause of independence among his compatriots while on itinerating trips in the northeast with the Canadian missionary Maud Rogers during the 1920s.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Like their counterparts in Sŏngjin, the Christians in Hamhŭng were also at the vanguard of the independence protests. Dr. Lee Chun-chul was a 17 year old student at the Canadian high school for boys when he participated in the insurrection. On March 2nd he along with YMCA leaders had a meeting at Lee Gun-jae’s home (a teacher at the mission school) to plan the insurgency. Lee mimeographed the Declaration of Independence – which they received from a fellow conspirator from Wŏnsan, Cho Yong-sin, and everyone else drew Korean flags that were to be used by the protestors. The Japanese police however had found out about their plot and subsequently arrested most of those who had been at the meeting. Lee fled Hamhŭng once he learned of the gendarmerie’s penetration of his conspiratorial circle.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Lee Chun-chul immediately went to see the Presbyterian Elder, Lee Yea-suk in Chang-jin county because he had the strong desire to tell his senior of Wilson’s “14 Points” and the plans to demonstrate against Japanese authority. Soon after meeting, Chun-chul convinced the Elder of the rightness of the cause and so they both went to a nearby lumber camp in the Bujeong mountains to tell the men there of the independence movement. According to Lee, all of the lumberjacks were incredibly enthusiastic. They transformed the Japanese flags they had found into *Taegukgi* by adding the colour blue and four black trigrams then marched to the local police station shouting *Mansei*! Being in such an isolated location the police officers had not heard any news from the outside world so they thought that perhaps the Koreans had really won independence, thus they began to cheer *Mansei* as well. A few days later however, the very same police officers were ordered by their superiors to round up the agitators – Dr. Lee was among those arrested and imprisoned.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Chun Chang-sin, the most politically engaged of all the women who told their stories to Macrae, provided many details about life in Hamhŭng during 1919. Like Kim Sang-pil and Dr. Lee, Chung had spent much of her young life associating with the Canadian missionaries. She converted to Christianity in Sŏngjin under the influence of her Canadian missionary teacher Jennie Robb when she was eight years old.[[22]](#footnote-22) She then moved to Hamhŭng in 1916 to attend the Canadian missionary school for girls but her studies were cut short in March of 1919 when she was arrested and tortured by the colonial police for helping to lead her fellow students in denouncing Japanese rule. When asked about the torture, Chun took a long pause and stated that she had been, “treated inhumanely.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Chun avowed that there were 42 principal architects of the Independence movement in Hamhŭng – the majority of them being male and Christian (Chun was one of the two female leaders). She asserted that Christians had been so prominent in the uprising because they were the most “advanced.” Although she did not thoroughly explain what she meant, thinking that Macrae would understand, it would seem that like many of the other Christians who had taken part in the 1919 Independence movement, Chun believed that the Koreans who had converted to Christianity were better equipped than non-Christians to guide the nation because they had embraced the values of democracy and social justice for all people regardless of gender or social status. Chun herself maintained a strong belief in this idea throughout her life. After fleeing from North Korea in 1945 she waged battles against trusteeship, the communists and misogyny. Before the Korean War broke out she spoke at large gatherings on behalf of women’s patriotic associations to discuss the evils of a divided Korea and the dictatorship established by Kim Il-sung. She also became one of the first female police officers in South Korea in order to help the cause of women, especially those who were suffering from domestic abuse.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Missionaries were prominent figures in many of the stories about 1919. A few Koreans recounted how Duncan Macrae had rushed to the Hamhŭng police station to lodge a protest soon after seeing Japanese policemen, firemen and peddlers brutalizing Koreans on the streets.[[25]](#footnote-25) Chun Chang-nim, a former student of the Canadian Academy in Hamhŭng and assistant to the missionary Emma Palethorpe in Northern Korea and Manchuria said he had heard the missionaries hid Koreans so the Japanese could not find them.[[26]](#footnote-26) Chun Chang-sin declared that the missionary teacher Ethel B. MacEachern had always argued against Christians taking part in political activities but put these feelings aside in 1919 and helped the Koreans who had been beaten and attacked by the Japanese.[[27]](#footnote-27) Most of the interviewees were too young to have taken part in the demonstrations, but, like their elders, they too discussed their appreciation for the Canadian missionary endeavor in 1919.

The Korean attitude toward the missionaries was not altogether positive. Unfortunately however the negative assessments provided by the Koreans were somewhat opaque because they often obfuscated their criticisms in generalities – they rarely mentioned names or gave specific instances of missionary transgressions.[[28]](#footnote-28) This said, the information provided by the respondents is valuable because it allows researchers an opportunity to evaluate the Korean-Canadian relationship and the Korean-Christian nationalist worldview after 1919 in a more comprehensive manner than would have been possible by only taking into account the documentary record.

Until the 1920s, Korean Christians by and large accepted their subordinate position within the Canadian mission. This is not to say that they were powerless, but they did not have much control over mission policy since the Canadians made the crucial decisions about education and medicine. After 1919 however Church leaders, emboldened by realizing their ability to organize the flock, came to believe that an essential feature of providing pastoral care now included a struggle to wrest more power from the Canadians over how and where mission funds should be spent. In December 1923, after reading a copious amount of letters about the demands of Korean church leaders and students at the mission schools, A.E. Armstrong, the Assistant Secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in Canada became so despondent that he suggested it might be wise for him to write a letter to the congregations threatening to force the withdrawal of the Canadian mission if the dissention did not abate.[[29]](#footnote-29) The missionaries on the ground decided to capitulate to the demands instead and started joint education boards in which Koreans and missionaries would decide school policies together. In 1927 a mission wide joint board was established whereby all major decisions concerning not only education, but finances and evangelism were made in this fashion.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Students at mission schools also protested against missionary policies during the 1920s. They regularly went on strike because of the inadequacy of school buildings, equipment and teachers. In February 1922, some of the students in Hamhŭng went so far as to burn down the Boys Academy in effort to show their anger at the Canadians.[[31]](#footnote-31) The missionaries assumed that Korean hostility toward them was driven primarily by resentment concerning the low quality of the schools, lack of leadership opportunities within the mission and Japanese or communist propaganda. They believed this propaganda to be the leading factor which accounted for the rebelliousness of the second generation of Korean students at mission schools. According to the missionary Frederick Vesey, anti-Western literature (mostly written in Japanese) had flooded into Korea during the 1920s, and some of it depicted Christian missionaries in a very unfavorable light. In March 1925 he wrote that this propaganda had helped to poison the minds of his students, many of whom had started to challenge their teachers’ stance on Christianity in class. He argued that if the situation in the schools became any worse, “… it will not be long before she [Korea] and Japan have the same attitude toward Christianity.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Vesey’s presumptions on the origins of the grievances were correct to some degree but the oral history project reveals that some of the animosity Korean Christians harbored (especially among the young in the mission schools) also stemmed, at least in part, from a belief that the Canadian missionaries treated them inequitably and their cultural traditions with disrespect. Helen Macrae explicitly attempted to compel her respondents to discuss these sorts of criticisms about the missionaries openly because, as she stated more than once, she wanted to know the extent to which Koreans shared the opinions of those who at the time of the interviews, denounced the missionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as being champions of the hegemonic system of western imperialism.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Macrae asked some of those she interviewed if they thought missionaries had adversely impacted Korea – or, as she sometimes put it using the parlance of the day, if the Canadians could be seen as “imperialists.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Not one answered in the affirmative seemingly because they thought of imperialism in terms of its political nature – Japan, not a western power had colonized their nation. One respondent, Chun U-lim, did say however that the Canadian missionaries were, for wont of a better term, “religious imperialists."[[35]](#footnote-35) Many, if not most Canadian missionaries believed that in order for native converts to become authentic Christians they needed to cut any ties they had to animist and or Buddhist belief systems as well as Confucian ritual practices (the most important of these being ancestor worship, or veneration).[[36]](#footnote-36)

When speaking on the subject of Korean religions and philosophy, Chun U-lim emphasized that missionaries should have been more tolerant regarding Confucianism because it is a moral-philosophical system, not a religion in the traditional sense, therefore it could not pose a threat to the Christian cause. Furthermore, he argued, if Canadians had been more accepting of Confucianism (especially by way of allowing Koreans to venerate their ancestors) the number of conversions might have been higher. Other interviewees, unlike Chun, did not criticize the missionaries directly, but they affirmed that although Christian, they were also great admirers of Confucianism. Reverend Lee Sang-chul, a former student of the Canadian middle school for boys in Yong Jung, and who at the time of the interview was a minister at the Korean United Church on Bloor Street in Toronto, held similar opinions, but he went one step further and stressed that the missionaries held only a very superficial knowledge of the Korean heritage (such as its Confucian basis),[[37]](#footnote-37) in part because they presumed their culture was more civilized.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Continuing on the theme of imperialism and the missionary movement, Macrae asked her interviewees if they had come across Canadians who exhibited what she referred to as “superior” dispositions in their interactions with Koreans. Frustratingly, many of them evaded answering the question, but enough was said that the listener could come to the conclusion that the relationships between Canadian and Korean were not always harmonious, but were often mercurial. One of the most common criticisms the Koreans expressed related to what they saw as the aloofness of the Canadian missionaries. Chun Chang-nim argued that some Canadians were reserved or unapproachable because they distrusted Koreans and were disdainful of Korean culture. He continued answering in this vein by venturing so far as to say that when Canadians did become too close to Koreans they were persecuted by their peers. In one particularly enlightening part of the interview Chun asserted he understood that life must have been difficult for the missionaries living in Korea, but he questioned why they employed Korean servants and maids.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Chun Taek-kyun, a member of the Korean Association of Toronto, also insisted barriers had existed between the Canadians and Koreans. He said that from what he witnessed the missionaries did seem to think they were superior to Koreans and because of this a genuine true fellowship between missionaries and native Christians could not have developed – the two only came together for church-related affairs. Continuing on this train of thought, he then explained that the missionaries were willfully ignorant of Korean customs and had contempt for Korean art and music because they thought it was tinged with paganism. Chun was not in any way entirely negative in his assessments of the Canadians. however. He told Macrae he had heard that some believed the missionaries did more harm than good, but he disagreed. He thought the Canadians had done a great deal to help Koreans in 1919 and in the areas of medicine as well as education.[[40]](#footnote-40)

During his interview with Macrae, Baek Hak-kyu, a theological student of Emanuel College at the University of Toronto, revealed he had conducted his own interviews with members of the Korean-Canadian community in Toronto – many of whom had lived and worked with the missionaries.[[41]](#footnote-41) According to Baek, his respondents said they held the missionaries in high regard (for the same sorts of reasons outlined by Chun Taek-kyun) but felt the Canadians had considered them to be an inferior people and because of this simply gave orders to native converts without asking for their input.[[42]](#footnote-42) Moon Chae-rim, a retired minister and former student of Emanuel College during the 1920s himself, also believed the contributions the Canadians made to Korea were far more positive than negative.[[43]](#footnote-43) Yet, he did mention that even though some missionaries he worked with such as Dr. William Scott and Archibald Barker were to be respected, others tended to ignore the wishes of the Koreans and often treated them with derision. In 1928 Moon saw a way in which to try and communicate his displeasure with some of the missionaries when he met A.E. Armstrong. Moon said Armstrong asked him what kind of missionary should be sent to Korea. He replied, “a real friend of Koreans – a person who understands Korean hearts.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

Minister Moon Ik-whan quite strongly expressed some of his criticisms of the Canadians. He professed that missionaries were imbued with a puritanical spirit and placed little value on Korean culture. He thought the fundamentalist views of the missionaries combined with the far too pro-Western stance of native Christians retarded the growth of a distinctly Korean theology. On the other hand, he also asserted that missionaries had helped liberate Koreans.[[45]](#footnote-45) The responses given by Reverend Moon and many of his fellow interviewees might seem anomalous, but when keeping in mind their nationalist worldview, a consistency can be surmised. The Canadian missionary movement as a whole was deemed good because it had seemingly aided in the preservation of the Korean nation, but certain individual missionaries (who always remained nameless) were considered beyond the pale for their perceived lack of sincerity in their dealings with Koreans and inability to accept and embrace the foreign culture in which they lived

The Koreans were much less reluctant to speak about their experiences under the Japanese after the Independence movement than they were their feelings about the Canadians. They wanted to describe how they survived one of the darkest periods of modern Korean history and in doing so kept the nationalist ideal alive. The listener gets a sense from the stories the interviewees told that they considered themselves to be the embodiment of Korea and as such had the strength to endure all trials and tribulations.

Throughout the post 1919 period, the Christians were deemed by the colonial government to be just as dangerous as the communists. The basis for this belief on the part of the Japanese was their failure to understand the spiritual nature of Christianity. They thought it was first and foremost, a political ideology. The Japanese assumed Christianity was nothing more than a weapon to be used by western imperialists against their empire – a view which seemed to be confirmed every time missionaries and their converts objected to colonial policy.

Chang Chung-guk, a former teacher and clerk-bookkeeper for the Canadian mission, poignantly described how the Japanese suspicions of Christians and missionaries contributed to the creation of a foreboding atmosphere. Knowing that Chang frequently interacted with the missionaries and travelled extensively throughout the mission, the police asked him to spy on his employers and fellow Christians. He understood that he had little choice but to accept their offer, so he agreed. Chang said he was constantly followed by the police (even when he went to the bathroom) and had to report his findings on a regular basis. He asserted that he never revealed anything of great importance.[[46]](#footnote-46) The medical missionary Florence Murray told a similar tale. She said that every Canadian had their own personal “shadow” and had to report to Japanese officials whenever they left the city in which they resided. They then had to report to other officials when they arrived at their destination.[[47]](#footnote-47) Murray disclosed that throughout her very long career as a missionary she avoided contact with the Japanese as much as possible because every interaction produced a fair amount of unpleasantness.[[48]](#footnote-48)

The Japanese were particularly mistrustful of Korean students in mission schools after 1919. They became even more so with the growing popularity of communism among the youth and the habitual strikes that took place on Canadian campuses during the 1920s and the 1930s.[[49]](#footnote-49) The largest and most raucous of the strikes occurred a decade after the March 1st Independence movement. In the fall of 1929, students in Hamhŭng decided to take part in the nationwide protests which followed in the wake of the persecution of students in Kwangju – they had called for the Japanese withdrawal from Korea. Kim Do-jun, who later in life was elected by North Korean exiles to be the “Governor of Hamgyŏng Province (South)” said he was arrested by the Japanese soon after the strike and was given what he described as “airplane torture” by the police as a means to compel him to give them the names of the student leaders.[[50]](#footnote-50)

One of Kim’s classmates, Chun Taek-bu, also demonstrated but he escaped arrest. In 1932, however, he was not able to elude the police after helping to lead yet another anti-Japanese protest. One of the more interesting aspects of Chun’s story was the influence that his senior classmates and Korean language teacher had on him. He said that even though the Japanese had banned the teaching of Korean history in the classroom, his teacher continued doing so nonetheless. Chun’s mentor also spent much time discussing the similarities between the Jews in the story of Exodus and the plight of the Koreans.[[51]](#footnote-51) Teachers in Hamhŭng were not the only nationalist educators in Canadian missionary territory. Reverend Choi Moon-hahn, although only 11 years old at the time of the demonstrations in Manchuria in 1919 said he remembered that the teachers from the mission schools were among the main conspirators.[[52]](#footnote-52) One physical education teacher had come to the conclusion that Koreans might have to fight for their independence – therefore he trained his students in military style maneuvers.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Helen Macrae’s line of questioning on the Korean Christian–Japanese relationship often involved an inquiry into the Shinto shrine controversy of the 1930s and 1940s. As a means of furthering their assimilation policy, the colonial government compelled all Koreans to honor the emperor by taking part in Shinto ceremonies on a routine basis. This became one of the most acrimonious issues in the history of the Korean protestant church, because the more conservative-minded refused to placate the Japanese by worshiping what they thought of as “idols,” while the liberals saw the ceremonies as not much more than civil in nature.[[54]](#footnote-54) Most Canadian missionaries and Christians in the northeast agreed to abide by the new law primarily because if they did not do so the future prospects of mission school students would be uncertain. The new laws stipulated that the credentials of students who graduated from non-compliant schools would not be recognized by the government.

Some of Macrae’s interviewees made sure to mention that they attended the Shinto shrine ceremonies in body only. The Canadian missionary Dr. William Scott also expressed the notion that the Koreans who took part in the rituals disassociated themselves from what they were doing.[[55]](#footnote-55) Reverend Kim Chun-bai said that Christians in Hamhŭng were opposed to the Shinto services but believed they had no other alternative if they wanted to preserve the credibility of their schools.[[56]](#footnote-56) (4). Tong Shun-sun, a former teacher, characterized the attitudes of Christians living in Sŏngjin in a similar manner.[[57]](#footnote-57) Korean participation in the Shinto shrine ceremonies was heralded by conservative Christians as an act of betrayal to church and nation. Kim, Tong and others who Macrae interviewed portrayed it as having little importance since it was just another duty they had to perform in their daily routines – therefore they could argue, their nationalist credentials remained untarnished.

By the beginning of the Pacific War, the Japanese had become even more suspicious of Korean Christians and the Canadians. Soon after the Canadians left in 1942, the situation for the converts became even graver than it had been before since they lost whatever protection their associations with the missionaries could have afforded them. The Japanese took control of all mission property including schools, hospitals and homes. Chang Chung-guk related the story of how one opportunistic minister in Hamhŭng, named Kim Hyung-su, helped to sell missionary furniture at low prices to Japanese buyers.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Students and those suspected of disloyalty bore the brunt of Japanese persecution during the Pacific War. In March of 1945 pupils at the mission schools in Hamhŭng were compelled to leave their desks and go to work at ammunitions factories.[[59]](#footnote-59) Reverend Cho In-suk emphasized that near the end of the war the Japanese tried to compel ministers to preach in Japanese and forced all of them to attend an institution-like school (his characterization) to study Shintoism for one week and do compulsory labor. The ministers who seemingly did not live up to Japanese expectations were badly beaten. Cho could no longer stand the situation in which he found himself so he resigned from his post.[[60]](#footnote-60)

As the war dragged on, the Japanese became convinced that Korean Christians, especially the ministers, were allied to the western imperialists and as such were bent on sabotaging the imperial war effort. Therefore, they embarked on a systematic persecution of the church. Chang Chung-guk was arrested and tortured because of his strong connections to the Canadian missionaries in Hamhŭng. During interrogation his captors asked him if God was more powerful than the emperor. He insisted that God ruled the spiritual realm while the emperor controlled the temporal world. Chang came to this answer because he knew of one prisoner who had been beaten to death by insisting that God was the only omnipotent being in existence.[[61]](#footnote-61) Reverend Kang Heung-su was arrested three times in his life, the final instance being one month before the end of the war.[[62]](#footnote-62) He was tortured for 29 days and was only released the morning of the Japanese surrender. Another minister, Moon Chae-rim, suffered under both the Japanese and the Soviets. In 1945 he was arrested by the colonial gendarmerie and then the communist military. The regime that Kim Il-sung eventually established was similar to the Japanese one it had replaced – especially in regard to its antipathy toward Christians. From 1945 to 1950 multitudes of Korean Christians from the northeast and Manchuria who had been associated with the Canadians fled communist persecution in order to attempt to re-establish their lives, church and nation in what seemed to them very unfamiliar territory in the south.

The oral histories contained in the Helen Fraser Macrae archive provide insights into the Korean Christian world of northeastern Korea and Manchuria which are difficult to gain through an analysis of the tactile source material alone. Missionary letters, articles, journals and autobiographies are invaluable sources as well, but the thoughts and emotions of individual native converts are either obscured by missionary perceptions, or lost in the descriptions of the extremely busy day-to-day details of mission business. Korean nationalism was a subject the Canadians discussed, but they only did so for the most part when it could no longer be ignored, such as in 1919. The main occupation of the missionary was to create Christians, not to get involved in politics. They only became embroiled in doing battle with the Japanese when they had come to the conclusion that there was no other option.

Koreans who accepted Christianity were among the most politicized on the peninsula. Many of the interviews Macrae conducted make it clear that Korean Christians, at least the leaders, viewed the success or failures of their lives in terms of their ability to help their nation first to survive then to gain independence. They had a tremendous amount of appreciation for the Canadians because they were seen as having helped Korea during its time of great need, but they were unwilling to prostrate themselves before the missionaries, just as they would not do so in the case of the Japanese imperialists. Their faith in Christ and Korea compelled them to believe that they were deserving of dignity, yet this was something they were certain could only be obtained once they controlled their church and nation.

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1. The Foreign Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Eastern Division) sent the newly married couples Rufus R. Foote and Edith Foote (née Sprott) as well as John Grierson and Lena Grierson, née (Veniot) and Duncan Macrae to Korea in 1898. A few months after their arrival they set up a mission station in Wŏnsan. Others were founded in Hamhŭng, Sŏngjin (now Kim’chaek) Hoeryŏng and Yong Jung (Lungchingstun) Manchuria. In 1925 the United Church took over control of the mission - little change in policy or personnel ensued. In 1942 the missionaries were forced to leave with the coming of the Pacific War, but re-established their mission (in South Korea) soon thereafter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Helen Fraser Macrae fonds – MG.1.volumes 2248 – 2351. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The United Church of Canada Archives in Toronto has extensive collections related to the Canadian Protestant foreign missionary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Most of these interviews were done in 1972. Macrae did 29 interviews of active and retired Canadian missionaries, 31 interviews of Koreans who had worked with Canadians and escaped to South Korea between 1945 and 1950, 17 interviews of Korean Presbyterian and Methodist Clergymen and 8 interviews of Koreans living in Toronto. The majority of these interviews were conducted in Korean, however, some were all or partly in English and most were translated into English. Macrae conducted these interviews over 40 years ago, however little use has been made of them. The exception is Kim Jung-gun. He utilized the interviews for his discussion of Korean immigrants to Canada in his unpublished dissertation, “’To God’s Country”: Canadian Missionaries in Korea and the Beginnings of Korean Migration to Canada (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Koreans interviewed by Macrae were leaders in the church and the community. The extent to which their opinions and ideas were shared by the majority of Christians is not altogether clear. Most of the Koreans who had been associated with the Canadians remained in North Korea after 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It would be disingenuous to deny the veracity of the feelings the interviewees had on this point, but one does wonder how being interviewed by the child of a famous ex-missionary, Duncan Macrae contributed to the nature of the responses. Duncan Macrae had earned a tremendous amount of respect from the Hamhŭng Christians because of his vocal opposition to the Japanese in 1919. See, Helen Fraser Macrae, *A Tiger on Dragon Mountain: The Life of Rev. Duncan M. Macrae, D.D*. (Charlottetown, P.E.I.: A. James Haslam, Q.C, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In 1919 mass arrests took place within Canadian mission territory. Many were tortured and some died. In October 1920, the Japanese burned down churches as well as Christian schools and killed hundreds of Korean Christians associated with the Canadians in the region of Chientao in Manchuria. Canadian historian Hamish A. Ion provided a detailed treatment of this subject in his, *The Cross and the Rising Sun: The Canadian Protestant Missionary Movement in the Japanese Empire, 1872 – 1931* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 188-208. Korean missionary expert Donald N. Clark has also given a good assessment of this topic, see *Living Dangerously in Korea: The Western Experience 1900 – 1950* (Norwalk CT: Eastbridge, 2003), 53-59,64. Ku Dae-yeol, *Korea Under Colonialism: The March First Independence Movement and Anglo-Japanese Relations* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 1985), 267 – 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ordinance no.19 issued in 1939 for example compelled all Koreans to assume Japanese surnames. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wi-jo Kang *Christ* *and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997), 17 – 60. Jai-keun Choi, *The Korean Church Under Japanese Colonialism* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2007), 23-38. Kyoung Bae Min, *A History of Christian Churches in Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2006), 193, 199, Jacqueline Pak, “Cradle of the Covenant: Ahn Changho and the Christian Roots of the Korean Constitution,” in *Christianity in Korea*, eds, Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 116 – 148. The earliest study of missions and their contribution to Korean nationalism is, George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832 – 1910*, 4th ed (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Min, 233 – 235, During 1919 the churches provided a nationwide network connecting leaders and protesters, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kenneth B. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896 – 1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990). For non-Christian and Christian nationalism see, Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920 – 1925* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ion, 193 – 196. Barbara Legault and John Prescott, “‘The arch agitator,” Dr. Frank W. Schofield and the Korean Independence Movement.” *The Canadian Veterinarian Journal*, v.50 (8) (Aug 2009): 865 – 872. The Korean community in Toronto has sponsored the creation of the Dr. Frank Schofield Memorial Gardens at the Toronto Zoo in order to honor his contribution to Korean independence, as well as make known their historical ties to Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A.F Robb, “A Visit From Pastor Kil: The Foolish Daugher in Law: A Letter from Mrs. A.F. Robb, Wonsan Korea,” *The Presbyterian Record*, vol. XLIV, no.1 (January 1919), 13. Kil spent 10 days in Hamhŭng and a few more in Wŏnsan. He also preached at the Bible Institute for men in Sŏngjin commencing on January 16th, 1919 and Hoeryŏng. United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA), Maud Rogers to R.P. Mackay, 4 January 1919, 79.204C, fond 122, box 4, file 60. UCCA, Archibald Barker to R.P. Mackay, 27 March, 1919, 79.204C, fond 122, box 4, file 61. For more on Kil Seon-Ju see, Chong-bum Kim, “Preaching the Apocalypse in Colonial Korea: The Protestant Millennialism of Kil Sŏn-ju,” in *Christianity in Korea*, 149-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. MG.1 2343, tape 6, Sang-pil Kim, interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, April 17. 1972. Kim became the principal of the Boys Academy in Hamhŭng later on in life. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Robert Grierson stated in his memoir that on February 27th, 1919 he allowed a group of Koreans to have a meeting at his house (without specifically mentioning Lee) therefore he was entirely aware of the plans to hold demonstrations. Robert Grierson, *My Life in Korea as a Missionary, 1898 – 1934* (Michael Scott: Toronto, 2002), 57. The memoir can be found at the UCCA - BV3460g572002PAM. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kim did not explain why he had changed his mind concerning involving Grierson in the uprising. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Sang-pil Kim, interview [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Grierson asserted that the leaders of the movement addressed the crowd from his hospital porch. *My Life*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Sang-pil Kim, interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. MG.1 2343, tape 9, Dr. Chun-chul Lee, interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, Aug 3, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. MG.1 2341, tape, 10, Chang-sin Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, April 24, 1972. She became a teacher at the Girl’s High School in Hamhŭng in the 1920s. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Canadian missionary Stanley Martin based in Yong Jung asserted that he was certain that women who were arrested had been “violated” by the Japanese. He heard from American missionaries that girls from a Christian school, while imprisoned, had been forced to remove all their clothes and walk on all fours while boiling water was poured on them. He ended this story by saying other things were done to them which were “unmentionable.” UCCA, Stanley Martin to A.E. Armstrong, 24 May 1919, 79.204C, fond 122, box 4, file 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Chang-sin Chun interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. MG.1 2343, tape 4, Neun-keun Kim interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, 1972. MG.1 2344, tape 8, Reverend Chai-il Pak and Chang-hyun Hong interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, June 30 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. MG.1 2341, tape 13, Chang-nim Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto, Ontario, February 26, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Chang-sin Chung interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Macrae supplied questionnaires to respondents in effort to make them feel more comfortable answering questions openly – 16 gave written replies, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, MG.1.2347. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. UCCA, A.E. Armstrong to D.A. Macdonald, 6 December 1923, fond 122, box 7, file 117. Roll 23.633. NSARM – UCC 79.204C, reel 6/M1070. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. William Scott, *Canadians in Korea: Brief Historical Sketch of Canadian Mission Work in Korea* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1975), 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. UCCA, L.L. Young to R.P. Mackay, 28 March1922, fond 122, box 6, file 84. Roll 23,632. NSARM – UCC 79.204C, reel 5/M1069. Scott did not discuss in any detail the animosity of the students toward the Canadians in his interviews or his book. The Korean respondents also made no mention of the depth of student anger against the Canadians at this period. Donald N. Clark, provided some insight into the situation, see *Living Dangerously*, 100. Elizabeth Underwood argues that much of the trouble during the 1920s was the result of a lack of familiarity with Korean culture on the part of newer missionaries. See her book, *Challenged Identities: North American Missionaries in Korea, 1884-1934* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. UCCA, Frederick Vesey to A.E. Armstrong, 7 March 1925, fond.122, box 8, file 132. Roll 23.631. NSARM - UCC 79.204C, reel 6/ M1070. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. MG.1 2345, tape 18 (2), Dr. William Scott interview by Helen Macrae, Brantford Ontario, February 19, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. MG.1 2342, tape 2, U- lim Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto Ontario, February 16, 1972. MG.1 2342 Hak-kyu Pak interview by Helen Macrae, March 4, 1972. MG.1 2343, tape 16, Reverend Chae-rim Moon interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto, Ontario, February 10, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Woo-lim Chun interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Missionaries were not entirely unified in their stance on Confucianism. For more on this see, Sung-deuk Oak, *The Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876 – 1915* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 189 – 217. James Scarth Gale, a Canadian missionary working for the North Presbyterian (U.S.A) missionaries was one of the first Korean experts in the West. Unlike many of his colleagues he grieved over Korea losing its Confucian heritage during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Richard Rutt, *A Biography of James Scarth Gale and a New Edition of His History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1983), 319 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. My emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. MG.1 2343, tape 12, Reverend Sang-chul Lee interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto, Ontario, February 3 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. MG.1 2341, tape 13, Chang-nim Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto, Ontario, February 26th, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. MG.1 2345, tape 11, Taek-gyun Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Toronto, Ontario, January 27, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The location of this survey has yet to be discovered. It is possible that Baek did not give it to an archive or library. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Hak-kyu Baek interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Chae-rim Moon interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid. Moon was certain the Canadian missionaries would help the Koreans in Manchuria after the Pacific War. See Ion, 218. Kim Jung- gun discussed Moon’s experiences under the communists, 146-147. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. MG.1 2343, tape 17. Ik-whan Moon interview by Helen Macrae. Seoul, South Korea, July 3, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. MG.1. 2341, tape 2. Chung-guk Chang interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, May 29, 1972, [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. MG.1. 2343, tape 22 (no.2), Florence Murray interview by Helen Macrae, Halifax, Nova Scotia, December 2, 1972. Murray wrote about this aspect of missionary life in her autobiography, *At the Foot of Dragon Hill* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc, 1975), 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Murray interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Kim Neun-keun said that on average strikes occurred once a year. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. MG.1. 2343, tape 3. Do-jun Kim interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, July 14 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. MG.1 2341, tape 15. Taek-bu Chun interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, April 1 1972. Chun was the secretary of the YMCA. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. MG.1. 2341, tape 1. Moon-hahn Choi interviewed by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, June 16, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Macrae, *A Tiger on Dragon Mountain*, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Kang, 62 – 66, 76-77. Kyoung-Bae Min has provided a detailed assessment of the Shinto shrine controversy and the division it created among Protestants in Korea, 480 – 518. On Canadian involvement see Scott, 130-131 and Ion, *The Cross in the Dark Valley: The Canadian Protestant Mission Movement in the Japanese Empire, 1931 – 1945* (Waterloo, Ontario: 1999), 92-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. MG.1. 2344, tape 19 (3), Dr. William Scott interview by Helen Macrae, December 18, 1971. Conservative Korean Christians distrusted Scott because of his stance on Shinto and his liberal theological leanings, Min, 545. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. MG.1 2342, tape 22. Chun-bai Kim interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, May 24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. MG.1. 2345, tape 12. Shun-sun Tong interview by Helen Macrae, Seoul, South Korea, May 29, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Chung-guk Chang interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Neun-keun Kim interview [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. MG.1. 2341, tape 4 (1). Reverend In-suk Cho interview by Helen Macrae, Busan, South Korea, May 13, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Chung-guk Chang interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. MG.1 2342, tape 16. Reverend Heung-su Kang interview by Helen Macrae, June 12, 1972. According to the information on the cassette tape the name of the interviewee is Yu Young-kyung – but Macrae referred to Kang Heung-su. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)