

# The Dark Shadow Cast by Moon Sun Myung's Unification Church and Abe Shinzo

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**Abstract:** *The killing of Abe Shinzo sparked a backlash in Japan against the Unification Church, after the assassin blamed it for his family's destitution and linked the former prime minister to the Korean cult. This has led to a government investigation of the Unification Church, popularly known as the Moonies, that may result in its disbandment in Japan. The scandal has focused attention on the vital role played by Japan in financing the sect founded by Moon Sun Myung, and the strange history that spawned a global empire swaddled in taboo.*

**Keywords:** *Abe Shinzo, Unification Church, Moon Sun Myung, Moonies*

The July 8 slaying of Abe Shinzo on the streets of Nara has spawned unexpected consequences. Public reaction in Japan whipsawed from shock and grief at the former prime minister's tragic death to anger and disgust at longstanding ties between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the Unification Church. On October 17, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio announced a government investigation of the Unification Church that may lead to the dissolution of its Japanese branch.

Yamagami Tetsuya, the former navy officer and unemployed man who fatally shot Abe from behind with a homemade gun, told police that his family had been left destitute, and his own life blighted, by his mother's huge donations to the Korean cult founded by Moon Sun Myung. In Yamagami's disturbed mind, Abe's political embrace of the Unification Church made him a legitimate target for revenge.

On July 16, the Japanese tabloid *Nikkan Gendai*, which had been the first to report that Yamagami's mother belonged to the Unification Church, published a list of 111 other members of the Diet (parliament) who shared Abe's links to the cult. The list was compiled by journalist Suzuki Eito, a specialist in tracking cults in Japan.

Japanese media critical of the LDP and of Abe's right-wing nationalism, most notably the *Asahi* and *Mainichi* dailies, doggedly pursued the scoop, and there has been an almost constant stream of press conferences and stories that have inflicted serious damage to the Unification Church in Japan, and acutely embarrassed the mainly conservative politicians who associated with it. On September 8, the LDP released the results of an internal survey, showing that almost half of its 379 Diet members had admitted to dealings with the cult. In addition, 290 members of prefectural assemblies and seven prefectural governors have acknowledged association with it, according to a survey by the *Asahi*.

Japanese Moonies are not so numerous as to

constitute a significant voting bloc. Sakurai Yoshihide, a professor of sociology at Hokkaido University and an expert on Japanese cults and new religions, says their main political value is as a source of volunteers to help favoured candidates in election campaigns. Abe had recommended that members of his Seiwa-kai faction take advantage of such offers.

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio hastily announced a state funeral for Abe, the Moonies' most valuable ally in Japan, soon after the assassination. Since then, the deluge of reporting about the Unification Church helped shift Japanese public opinion against the state funeral which took place on September 27 with a cost to taxpayers of ¥1.25 billion. Kishida's popularity slumped, and the October announcement of a probe into the Unification Church has been seen as a means to boost his standing in opinion polls.

### Japanese Fund a Global Empire

Japan has been crucial to the growth of the Unification Church. The former colonial power, which ruled the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945, has twice the number of Moonies as its home country - 300,000 compared to between 150,000 and 200,000 in South Korea, according to spokesman Ahn Ho-yeul - and ever since the 1970s, has provided the lion's share of the church's global income.

In 1984, the *Washington Post* was told by two renegade former officials of the Unification Church in Japan that from 1975 to 1984 it had transferred at least US\$800 million to the United States, to finance a myriad of the cult's businesses, publications, and political operations, including the money-draining *Washington Times* newspaper.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the money came from gullible and superstitious Japanese who were peddled marble vases, ivory seals, and miniature

pagodas said to have miraculous powers, along with ginseng teas, at vastly inflated prices. Japanese members of the cult were given sales quotas requiring them to transfer to the United States about \$2.5 million a month earmarked for the *Washington Times*, which lost an estimated \$150 million in its first two-and-a-half years of operation, according to Soejima Yoshikazu.



**Figure 1: Moon Sun Myung in headdress performing cult ceremony. Photo credit: Unification Church.**

Soejima had been editor of the cult's Japanese newspaper, *Sekai Nippo*, but was fired on Moon's orders for attempting editorial independence. A gang of toughs from the Unification Church, led by members of the affiliated anti-communist group Kokusai Shokyo Rengo, ransacked the newspaper office, and beat him up, according to Soejima. Then in June 1984, Soejima was attacked outside his Tokyo home and repeatedly stabbed. At the time, he had been preparing an article critical of Moon for *Bungei Shunju* magazine.

In 1987, the *Asahi* calculated there had been 15,000 complaints since 1980 of Japanese citizens being defrauded by Unification Church

members, through total purchases amounting to ¥317 billion. A national network of lawyers to combat *reikan shoho* (靈感商法, selling of spiritual goods) was set up.

The Japanese backlash forced the Unification Church to curtail unscrupulous sales in favour of pressuring Japanese members to make donations. These were often linked to fundraising projects of Moon Sun Myung, such as the construction of a tunnel between Japan and Korea (since stalled), car factories in North Korea and China, and a 1,200-hectare “Peace Park” at Moon’s birthplace.

The new donation strategy reportedly led to a substantial *increase* in financial demands placed upon Japan. Sakurai Masaue, a disillusioned former cult official, told the *Mainichi* that in the two decades before he quit in 2017, the Unification Church in Japan had an annual fund-raising target of around ¥30 billion, or \$209 million. The extreme burden placed on Japanese members pushed many into bankruptcy, he said.

Offspring of Japanese duped into handing over their life savings or retirement money to the Unification Church have given harrowing testimony; none more so than that of Yamagami, the alleged assassin of Abe, whose hatred of the cult festered as his family was dragged into poverty.

Yamagami was four years old when his father, a site director of a tunnel construction firm, killed himself. Seven years later, his mother joined the Unification Church and started making huge donations that eventually bankrupted her and compelled Yamagami to drop out of university. His brother later committed suicide.

“After my mother joined the church, my entire teenage years were gone, with about ¥100 million wasted,” Yamagami wrote in a letter. “It’s no exaggeration to say my experience during that time has kept distorting my entire

life.”

Upon joining the Unification Church in 1991, his mother turned over ¥50 million she had received from her late husband’s life insurance policy. When her own father died in 1998, she became head of his construction company, but five months later sold a house she had inherited and gave more than ¥40 million to the cult. In 2002, she was declared bankrupt but continued giving money to the cult. Yamagami’s paternal uncle said he used to receive telephone calls from the three children complaining of having nothing to eat. He finally halted financial support because their mother was just handing over his money to the Unification Church. When Yamagami tried to commit suicide in 2005, she opted to stay in South Korea on a church mission.

### Concealment and Deception

One of many charges made against the Unification Church is its lack of candour about numerous front groups, often given titles offering no clue as to their cult origins.

In Japan, recruitment and fund-raising have frequently involved concealment and deception. Sakurai says this has been necessary to hide both the Judaeo-Christian elements of the Moon cult in a country that lacks any monotheistic tradition, and its lacing with Korean nationalism. Recruiters “don’t disclose who they are but aim first at establishing a strong emotional relationship,” he notes. Elderly Japanese and housewives are particularly vulnerable to a strategy that employs fortune-telling and ancestor worship.

Moon’s boldest subterfuge in the late 1980s was to establish a Buddhist cult called Tenchi Seikyo (‘True teachings of heaven and earth’) to wring more money out of Japan. A ‘clandestine convergence’ of ‘traditional Japanese folk Buddhism’ with the Christian

messianism of the Unification Church, Tenchi Seikyo met the expedient requirement for 'a more direct fund-raising and witnessing approach within a predominantly Buddhist country,' Thomas H. Pearce noted in a paper.<sup>2</sup> The forerunner of Tenchi Seikyo was started in Hokkaido in the late 1950s by a charismatic spiritual medium, Kawase Kayo. Her cult's object of worship was the Maitreya 'future Buddha' (Miroku Bosatsu 弥勒菩薩). In the early 1970s, she secretly joined the Unification Church, but did not announce this to her followers, who continued to worship Miroku Bosatsu. This did not trouble Kawase, as according to Moon's syncretic doctrine, the Korean messiah could also be Buddha:

'Naturally, the Lord of the Second Advent [i.e., Moon], who comes as the central figure of Christianity, will also play the role of Buddha, whom Buddhists believe will come again, as well as the role of the "True Man" whose appearance Confucianists anticipate, and "Chung Do Ryung" ("Herald of the Righteous Way"), whom many Koreans expect to come. In addition, he will also play the role of the central figure whom all other religions await.' (*Divine Principle*, 1973)

Kawase founded Tenchi Seikyo after receiving a "heavenly message" in 1987. The messenger was a young African who had belonged to the Unification Church in Zimbabwe. Cultists believed him to be the incarnation of 'Lord' Heung Jin, the second son of Moon who died in a car accident in 1986. During a visit to Japan, the African Heung Jin instructed Kawase to obtain legal status for a new Miroku church. 'Within months,' the Unification Church 'had organised Tenchi Seikyo centres throughout the country. Thousands of members and a large amount of money were invested in creating this new organization.' In the 1990s, out of 111,000

followers of Tenchi Seikyo, only 8,000 had been informed that the Miroku Bosatsu they were worshipping was actually Moon Sun Myung. Members of the Unification Church were in charge of running the Tenchi Seikyo centres, known as *dojo*, and they all believed that Moon was Miroku Bosatsu,' while their 'core concern' was that Moon needed 'money and members to save the world.' Pearce was told by an officer of Tenchi Seikyo that his cult had made 'very large contributions to Moon.'

In order to peddle Unification Church products, such as marble vases, miniature marble pagodas, ivory *inkan* seals, Buddhist prayer beads and ginseng tea, Japanese consumers first had to be won over.

Typical Moonie approaches to Japanese strangers have included "Please cooperate in this questionnaire into youth consciousness," or "I am studying palm reading. There are stress lines in your hand that indicate a transition period." Bit by bit, they drew out personal worries, and family and financial misfortunes.

Pearce interviewed a Unification Church female member who claimed to be a trainee monk and gained entry to Japanese homes by promising to read a householder's fortune. The *kanji* characters of the victim's name inevitably would indicate trouble in the spirit world, but this could be rectified by buying a new *inkan* seal. After the order was placed, the Unificationist would continue to visit the house and give instructions on worship at the family altars, so that the ancestral curse would be lifted. Once the *inkan* arrived, the target would be invited to a showroom for the sale of marble vases.

Remedies from bad karma, "to free you from the fateful destiny of ancestors," were all exorbitantly expensive. One bottle of concentrated ginseng extract was peddled for ¥80,000. A carved pagoda would set you back ¥5.4 million. Missionaries scanned death notices to identify the recently bereaved, who



were then offered special communication channels to the spirit world in return for a sizeable donation.

The Unification Church has defended such fraudulent practices. “Imagine that one of our ancestors committed a sin in his life and is now in hell, but let’s say he can ascend to heaven from hell through our ancestor donations. He can be freed from hell. How great is this?” spokesman Ahn told the Al Jazeera news channel in 2012.

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-8 dealt a heavy blow to Unification Church finances. In 2005, Moon’s fourth son Kook Jin, who has an MBA from the United States, was put in charge of restructuring the Tongil (‘Unification’) Group, the church’s business empire in Korea.

In 2012, Moon Kook Jin told a Unification Church assembly in Seoul that the cult had “fought a very difficult battle against the Japanese government’s persecution of our church” and had “prevented the government from closing our church down.” Both membership and income in Japan had posted healthy growth, he assured cult members. Net membership in Japan increased by “15,000” in three years and debt incurred from settling legal claims had been cut by more than \$300 million. “We are doing just fine,” he assured.

If confirmed, this increase in membership may be linked to targeting of Zainichi ethnic Korean permanent residents, who either immigrated to Japan before 1945 or are descended from them.

According to Sakurai of Hokkaido University, most members of the Unification Church in Japan “are ordinary Japanese.” However, in 2005 the Public Security Intelligence Agency reported that a “unique group” had established “a new organization with the purpose of gathering Koreans living in Japan and that exhibited attempts to extend its influence by incorporating these Zainichi Koreans and

affiliated parties” and was “inciting a sense of danger and anxiety” to expand its power. The following year, the agency added that the group “advocates the unification of the Korean Peninsula and has made moves to create friction with Zainichi organizations by making Zainichi Koreans and affiliated parties attend gatherings in South Korea and through other means.” In response to opposition questions in the Diet, the Cabinet clarified on August 15 that this “unique group” being monitored was the Unification Church. It was categorised as unique because of “doctrines and claims that deviate from social norms.”<sup>3</sup>

## Korean Official Silence

What of the spiritual home and headquarters of the Unification Church? In Japan, the political protection assiduously cultivated by the cult for more than six decades has rapidly unravelled in the wake of Abe’s assassination, threatening to uproot the money tree that has bankrolled a global empire.

Remarkably, in South Korea there is no sign of any similar upheaval. South Korean media dutifully covered the intense controversy in Japan over the Unification Church’s ties to Abe and Japanese politicians, although some of their reporting was perfunctory at best. However, the tumult in Tokyo has stirred no corresponding debate or soul-searching in Seoul over the morality of a Korean religion partly financed through bilking Japanese victims. Neither has there been any domestic probing of a curiously indulgent relationship with the South Korean state. This relationship has allowed the Unification Church to weather numerous international scandals while basking in extraordinary privileges at home, where it hosts mass weddings, owns a famous ski resort, a soccer team, travel agency, construction company and numerous factories, sits on a giant land bank of 4,628 hectares, and pursues government-sanctioned economic and political

diplomacy with North Korea. The cult's wealth and power are not hidden away but are on proud public display in the wooded mountains of Gapyeong, north-east of Seoul. Viewed from afar, the world headquarters of the Unification Church bears a passing resemblance to the U.S. Capitol. Equally ostentatious are a convention centre where mass weddings are held, a museum, a hospital, a boarding school, a retirement home, and a restaurant called 'Heaven G Burger.'

So close have been relations with the government that the Unification Church gave anti-communist indoctrination courses to South Korean civil servants at its Sootaek-Ri compound outside Seoul. Inside the compound was the Unification Church factory making rifles for the South Korean military.

One gauge of an entrenched official taboo protecting the Unification Church in South Korea is the lack of response this writer received to a list of written questions submitted in August to the government in Seoul. Unanswered questions ranged from donations by the Unification Church to South Korean politicians and officials, and the tax treatment of the Unification Church's many businesses and 'foundations,' to the past and present domestic manufacture of armaments by the Tongil Group, the historical relationship of the cult to South Korea's main intelligence agency, and coordination with the Seoul government in undertaking diplomacy with Pyongyang.

Korea and Japan have a fraught past, and relations between Seoul and Tokyo nosedived under Abe's premiership. To South Koreans, Abe seemed intent on rubbing salt into old wounds by refusing to endorse a previous apology for wartime sexual slavery, visiting the Shinto Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo where Class A war criminals are venerated, upholding Japan's claim to the disputed Takeshima/Dokdo chain of islets (aka 'Liancourt Rocks'), and appearing to exonerate Japan's war in Asia by arguing in

the Diet that "the definition of aggression has yet to be established." Anti-Korean publications flourished under Abe and line the shelves of many Japanese bookstores.

It may appear paradoxical that a fervent Japanese nationalist should have held warm feelings towards a cult that views Koreans as a master race destined to rule the world. The explanation lies in the strange history of the Unification Church.

## Religious Roots

Moon was born January 6, 1920, to a farming family in a village that is now part of Chongju city in North Korea. He said that his parents followed Confucianism, the conservative ideology of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), until converting to a millenarian branch of Presbyterianism when he was 10 years old.

Protestantism had only recently entered the Hermit Kingdom. Horace Newton Allen, an American Presbyterian, became the first Protestant missionary in Korea, arriving in 1884. Centred in Pyongyang, the transplanted faith quickly flourished.

Both Presbyterianism and Methodism are far more fervent and dynamic in Korea than in the West. One scholar describes how typical Sunday worship at Korean Protestant churches involves 'praying loudly, crying out for healing, speaking in tongues, and clapping their hands rapidly. Following this ecstatic and emotional worship, a preacher of great authority climbs the pulpit in order to deliver a thundering sermon on both the material and physical benefits of Christian spirituality, urging his congregation to devote themselves entirely to God in order to guarantee both earthly blessings and heavenly salvation.'<sup>4</sup>)

Theologians have tended to ascribe the ecstatic and mystical emphasis of Korean Protestant

worship to assimilation of earlier religious traditions, especially shamanism, the communion with omnipresent spirits, which survived from primeval times among lower orders in Korean society.

In 1907, a 'Great Revival' or 'Holy Spirit Movement' was born in Korea, when 1,500 people gathered in Pyongyang, and 'some threw themselves full length upon the floor, hundreds stood with arms outstretched toward heaven. Every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God.'

Many other new religious movements followed, combining 'mysticism, eschatology, and arbitrary interpretation of the Bible' with 'personal belief in the apocalypse.' A female Methodist 'argued that Jesus incarnated in her body and that the presence of Jesus dwelt in her.' Another taught that 'the root of original sin was caused by the obscene act of Eve with Satan (disguised as a snake), not by eating the fruit of Good and Evil. The second coming of Christ was believed through the body of the woman.' The 'Seongju church' preached that Korea is the place for the second coming of Christ; a man called Hwang Gukju announced that he himself was Jesus incarnate.<sup>5</sup>

The influence of such movements is evident in Moon's theology. On Easter Sunday in 1936, he claimed to have had a vision of Jesus Christ, in which he is told to complete Christ's unfinished tasks.

The essence of Moonism is that mankind was burdened with original sin by Satan seducing Eve, who then fornicated with Adam in the Garden of Eden. This sexual union created a Satanic bloodline. Jesus was the 'Second Adam' and his great mistake was to have married and produced children. Moon was the sinless third or "perfect Adam," who would create a sin-free bloodline by marrying the perfect Eve, creating a perfect family, and choose other couples to do the same. Thus, mankind would achieve its original goodness.

In 1941, Moon began studying electrical engineering in Tokyo but did not finish the course and returned to live in Seoul, where he married his first wife. After Allied forces liberated Korea in 1945, Moon moved to Pyongyang, and started his own church. Other ministers complained of his teaching, and in 1946, Moon was arrested and charged with polygamy. Two years later, he was excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church. Moon was sentenced to five years at the Hungnam labour camp, where he wrote in his memoir that he was beaten until he vomited blood.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, he was freed from the camp when guards fled from advancing United Nations troops, and travelled to Pusan in the South, where he began a new church. By then a convinced anti-communist, he identified movements and countries with biblical figures. Korea became the "Adam nation" while Japan was "Eve" and America the "archangel." Communist countries were the lair of Satan, and Korea was the front line in a war between good and evil.

## Sex Scandal

Moon emerged out of the chaos of the 1950-53 Korean War as a charismatic preacher whose deviant cult soon became embroiled in another scandal. In 1955, one year after the official founding of his Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, Moon was arrested over allegations of sex with female followers. Ewha Women's University, a prestigious Methodist mission college, dismissed five professors and expelled 14 students. Eighty young women involved in the case refused to testify in court and charges were finally dropped. The FBI later cited reports that the cult was engaged in a sexual rite called *P'ikareun* or 'cleaning of the womb,' in which a woman had sex with Moon three times to cleanse her blood from Satan's

lineage. The woman could then cleanse her husband by having sex. (The doctrine of *Seonghyeol Jeonsu* or ‘changing blood through sex’ had previously been practised by two other charismatic Korean preachers in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup>)

After liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, Korean Protestants were in the political ascendancy. Rhee Syngman had attended an American Methodist school where he converted to Christianity, and at his inauguration as the first president of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948, took his oath of office with a hand on the Bible. Rhee’s dictatorial administration, which lasted from 1948 until his overthrow in 1960, owed its hostility to the Unification Church and other new religious movements to the strong influence of established Protestantism, according to Kim Heung-soo, editor of *Gidokgyo sasang* (Christian Thought) and a former professor of Korean church history at Mokwon University.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, South Korea was beginning its transformation from a poor and backward agrarian economy, devastated by civil war, to a modern, urban, industrial state. As in Japan, the accompanying social upheaval and dislocation proved fertile soil for the spread of new religions. The most successful was the Olive Tree Church of Park Tae-son, a charismatic Presbyterian elder who claimed to see fire and water descending from the heavens during a religious revival meeting atop Namsan Mountain in central Seoul. Park’s reputation for faith-healing drew a mass following, undaunted by scandals alleging *P’ikareun* sex with female followers and a brief stint in jail for embezzlement. Like Moon, he was excommunicated by the Presbyterian Church. At its peak, the Olive Tree movement had two million members, but Park’s popularity haemorrhaged in the 1960s after he claimed Jesus was an imposter and he himself was the real Christ.<sup>7</sup>

## KCIA Involvement

Moon’s own cult first came to prominence after the 1961 military coup that brought Lt. Gen. Park Chung Hee to power. According to a February 1963 American Central Intelligence Agency report, the Unification Church was “organised” by retired Brig. Gen. Kim Jong Pil, the founder and first director of the South Korean CIA (KCIA). Kim Jong Pil, a relative of Park Chung Hee and architect of the coup who later became prime minister, “has been using the Church, which has a membership of 27,000, as a political tool,” the CIA report stated.<sup>8</sup> In May 1963 the Unification Church was registered as a religious organisation by the new government in Seoul, after its application was initially rejected by the education minister.

It is not known why Kim Jong Pil decided to co-opt the Unification Church. One tantalizing possibility is that Kim Il Sung, the leader of communist North Korea, had himself been raised in a Presbyterian family, and was building a quasi-religious personality cult like the one at the centre of the Unification Church, embodying elements of Christianity, Confucianism and Korean Shamanism. Moon’s messianic cult may have seemed a powerful antidote to the appeal of Kim Il Sung’s *Juche* ideology, as well as being a vehicle for more orthodox anti-communism. Moreover, the religious status of the Unification Church provided useful ‘cover’ for political activities, shielded from public scrutiny and the prying eyes of tax authorities.





Moon Sun-myung (left) meets North Korean founder Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang in December 1991. (Yonhap News)



**Figures 2 and 3: Moon Sun Myung with Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang, December 1991. Photo credits: Yonhap News Agency (2) and Unification Church (3).**

Several South Korean military and intelligence officers joined Moon's cult, most notably English-speaking Lt. Col. Pak Bo Hi, who became a member in 1957, seven years after entering the Korean Army. In 1961, Pak was assigned as a military attaché to the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C., where he served as a liaison between the KCIA and U.S. intelligence agencies while helping to recruit and proselytise on behalf of the movement.

Han Sang Keuk (aka Bud Han), who had been a Moon follower since the 1950s, became a personal assistant to Kim Jong Pil. Kim Sang In (Steve Kim) was a close friend of Pak Bo Hi and supporter of the Unification Church. He retired from the Korean Army in May 1961, joined the KCIA, and became Kim Jong Pil's interpreter. He remained a close aide to Kim Jong Pil until 1966 when he returned to active service as KCIA head of station in Mexico. Han Sang Kil was a military attaché at the Korean Embassy in Washington in the late 1960s and was also linked to the KCIA. On leaving government service, Han became personal secretary to Moon Sun Myung and tutor to his children.<sup>9</sup>

### Japanese Bridgehead

The cult's first overseas bridgehead was in Japan, where Kishi Nobusuke, the maternal grandfather of Abe Shinzo, rolled out the red carpet for Moon.

As minister of commerce and industry in the cabinet of Gen. Tojo Hideki, Kishi was a co-signatory of Japan's 1941 declaration of war against the United States and the British Empire. He played a key role in designing a centrally planned, military-dominated economy in Japan's puppet state of Manchukuo to feed the home island's war machine. His policies helped inspire the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in plotting Japan's post-war export miracle, as well as guiding South Korea's rapid industrialisation.

After the war, Kishi was locked up at Sugamo Prison as a Class A war crimes suspect but was never put on trial. Instead, he was released on Christmas Eve 1948, a beneficiary of the Occupation “reverse course” from purging militarism to suppressing communism. In 1955, Kishi brokered the founding of the Liberal Democratic Party that has since ruled Japan almost without interruption. Capping an astonishing metamorphosis, Kishi became prime minister in 1957. Kishi tried and failed to abolish the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, bequeathing that unfinished task to his heirs, but succeeded in ratifying a new Japan-U.S. Security Treaty before stepping down in 1960.

Park Chung Hee, the most consequential of South Korea’s leaders, was an officer in the Japanese Imperial Army who in his cups would later lustily sing Japanese *gunka* army songs. Like Kishi, he also reinvented himself as a conservative nationalist. In 1961, Park and fellow generals seized power and began implementing elements of the Manchukuo model of state-led capitalism to jump-start South Korea’s economy. One of his priorities was to normalise relations with Japan. Kishi played a key backstage role with Kim Jong Pil in forging terms highly favourable to Japan. “Fortunately, South Korea is under a military regime when even a small number of leaders under Park Chung Hee can decide everything,” Kishi noted. Park was desperate for Japanese capital, and the 1965 ROK-Japan treaty largely brushed aside Japanese compensation for the colonial past. The issue still festers in bilateral relations. Park’s rule became increasingly repressive and in 1979 he was assassinated by his intelligence chief. His daughter became president of South Korea in 2013 and frequently sparred with Abe until being impeached over a financial scandal.

The Unification Church was granted Japanese status as a ‘Christian’ religious corporation in July 1964, and a few months later, moved its

headquarters to an Art Deco-style building beside Kishi’s home in Tokyo’s Shibuya Ward. Kishi had used the building as his official residence while prime minister.



**Figure 4: Moon Sun Myung with Kishi Nobusuke. Photo credit: A Pictorial History of the 40 Years of the Unification Church, Unification Church.**

Twenty years after the Unification Church became his next door neighbour, Kishi would beseech U.S. President Ronald Reagan to free Moon Sun Myung from imprisonment.

The first president of the fledgling church in Japan was Kuboki Osamu, a former youth leader of Rissho Koseikai, a powerful Nichiren Buddhist denomination. Kuboki led the Moon cult in Japan for 27 years.

From the 1960s to late 1980s, the Unification Church was stridently anti-communist. More than 300,000 South Korean troops were sent to support American forces defending South Vietnam and Moon was a vocal supporter of the Vietnam War. His position was fully shared throughout the war by all mainstream

Protestant churches in South Korea. At home, critics of the South Korean military deployment risked detention and torture by the KCIA, and massacres by Korean troops in Vietnam were covered up.<sup>10</sup>

Part of Yamagami's lethal animus against Abe Shinzo derived from his grandfather's partnering with Moon in the International Federation for Victory Over Communism (IFVOC) that Moon founded in Seoul in 1968.

The honorary chairman of the Japan affiliate launched in the same year – in Japanese, *Kokusai Shokyo Rengo* – was none other than Sasakawa Ryoichi, one of the most notorious and flamboyant Japanese of the 20th Century. In the 1930s, Sasakawa started an ultra-rightist party and volunteer air corps, and flew a Japanese-made aeroplane from Tokyo to Rome to meet Benito Mussolini. During the war, Sasakawa engaged in large-scale profiteering in cahoots with Kodama Yoshio, and in 1945 was imprisoned at Sugamo for suspected war crimes, along with Kodama and Kishi. After he was de-purged, Sasakawa was granted a highly lucrative concession tied to gambling on powerboat racing that funded his reinvention as a philanthropist. He also made a fortune in Japan from stock speculation.



Figure 5: Moon Sun Myung with Sasakawa

**Ryoichi. Photo credit: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1978.**

Moon also sponsored the 1970 Tokyo meeting of the World Anti-Communist League, with which the IFVOC and *Shokyo Rengo* were affiliated. The WACL grew out of the Asian People's Anti-Communist League, formed in 1954, at the request of South Korea's Rhee Syngman and Taiwan's Chiang Kai-shek, to fight communism in Asia after the end of the Korean War. The WACL, established in Taiwan in 1966, expanded the scope of anti-communist activity onto a global stage. In the 1970s, the European division of WACL became notorious for a large influx of fascist groups, especially after British white supremacist Roger Pearson took over as WACL chairman in 1978. Geoffrey Stewart-Smith, who headed the League's British chapter, resigned in protest, describing the WACL as "largely a collection of Nazis, Fascists, anti-Semites, sellers of forgeries, vicious racialists, and corrupt self-seekers."

### American Expansion, and Reaction

Unification Church expansion in the United States began after Moon moved there with his rapidly growing family in the early 1970s, settling in a sprawling country estate in Tarrytown, in the Hudson Valley outside New York City. His religion appealed to young people seeking a communal ethos but turned off by the drugs and free love of the hippie counterculture. Converts hawked flowers and candles at airports and street corners, and with money also pouring in from Japan, the Unification Church bought the New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan, a seafood operation said to supply half of the sushi sold in the United States, a cable TV network, a recording studio, and a shipbuilding firm.





**Figure 6: Moon Hyung Jin with wife and followers. Photo credit: *How Well Do You Know Your Moon?* (blog).**

At the height of the Watergate scandal in 1973, Moon organised 'God Loves Richard Nixon' rallies. Members of the Unification Church prayed and fasted in front of the Capitol, and in 1974 Nixon publicly thanked Moon for his support.

"We should defeat Kim Il Sung, smash Mao Tse-tung, and crush the Soviet Union in the name of God," Moon told a vast crowd of devotees in Seoul's Yeouido Plaza in 1975. At the same time, bags bursting with cash from Japan were arriving at Unification Church offices in New York. "By the end of 1975, the main activity of the church was collecting money, buying lots of real estate in Korea and the United States and starting a lot of businesses," Soejima, the ex-*Sekai Nippo* editor, told the *Washington Post*.

A U.S. Congressional probe into the 'Koreagate' scandal of influence-buying in Washington lifted the lid on close cooperation between the Unification Church and the government of Park Chung Hee. The spark for a wide-ranging investigation into the U.S.-Korea relationship was revelations of corruption by South Korea's chief lobbyist, Tongsun Park, who funneled money from the KCIA to members of Congress. Cash-filled envelopes were handed over at lavish parties at the Georgetown Club that Park had founded for

entertaining. Park Chung Hee had authorised an aggressive influence-buying operation, run out of the Washington embassy, to counter moves to reduce the U.S. troop presence in South Korea and other U.S. military assistance, as well as to roll back mounting criticism of human rights violations by his régime. The chief agent of repression was the KCIA, widely suspected of involvement in the 1973 abduction from Tokyo of Korean opposition leader, and later Nobel laureate, Kim Dae Jung. (More than three decades later, the successor agency to the KCIA confessed to the 1973 kidnapping, adding it was possible "the plan had been pursued as an assassination."<sup>11</sup>)

The 1978 'Koreagate' main report by the House of Representatives sub-committee on international organizations devotes 100 pages to peeling away layers of shell companies, foundations, and multiple bank accounts of what it dubbed 'the Moon Organisation.' Testimony on the 'Activities of Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States' takes up another 57 pages.

One of the main fronts set up in the United States was the 'Korean Cultural and Freedom Foundation' conceived by Pak Bo Hi while still employed as a military attaché. Initially, its sole project was a children's dance troupe called the Little Angels, described by a Unification Church publication as 'a group of Divine Principle children who perform traditional Korean dances.' In later years, they were sponsored as cultural emissaries by the South Korean government on world tours.

"The Little Angels can be invited to the premier's mansion, or the palaces of kings and queens, and will be known to the peoples of those nations ... If we pick up 20 or more senators from those nations, we can organise a strong group. Out of ten nations we can gather some 200 high-level people," Moon said of their usefulness to the cult.

The Congressional report noted how 'Little

Angels concerts often provided the occasion for Moon and his top followers to mingle with politicians and have pictures taken; those pictures and endorsements were later used in Moon Organisation literature to enhance Moon's image as a well-respected figure with powerful friends.' The Little Angels were invited to perform before President Gerald Ford at the White House.

### Moving Cash

Pak Bo Hi suggested in testimony to the subcommittee that Little Angels also doubled up as couriers to transport large amounts of cash.

Transferring money across international boundaries was extremely important to Moon and a constant headache given the strict currency control laws in force at the time. From 1972, U.S. law required that persons moving cash in excess of \$5,000 into and out of the country had to fill out a Treasury report. One solution was to divide money between the Little Angels, with each child carrying less than \$5,000 when passing through Customs.

Japan had similar requirements to the U.S., as well as limits on converting yen. Converting Korean won to dollars in order to take money out of Korea was legally almost impossible, unless in very small amounts. Yet none of these restrictions stopped the 'Moon Organisation' from bringing large sums of cash into the U.S.

In December 1975, Pak Bo Hi opened a bank account in the name of Unification Church International at the newly founded Diplomat National Bank in Washington. Within 15 months, over \$7 million had been deposited in the account, of which over \$6 million came from Japan. In 1974, Moon Sun Myung opened accounts and time deposits at Chase Manhattan with \$995,00, of which about half was in cash.

Diplomat National Bank became a scandal-within-a-scandal. Moonies had directly provided at least \$1 million to purchase shares in the bank equivalent to 45 percent of its capital. Another \$207,000 worth of stock came from Moonies, associates, or relatives of Pak Bo Hi. Lobbyist Tongsun Park bought another \$250,000 in the bank's stock in the names of business associates, using funds from one of his companies. In each case, the investments were divided up among nominees to make it appear that no individual owned or had a beneficial interest in more than 5 percent of the bank's stock.

In 1977 the Securities and Exchange Commission charged Tongsun Park, Pak Bo Hi and the Diplomat National Bank with securities violations.<sup>12</sup>

The subcommittee also concluded that the South Korean government, 'particularly the KCIA,' had participated in the 'establishment and operation' of Diplomat National Bank. In Seoul, the bank's chairman, a naturalised American of Korean origin called Charles Kim, had been introduced to the director of the KCIA who smoothed the way for him to meet appropriate banking officials in the government.

### Manufacturing Guns

Moon's manufacture of guns for the Korean military inevitably drew much unfavourable attention. Tongil Heavy Industries, headed by his second cousin, made the Vulcan gun (an antiaircraft weapon); an air gun, used by Korean school children for military training; the M-79 grenade launcher; and most controversially at the time of Koreagate, the M-16 rifle, the basic infantry weapon of the Korean army. The M-16 was made under licence from Colt Industries, and under an agreement with the U.S. government, was only to be produced by the South Korean



government.

"Father made guns from the beginning of our church's history," Moon Kook Jin would later recall. "Father did a lot to establish the defence industry in Korea. The technology, the machining and metal-working skills that Father was able to nurture through our companies were actually the foundation for the manufacturing strength of Korea today."



**Figure 7: Moon Kook Jin with firearms. Photo credit: Kahr Firearms Group.**

The subcommittee said it had found evidence that the Moon Organisation 'had systematically violated U.S. tax, immigration, banking, currency, and Foreign Agents Registration Act laws, as well as State and local laws relating to charity fraud.'

In the same year that the Koreagate report was published, the *Daily Mail* in London ran an article under the headline 'The Church That Breaks Up Families' in which the Moon cult was described as a maggot feeding on society, and its members as "robots, glassy-eyed and mindless, programmed as soldiers in this vast fund-raising army with no goals or ideals, except as followers of the half-baked ravings of

Moon, who lived in splendour while his followers lived in forced penury." The Unification Church sued for libel, but after a five-month trial, the *Daily Mail* won the landmark case in 1981.

The following year, Moon was convicted in the United States of tax fraud and conspiracy to obstruct justice, and in 1984 began a thirteen-month jail term at Danbury, Connecticut.

Moon had been excoriated by a landmark Congressional report, pilloried in the press, and was now a convicted felon. Yet, far from being crushed, he was brimming with optimism thanks to a new occupant in the White House. Ronald Reagan was a fellow old-school anti-communist whom Moon and the government in Seoul could comfortably back to the hilt.

Gone was Jimmy Carter's belief that U.S. foreign policy should be guided by high moral principles – a reaction against the *realpolitik* and turpitude of the Nixon Administration. Carter pointedly had refused to overlook the human rights abuses of the Park regime and proposed withdrawing U.S. troops from Korea. When Maj. Gen. John Singlaub, chief of staff of U.S. forces in Korea, and a former field officer of the CIA, criticised the troop drawdown in an interview with the *Washington Post*, he was relieved from duty and later resigned from the military. In 1981, Singlaub founded the U.S. chapter of the WACL, the United States Council for World Freedom.

### 'Inchon' Lands Badly

As part of a propaganda effort to bolster a flagging U.S. defence commitment to South Korea, the Unification Church financed the entire \$46 million cost of an epic war film, *Inchon*, about the surprise U.S. amphibious landing in 1950 that turned the tide against North Korea's invasion.<sup>13</sup> Produced by a Japanese member of the cult, Ishii Mitsuharu,

with Moon himself credited as ‘special adviser on Korean matters,’ it starred Laurence Olivier, Jacqueline Bisset, Ben Gazzara and Toshiro Mifune. Olivier was paid \$1 million to play Douglas MacArthur, with a special emphasis on the general’s spiritualism and trust in divine guidance. “People ask me why I’m playing in this picture,” Olivier was quoted as saying. “The answer is simple. Money, dear boy.”

Numerous members of the Unification Church, including its Little Angels ballet troupe, also appeared in the film. For a fee of \$77,000, the U.S. Department of Defence allowed 1,500 soldiers from the U.S. Army and Marine Corps to participate as extras, and the U.S.S. *Cleveland* was used in filming the landing.

*Inchon* received its world premiere in Washington in 1981. Panned by critics as one of the worst films ever made, it was a commercial disaster. Pulled from cinemas, it was never released on video. Reagan was a rare admirer. After a special White House screening of *Inchon*, he described it in his diary as “brutal but gripping ... for once we’re the good guys and the Communists are the villains.”

## Tunnel Vision

Undeterred by cinematic fiasco, Moon pressed ahead with a grandiose plan to connect Japan with Korea by undersea tunnel, billed as the beginning of an ‘International Highway Project’ that Moon unveiled at the end of 1981. The stated aim was to achieve world peace by girding the globe with arteries of economic and cultural exchange. Japanese military planners had first studied the feasibility of a Japan-Korea tunnel in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as part of a ‘Greater East Asia Railroad’ to connect Japan and its ‘Co-Prosperity Sphere’ with Axis partner Nazi Germany.

In 1982, the International Highway

Construction Foundation was established in Tokyo by the president of *Sekai Nippo*, the Japanese newspaper arm of the Unification Church. This was followed a year later by a Japan-Korea Tunnel Research Institute, chaired by Kanayama Masahide, a former Japanese ambassador to Seoul. A devout Catholic, Kanayama had worked under Japanese Ambassador to the Vatican Harada Ken from 1942 to 1945 and was involved in fruitless talks to obtain a Japanese surrender. The initiative, codenamed Vessel, was initiated by an agent of the U.S. Office of Special Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, Martin S. Quigley, who had been assigned to Rome using the cover of representing the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America.

Kanayama was close to Choi Seo Myun, a fellow Catholic with close ties to the KCIA, as well as former Japanese prime ministers Kishi and Fukuda Takeo. Dubbed the ‘Park Tong Sung of Japan’ after the central figure of Koreagate, Choi was a ‘major political operator.’ Imprisoned in South Korea on charges of assassinating a prominent politician, Choi escaped from jail during the Korean War and was smuggled into Japan on board a U.S. military plane in 1957, disguised as a Catholic nun. Choi was allowed to stay in Japan and in 1969 founded the International Institute for Korean Studies in Tokyo, funded by the South Korean government. When Kanayama retired from the diplomatic service in 1972, he became director of the Joint Research Centre of International Relations, which in turn was largely funded by Choi’s Tokyo institute.

In 1973 Kanayama brokered a settlement with Seoul over relations ruptured by the KCIA’s kidnapping of Kim Dae Jung from a Tokyo hotel. In secret shuttle diplomacy between the two capitals, Kanayama met with Kim Jong Pil, then South Korea’s prime minister, and KCIA Director Lee Hu Rak. Three months after the kidnapping, Kim Jong Pil visited Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei and they secretly agreed to

close the case, which had caused public fury in Japan.

Kanayama's introduction to Moon came, apparently, from Choi. As well as heading the Unification Church's research institute for the Japan-Korea tunnel, Kanayama also spoke at one of the cult's mass wedding ceremonies in October 1982. Ikehara Mariko, in a revealing paper on Kanayama, wrote that he was so close to Choi that he asked for his own ashes to be placed next to Choi's grave in a Catholic cemetery near Seoul.<sup>14</sup>

The undersea tunnel was supposed to stretch 235 kilometres from rustic Saga Prefecture, on Japan's most southerly main island of Kyushu, to near the port city of Pusan on the southeast tip of the Korean peninsula. The Unification Church estimated the total cost at ¥10 trillion (\$67 billion).

Boring of a test tunnel started in 1986 on the side of a mountain, in agricultural land acquired by the cult. Ironically, the site is only 1.5 kilometres from the ruins of a castle Toyotomi Hideyoshi had built in 1591 in preparation for his invasions of Korea. By 2007, the survey shaft, six metres in diameter, extended 540 metres into the mountain.

Test tunnelling had to stop when it reached the boundary of land owned by the Unification Church. By then, the total cost is estimated to have reached ¥6.75 billion (\$45 million), although according to the *Asahi Shimbun*, the cult stated in 2014 that 'the church and its followers had together donated more than ¥10 billion for the project.' One former member of the cult is claiming about ¥180 million in compensation for money donated to the tunnel.

Cult followers were taken on tours of the mountain hole to encourage them to give more money. The *Asahi* recounted how many Japanese politicians as well as academics spoke out in favour of the tunnel, lending it credibility.

The intense controversy over the Unification Church that has followed Abe's assassination finally persuaded the central government to burst the delusional bubble.

"We have never considered the tunnel project when we were formulating plans to develop Japan's land," Saito Tetsuo, minister of land, infrastructure, transport, and tourism said flatly on August 26. "I believe the vision for the tunnel is quite absurd."<sup>15</sup>

### The Anti-Communist Causa

Reagan's love of Moon's *Washington Times*, founded by his ubiquitous henchman Pak Bo Hi in 1982, strengthened bonds. The paper was meant to be a conservative counterweight to the liberal *Washington Post* that had been instrumental in driving Nixon from office and enjoyed a monopoly in the capital area. Reagan read the *Washington Times* every day of his nine-year presidency. "The American people know the truth. You, my friends at the *Washington Times*, have told it to them," he said in 1997. (Three years later, the Unification Church holding company of the *Washington Times* bought the shrivelled rump of the once illustrious United Press International wire service.)

It was in Latin America where a de facto alliance between the Unification Church and the White House was most in evidence. Following the debacle of the Vietnam War, Congress had reined-in executive authority to commit the United States to war (under the War Powers Resolution of 1973) and the Reagan administration was forced to rely on largely covert means to try and roll back communism.

In 1979, the hereditary dictatorship of the Somoza family, in power in Nicaragua since 1937, was deposed by the left-wing Sandinistas. Reagan believed that the

Sandinista victory threatened the “southern frontier” of the United States. In addition to a trade embargo against Nicaragua, he authorised the CIA to covertly help ‘Contra’ rebels, operating out of camps in neighbouring Honduras and Costa Rica, with funding, training, and weaponry. After Congress prohibited federal funding of the Contras in 1983, Col. Oliver North on the National Security Council formulated a plan for the Reagan administration to continue backing them by selling arms to Iran and channelling the proceeds to the Contras (the ‘Iran-Contra affair’).

The CIA was supported in these covert campaigns by a broad range of right-wing individuals and networks connected to Singlaub’s World Anti-Communist League. Its Latin American chapter, CAL – for *Confederacion Anticomunista Latina-Americana* – ‘would gradually involve representatives of all the Latin American domestic security forces, intelligence services, military establishments, paramilitary movements and death squads across the continent.’<sup>16</sup>

Moon’s contribution to anti-communism in Central and South America was through a new political arm of the Unification Church called Causa, Spanish for ‘cause.’ Founded in New York in 1980, Causa was inevitably headed by Moon’s ultra-loyal ex-colonel Pak Bo Hi.

In 1984, the celebrated American investigative journalist Jack Anderson described in a syndicated column how Moon’s cult worked with the CIA:

In the Central American hinterlands, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish CIA operatives from the Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s disciples. They appear to be working in harness against the communist-tainted Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

This troubles at least one Pentagon analyst, now stationed in Korea, who has warned the White House that the CIA-Moonie connection could cause possible political damage to President Reagan’s re-election campaign.

“Current Moonie involvement with government officials, contractors and grantees could create a major scandal,” the memo warns. ...

... Causa International, Moon’s political front, has representatives working in programmes that help the CIA in its “contra” war against the Sandinista government.

Causa maintains a publicity office in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, but its principal activities are in the field. Causa provides cash and other aid to Honduran-based Nicaraguan contras and Honduran right wing political groups. Many anti-Sandinista guerrillas wear red Causa T-shirts, with a map of the world on them.

But Causa and its affiliate, the Refugee Relief Freedom Foundation, provide more than T-shirts to rebel groups. They also funnel supplies to refugee families in and near contra camps and pay for trips by rebel leaders to the United States....

‘The airlift of supplies to the rebels by Moon’s Unification Church has escalated since Congress cut off CIA funding for the contras. The administration has been attempting to “privatise” its war against the Sandinistas and is apparently willing to work with Moon’s people.’<sup>17</sup>

While Causa was active throughout South America, it was Uruguay’s military dictatorship that offered the warmest welcome. In March 1981, Pak Bo Hi met the president, vice



president and interior minister in the capital Montevideo. By the end of the year, Causa was granted rights to set up two newspapers, *Noticias del Uruguay* and *Ultimas Noticias*, and a radio station in Uruguay, as well as a casino, in violation of local gambling laws.<sup>18</sup> It bought the largest publishing house, a restaurant and a meat packing plant, and owned Montevideo's only luxury hotel, the Victoria Plaza, which housed the casino and was later extended to include a convention centre.

Uruguay's offshore banking system operated behind walls of secrecy and was notorious for being a laundromat for drug money, as well as a haven for flight capital and tax evasion.

Causa's acquisition of a controlling interest in Uruguay's third-largest bank, the Banco de Credito, prompted many questions.

Employees of Banco de Credito reported how 4,200 Japanese members of the Unification Church turned up at the bank, with each depositing as much as \$25,000. "The money still had the U.S. Federal Reserve band around it. More than \$80 million was deposited over the course of a week," according to Juan Ramos of the Bank Workers' Association.<sup>19</sup>

### Kishi Begs Reagan to Pardon Moon

The cult's sudden interest in acquiring a Uruguayan bank may have been related to the intense scrutiny it was receiving from U.S. tax authorities, which had led to Moon's conviction and incarceration in a Connecticut penitentiary.

This provoked an extraordinary intervention by Kishi, the former prime minister who had done so much to facilitate Unification Church entry into Japan.

On November 26, 1984, Kishi wrote to Reagan at the White House, imploring him to release

Moon 'by all means from his unfair imprisonment as soon as possible.'

Kishi begins his letter by congratulating Reagan on a sweeping election victory, and on departing from 'the New Deal policies of the Democratic Party ultimately derived from Marxism, which have been apparent since the time of President F.D. Roosevelt.'

Kishi alludes to a recent World Media Conference in Tokyo, of which he and Douglas MacArthur II, American ambassador to Japan from 1957 to 1961, had both been honorary chairmen. Attended by "800 journalists from 87 countries," according to Kishi, the conference closed with a congratulatory speech by Mike Mansfield, who was U.S. ambassador to Tokyo from 1977 to 1988.

The World Media Conference was founded by Moon, whom Kishi extols in his letter as "a genuine man, staking his life on promoting the ideals of freedom and correcting communism. His existence is, and will be in the future, a rare, precious and indispensable one for the maintenance of freedom and democracy."

A reply was drafted for Reagan's signature and was sent to Kishi on March 5, 1985. It noted that Moon's request for parole had been denied and his scheduled release date remained August 20, although a "formal request for Executive clemency" was under consideration.<sup>20</sup>

### Götterdämmerung and Pyongyang Bearhug

For most of the 1980s, Moon felt secure in his homeland with the continuation of strongman rule after Park Chung Hee was shot dead in 1979 by his KCIA director. When Chun Doo Hwan finally yielded power as president in 1988 it was to a close ally and friend, fellow general Roh Tae Woo. Few predicted the *Götterdämmerung* that brought the decade to a



close, the near simultaneous democratisation of South Korea after two decades of military rule, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and Seoul's dramatic diplomatic openings to Moscow and Beijing which threatened the survival of Kim Il Sung's embattled 'People's Paradise' in North Korea.

Moon's cult had always tacked close to South Korean government policy, and with breath-taking bravado, he abruptly ditched three decades of virulent anti-communism. Détente with what Moon had long anathematised as a satanic lair in Pyongyang, now jettisoned by Moscow, was urgently required. Pak Bo Hi and Moon were among the first to meet the dictator and his son. Photographs of a beaming Moon and Kim Il Sung in joyous bearhug in December 1991 are still a wonder to behold.

Japanese members of the Unification Church were pressured to contribute money for a 'Peace Park' at Moon's birthplace in North Korea that sounded remarkably like the park at Kim Il Sung's own purported birthplace at Mangyongdae outside Pyongyang.<sup>21</sup>

The Tongil Group then invested \$54 million in a joint venture with the North Korean government to assemble cars and pickup trucks from imported kits.<sup>22</sup> Pyeonghwa ('Peace') Motors achieved less than 10 percent of its planned capacity and profits were almost zero. In December 2012, the Unification Church decided to donate their share in the factory to the North Korean government, as well as hand back control of the Moonie-staffed Pothonggang Hotel, where I had once stayed during a reporting visit to Pyongyang in the 1980s.<sup>23</sup>

Frank Wisner, one of the founders of the CIA, famously used the metaphor "the mighty Wurlitzer" to describe the CIA's influence on public opinion through a multitude of front organisations. The Unification Church had its own mighty Wurlitzer, but the purpose of its multitude of instruments was not only to

promote a geopolitical agenda, but to gain religious believers and generate cash.

One can easily get bewildered by the bizarre labyrinth of political leaders (usually retired), academics, journalists, clergy, military officers and assorted celebrities who have accepted Unification Church money to speak at conferences, or in the case of George H.W. Bush and his wife Barbara, address Japanese stadium crowds of bused-in Moonies.

In 2021, both Abe Shinzo and Donald Trump addressed a Unification Church 'Rally of Hope.' Both Trump and his former CIA director and secretary of state Mike Pompeo addressed another Moonie event in Seoul in August, 2022 after Abe's assassination.

My own interest in the Moonies was piqued during a visit to Seoul in 1995, when I found former British prime minister Edward Heath and former Canadian governor-general Edward Schreyer both sitting next to Moon on a ballroom podium in the Lotte Hotel. The 'Summit Council' conference was a featured attraction of a week-long festival culminating in a Unification Church wedding ceremony for 36,000 couples crammed into Seoul's Olympic stadium. What I recollect of Heath's keynote address was a well-worn tale of Mao Tse-tung giving him a pair of pandas for London Zoo. During the intermission, I asked Heath what he was doing there. He flew into a rage. "How dare you!" he bellowed. According to the British Embassy in Seoul, Heath had visited South Korea almost annually for the previous five years to attend Moonie conferences. Later that year, a U.K. home secretary decided to bar Moon's entry to the U.K., on the grounds that it "would not be conducive to the public good."

## Dysfunction and Family Feuds

To what extent Moon's own brood have benefited from the river of money flowing into

his global empire has never been tabulated. What is certain is that compared to foot soldiers of the cult tasked with meeting financial quotas his children lived like pampered royalty.

Tales of Tarrytown turmoil in upstate New York made tabloid fodder and a mockery of Moon's teachings about a Perfect Family.

Nansook Hong was handpicked to be the wife of Moon Sun Myung's son, Moon Hyo Jin, at the age of fifteen. In 1998, her tell-all memoir, *In the Shadow of the Moons: My Life in the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Family*, revealed a life of dysfunctional horror. Her husband, whom she divorced, was a drug addict. When she was seven months pregnant with her fifth child, she tried to flush his cocaine down the toilet. He "smashed his fist into my face, bloodying my nose," Hong recalled. "He wiped my blood on his hand, then licked it off. 'Tastes good,' he said. 'This is fun.'" In 1999, another of Moon's sons jumped to his death from the seventeenth floor of a Nevada casino.

In the new millennium, a bitter succession struggle erupted within the Moon family.

Hyun Jin (aka 'Preston'), the oldest living son, had long been treated as heir apparent, but Moon came to regard him as incompetent, and instead anointed his youngest son, Hyung Jin ('Sean'), as head of the spiritual empire. Kook Kin, the fourth son, was put in charge of the Tongil business arm.

Hyun Jin's fury at being sidelined is on frightening display in a video taken in May 2010, during a visit to the Unification Church in São Paulo, Brazil. Supporters cheer as he marches in, and his men physically remove the Korean preacher, Shin Dong Mo. "Is it your agenda to isolate ME from the Unification community?" Hyun Jin shouts. The next day, Hyun Jin humiliates Shin in front of leading members of his congregation, all seated cross-legged on the floor. Looking down at Shin,

Hyun Jin says in Korean, "You arrogant little bastard! I'm speechless!" and proceeds to kick him, for having schemed against him, in league with his brothers. "From now on, you people will never be able to lie to me!" Nodding, Shin mumbles, "Yes, I will never lie to you." Hyun Jin yells back: "Tell Kook Jin and Hyung Jin about our discussion today! Tell them!"

After the death of Moon Sun Myung in 2012, his second wife Han Hak Ja seized control of the worldwide church (renamed the 'Family Federation for World Peace and Unification' in 2015) from Hyung Jin, and the Tongil conglomerate from Kook Jin.

Hyung Jin 'Sean' has denounced his mother as the 'Whore of Babylon' and now heads a splinter cult called the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary Church, aka 'Rod of Iron Ministries' after a passage in the Book of Revelations ("and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father"). He preaches that AR-15 assault weapons are needed "to defend ourselves against an aggressive satanic world" and wears a crown formed from bullets. Followers train with AR-15s at the sect's base in Pennsylvania and bring them to be blessed in worship.

Hyung Jin's hate-flecked speech echoes that of America's libertarian extreme right. "The Democratic Party has become the Communist Party funded by Nazi collaborator George Soros." Pope Francis is "a socialist, communist devil." "Government is becoming a totalitarian crime syndicate," creating "a dystopian, Christ-hating hell on earth." "Without our property and our guns, we're nothing but labourers in a communist death camp."<sup>24</sup>

His elder brother Kook Jin presents a far more reassuring, button-down image, appropriate to a Harvard economics graduate with an MBA from the University of Miami. Yet Kook Jin endorses Hyung Jin's claim to inheritance of

their father's church. He also continues a family fascination with guns, owning a manufacturer of semi-automatic pistols, Kahr Arms, that is based in Pennsylvania, not far from the 'Sanctuary Church' of Hyung-Jin's rifle-toting, government-loathing followers. "I wanted to make the ultimate line of concealable pistols," Kook Jin once said.

In recent years, Kook Jin has been preaching the need for increased military spending to counter a threat from China. He sometimes couches this in terms of his father's theology. America can no longer police the globe. It's time for the Adam nation to take up its role as leader and protector in earnest, and Adam needs his Eve. "We want Korea to enter into a defensive alliance with Japan, for Japan and Korea to 'get married'," he said. "That's what Father says and that's what the Principle says."

## Endgame?

The prospect of such diplomatic nuptials has further receded with the launch of a Japanese government investigation of the Unification Church, which still enjoys protection from the South Korean government.

If the official probe results in an order to disband the Japanese branch of the Unification Church, this would choke off what historically has been its biggest source of money. What would then become of the cult's global business and property empire?

After Japan, the second pillar of the Unification Church outside its home country has always been the United States. Rebel brothers Hyung Jin and Kook Jin are shielded by the constitutional privileges of the First and Second Amendments guaranteeing freedom of expression and religion and the right to bear arms. Both fervently back Donald Trump; the official church, controlled by their mother, is less loud about being pro-Republican but is equally steeped in conservatism.

What if the prevailing political wind in America were to follow Japan, and turn against the Unification Church and investigate Koreagate? The Congressional probe into U.S.-South Korea relations in the late 1970s benefited from unprecedented access to classified material. It is not farfetched to assume that a mountain of secret documents concerning Moon and the Unification Church remain locked away in U.S. government archives. Full disclosure might finally spell the end of the cult in the United States.

**Peter McGill** was North-East Asia correspondent of *The Observer* and was based as a journalist in Japan for 19 years. He was president of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan from 1990 to 1991. He was first employed as a civil servant in Hong Kong. In recent years he has written mainly for financial magazines.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Moon's Japanese Profits Bolster Efforts in U.S.,' John Burgess and Michael Isikoff, *Washington Post*, September 16, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tenchi Seikyo: A Messianic Buddhist Cult,' Thomas H. Pearce, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1994), 21/4.

<sup>3</sup> 安倍政権時に記述消失 公安調査庁報告書「特異集団」とは旧統一教会, Mainichi Shimbun,

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<sup>4</sup> Guwonpa, WMSCOG, and Shincheonji: Three Dynamic Grassroots Groups in Contemporary Korean Christian NRM History,' David W. Kim and Won-il Bang, *Religions* (2019), MDPI.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> 'How one man's epiphany on a Seoul mountain in 1955 laid the foundation for many religious sects in South Korea,' Joshua Berlinger, CNN, March 7, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> 'Investigation of Korean-American Relations. Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations U.S. House of Representatives.' October 31, 1978 (henceforth 'Koreagate' main report).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> 'The Forgotten History of South Korean Massacres in Vietnam,' *The Diplomat*, May 15, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> 'South Korea spy unit admits kidnapping Nobel winner,' Reuters, October 24, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> 'Koreagate' main report.

<sup>13</sup> *Inchon* was directed by Terence Young and produced by Ishii Mitsuharu. Released September 17, 1982 (USA) and distributed by MGM and United Artists. See the entry for 'Inchon (film)' on *Wikipedia*.

<sup>14</sup> 'Kanayama Masahide: Catholicism in Mid-Twentieth Century Japanese Diplomacy,' Ikehara Mariko, in *Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture*, ed. Kevin M. Doak, UBS Press, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> 'Policymakers' interest wanes for undersea church tunnel,' *Asahi Shimbun*, September 5, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> 'The World Anti-Communist League: Origins, Structures and Activities' by Pierre Abramovici, in *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War. Agents, Activities, and Networks*, ed. By Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin, Giles Scott-Smith. Palgrave Macmillan 2014. See also review by Richard Saull in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (December 2015) pp. 507-509. Cambridge University Press.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Korea's Peace Motors readies opening,' UPI, April 2, 2002.

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