

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Murder Death of Pang Hwa-il: Erasing American Violence, Producing Christian Allies During the Korean War

Paul S. Cha

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
Email: pcha@hku.hk

Abstract

This article examines one of the first court-martial of a US soldier for the murder of a Korean civilian. In December 1951, Pang Hwa-il died from injuries sustained at the hands of four American soldiers during a late-night search of a home he was visiting. Many acts of violence perpetrated by the US military against Korean civilians like Pang during the Korean War went unaccounted for. However, his death would receive public attention in the United States because he was the associate general secretary of the Korean National Council of Churches. Responding to public pressure, the US military eventually started an investigation approximately two months after the incident took place. By examining the circumstances surrounding Pang's murder, the subsequent trial, and its aftermath, this article challenges a standard characterization of the relationship among missionaries, Korean Protestants, and the US military during the 1950s as a close partnership. The American government, the military, and missionaries had all carefully cultivated a narrative that the US and a Christian South Korea were allies against communism. However, Pang, a Korean Christian leader, was killed by a US soldier, not a communist enemy. Furthermore, the US military's initial delay in bringing Pang's assailants to trial and the light sentence that was handed down shocked both Korean and American observers. As this incident reveals, the US military valued the lives of its Korean allies less than American lives, calling into question the American government's claims that it was working in partnership with South Koreans.

Keywords: Korean Protestantism; Korean War; *The Christian Century*; wartime violence; court-martial; church state relations

1. Introduction

On January 21, 1953, the front-page editorial of *The Christian Century* detailed the brutal murder of Korean church leader Pang Hwa-il.¹ On December 5, 1952, Pang had

¹Korean terms have been Romanized using McCune-Reischauer. Korean names appear with the family (last) name first and given name second. The only exceptions are for names well known in the English-speaking world (i.e., Syngman Rhee).

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Society of Church History. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

visited the home of his brother in P'yŏngt'aek, approximately 65 kilometers southwest of Seoul. When he arrived, his brother was not home; Pang's sister-in-law showed him to a guest room, where he retired for the night. While the family was asleep, four US soldiers burst into the house looking for Pang's brother, who still had not returned. During the search, one of the soldiers delivered a blow to Pang's head from which he would never recover.

This incident had initially received little publicity, and Pang's assailants were not arrested. Life carried on as if nothing had occurred. But when *The Christian Century* hit the newsstands some six weeks after the murder, a public furor in the United States prompted the military to quickly bring those involved to trial. Even so, the original charge of "unpremeditated murder" was weakened, and the primary defendant was found guilty on a lesser charge of "assault resulting in death."

This trial was one of the first, if not the first, court-martial of an American soldier for killing a South Korean citizen. Newspaper and missionary reports, however, suggested that it was not the first incident of violence by a member of the US military against a Korean civilian. The reason Pang's case received international attention was that he was the associate general-secretary of the Korean National Council of Churches (KNCC). Originally hailing from Sinŭiju, in the northwestern portion of the peninsula, Pang had fled to Seoul after facing persecution from communist forces. There he became one of the most influential pastors in South Korea. Pang's story—surviving both the partition of the peninsula in 1945 and the opening salvos of the Korean War, only to perish at the hands of a US soldier—raised many uncomfortable issues for the American public.

Focusing on the circumstances surrounding the murder of Pang Hwa-il, the subsequent trial, and its aftermath, this article gives voice to an event that has been largely forgotten and challenges a standard interpretation of the history of Protestantism in post-1945 South Korea. Specifically, scholars have emphasized that Protestant actors, both Korean and missionaries, became allies of first the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and then the South Korean state during the years immediately following the end of the colonial period (1910–1945) and through the Korean War (1950–1953).² The main reason for this alliance between Protestants and the state was a common desire to combat the spread of communism.

To briefly sketch this portrayal: after Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers on August 15, 1945, the United States proposed to the Soviet Union—which had entered the Asia Pacific Theater of World War II only days before Japan's capitulation—that the two powers divide the Korean Peninsula at the 38th parallel. The US feared that the Soviets, whose troops were already stationed in the northeastern portion of Korea, would otherwise quickly occupy the entire peninsula. The divided occupation US officials proposed was supposed to be temporary, with control to be eventually handed over to a unified Korean government. Instead, the 38th parallel became one of the front lines of a global Cold War and in the end led to separate states.

When the USAMGIK commenced its rule over the southern half of the peninsula in September 1945, it lacked specialists who spoke Korean or were intimately familiar with

²Cheng-Pang Lee and Myungsahm Suh, "State Building and Religion: Explaining the Diverged Path of Religious Change in Taiwan and South Korea, 1950–1980," *American Journal of Sociology* 123, #2 (September 2017): 465–509; Timothy S. Lee, "A Political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea: Protestantism and the 1919 March First Movement," *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 116–142; and Yi Man-yŏl, "Hanmal kidokkyo in ūi minjok ūisik hyŏngsŏng kwajŏng" [Process of formation of the national consciousness of Christians during the Hanmal period], *Han'guk saron* 1 (May 1973): 335–405.

Korean history, society, or politics. To compensate, it employed former missionaries to Korea as advisors.³ During the Cold War struggle against communism, when ensuring that pro-US Koreans took positions of leadership was of utmost importance, the USAMGIK tasked former missionaries with identifying Koreans who could be trusted.⁴ One result was that Korean Christians came to wield an outsized influence in the social, economic, and political affairs of US-occupied territory. Consider, for instance, that in 1948, when the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was officially founded, approximately 25 percent of the first legislative assembly identified as Christian⁵—even though less than 3 percent of the general population was Christian.⁶ Further, South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee, was a well-known Methodist, and he promoted this identity, casting his government as a Christian one that would stand up to the forces of communism.

Importantly, prior to 1945, Korea's Protestants were concentrated north of the 38th parallel. When the Soviets occupied the northern territory, Protestants like Pang Hwa-il started to migrate southward. The exodus intensified after the Sinūiju Incident of November 1945, when Soviet forces brutally cracked down on a group of protesters, many of whom were Protestants.⁷ The Soviet Union and communism appeared to be bent on suppressing Christian actors, if not eradicating Christianity altogether. Korean Protestants who fled south after 1945 played critical roles in supporting Rhee and became leading figures in the construction of South Korea's social, economic, and political systems.⁸

Because of this Cold War context, a close relationship certainly existed between Protestant organizations and government officials. However, interpretative frameworks that cast the relationships between the two groups primarily as an alliance against communism struggle to capture the complex interests and motivations of the various participants involved. The rhetoric of a common struggle against communism may have allowed these diverse actors to work together and even granted certain advantages to each one, but these relationships were unequal on multiple levels.

³Henry Em, "Christianity, the Cold War, and the Construction of the Republic of Korea," *Korea Journal* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 5–29; and Elizabeth Underwood, "Korean Sovereignty, Liberal Democratic Society, and the Underwoods, 1916–1951," *Korea Journal* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 86–114.

⁴While close relations with the US military facilitated their early return to and work in Korea, the mainline mission societies feared Koreans would simply view their religious activities as an extension of USAMGIK policy. Since many Koreans were displeased with the United States' role in dividing the peninsula and because of the missionaries' own desire to maintain a clear separation of church and state, the mission societies approached working with the USAMGIK with caution. See, for example, Rowland Cross, "Korea Committee with Joint Deputation to Korea," June 2, 1947, RG 27, Box 5, Folder 26, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA. Hereafter, this archive will appear as PHS.

⁵Chung-shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003), 174.

⁶Lee and Suh, "State Building and Religion," 479.

⁷Adam Cathcart and Charles Kraus, "Peripheral Influence: The Sinūiju Incident of 1945 and the Impact of Soviet Occupation in North Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 1–27.

⁸Kim Kōn-u, *Taehan Min'guk ūi sōlgyeja tūl* [*Architects of the Republic of Korea*] (Seoul: Nūt'i Namu Ch'aekbang, 2017); Kang In-ch'ōl, "Nam Han sahoe wa wōllam kidokkyoin" [South Korean Society and North Korean Christian refugees], *Yōksa pip'yōng* 21 (May 1993): 73–130; Yun Chōng-ran, *Han'guk chōnjaeng kwa kidokkyo* [*Korean War and Christianity*] (Seoul: Hanūl Akadei, 2015); and Jeong-nan Yoon [Yun Chōng-ran], "Victory over Communism: South Korean Protestants' Ideas about Democracy, Development, and Dictatorship, 1953–1961," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 24, no. 2/3 (2017): 244–245.

Pang's murder and the early lack of response on the part of both the US Army and missionaries challenge simplistic narratives of Christian solidarity against communism. Most obviously, like many of their compatriots, Korean Protestants were subjected to violence by American soldiers during the Korean War, whether out in the fields or in their own homes. Few received justice. Because of unequal power relations between the United States and South Korea and because of the Cold War context, many of these acts were ignored at the time and have remained hidden from history.

Pang's case was unique because of his status and the way his story reached an international audience. The US government, mission societies, and faith-based aid organizations had promoted the Korean War to the American public as an effort to contain the spread of communism. South Korea needed to be supported, they argued, because of the bravery of Korean Christian communities, which were standing firm against communist aggression. The United States and a "Christian South Korea" were supposedly partners. But Pang died at the hands of an American soldier, an alleged ally, not those of a communist enemy. Therefore, when *The Christian Century* started reporting on Pang's murder, public pressure mounted for a response. The US Army and missionaries had to act to restore public confidence in the war and the narrative that the United States was working in (Christian) partnership with South Korea to fight communism.

II. Making South Korea a Christian Ally: *The Christian Century* and a Religious Cold War

Upon the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, the United States quickly mobilized its forces in what would initially be called a "police action." As this effort gathered steam, policy makers were concerned with convincing the American public both to accept the necessity of US intervention and to sacrifice (once again) for the sake of a foreign nation. In the words of Steven Casey, the government needed to "sell" the American public on the Korean War.⁹ A major impediment to this effort was the social, cultural, and, perhaps most importantly, racial distance most Americans felt from South Korea.¹⁰ Why should they make sacrifices for this country and its "oriental" people on the other side of the world?

Religion played an important role in closing the distance Americans felt from South Korea and persuading them that it was morally imperative to come to the country's aid. Even before the outbreak of the war, missionaries had long touted Korea as a bastion of Protestantism in Asia. Indeed, by the 1930s, P'yongyang was home to one of the largest mission stations in Asia and was known as a "city of churches." With the division of the peninsula, P'yongyang and these churches fell under Soviet control. The stakes during the Korean War seemed clear: a communist North Korea, supposedly working on behalf of the Soviet Union, was attempting to destroy South Korea and its Christians. Many in the US understood the Korean War to be a religious conflict and believed that "Christian America" needed to demonstrate the superiority of its system to that of communist countries.¹¹

⁹Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰Paul S. Cha, "'People Like You and Me': The Korean War, Humanitarian Aid, and Creating Compassion," *Journal of Korean Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2021): 95–116.

¹¹For an examination of the complex interaction between religion, the language of religious warfare, and the Cold War, see Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2003); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Though vibrant communities of both Catholics and Protestants did exist in Korea, as noted above, less than 3 percent of the population identified as members of the Christian faith.¹² To make this country “Christian” required the creation and dissemination of narratives that collectively supported the characterization. One influential American voice casting South Korea as a Christian ally was *The Christian Century*. This weekly periodical associated with the mainline US Protestant churches was one of the most important religious magazines in the United States for much of the twentieth century.¹³

In the winter of 1951, the editor-in-chief of *The Christian Century*, Harold E. Fey, spent approximately one month in South Korea. In the December 26, 1951 issue of the magazine, he penned an article called “A Great Church in Seoul” as part of an ongoing series, “A Gallery of Great Churches.” Fey opened by describing how in the rubble of Seoul, two buildings stood tall: Myōngdong Cathedral and Yōngnak Presbyterian Church—the focus of his article. What made Yōngnak “great” was not its age but its resilience and the faith of its community.¹⁴ The church, built by Protestant refugees from north of the 38th parallel, was completed on June 4, 1950, mere weeks before the start of the Korean War. Fey emphasized the tremendous suffering endured by members of Yōngnak. They had scattered across the southern half of the peninsula multiple times when Seoul was occupied by North Korean forces not once but twice during the first year of the conflict. And they had returned (twice) to a city ravaged by war and struggled to rebuild their lives. Even so, church members had remained steadfast in their faith.

The most powerful story of religious devotion came toward the end of Fey’s piece. In the spring of 1951, when United Nations forces were on the verge of retaking Seoul for the second time and the North Korean military began its retreat,¹⁵ Elder Kim Eung Nak, who had been in hiding during the occupation, hurried to the church. He was concerned that vandals would descend on the building. Three North Korean soldiers seized him right outside the church and informed him that he would be executed. He pleaded for five minutes to pray in the church, and they granted his wish. After his prayer, he walked outside, and the North Korean soldiers shot and killed him.¹⁶

Fey’s story posed two haunting questions for Americans. In the face of such danger, would they have the courage to rush to save a church building? And when confronting death, would they have the peace of mind to ask for five minutes of prayer? Fey asked with wonder how Korean Protestants, who had suffered so much, could remain so

Press, 2008); Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Philip Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012). For a discussion on the rhetoric of Christian America and the Korean War, see Arissa Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹²The tremendous surge of Christian converts, particularly within Protestant churches, in South Korea would not start until the 1960s. See Lee and Suh, “State Building and Religion,” 468.

¹³For a detailed examination of the history of *The Christian Century*, see Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For an examination of the role *The Christian Century* played in promoting Christian humanitarian aid abroad, see Heather Curtis, *Holy Humanitarianism: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁴Harold E. Fey, “A Great Church in Seoul,” *The Christian Century*, December 26, 1951, 1506.

¹⁵The North Korean army took control of Seoul twice during the war. Here, Fey is recounting the end of the second occupation.

¹⁶Fey, “A Great Church in Seoul,” 1509.

spiritually gracious, even joyful. He noted that at a thanksgiving service held in November 1951, Han Kyōng-jik, the founder and head pastor of Yōngnak, had concluded his sermon by exhorting his congregation to be grateful to God in all circumstances.¹⁷ What Koreans were facing was no greater than what Jesus had endured, he said, and God would sustain them in their times of need.

Though Fey admitted that a superficial comparison might reveal great differences between American and Korean churches, he emphasized that both shared a common loyalty to and passion for God.¹⁸ Their commonalities, in other words, surpassed their differences. Thus, he contended that American churches had a duty to “share with the Korean Christian church” the burden of rebuilding in the aftermath of the war. Koreans and Americans might be racially different, but spiritually they were the same.

Apparently inspired by his journey to South Korea, Fey wrote a weekly series on South Korea for *The Christian Century* from January 16 to February 20, 1952. He started by humanizing Koreans, stating that after his stay in the country, he now viewed Korea as the people he had met during his trip, from the ten-year-old orphan girl carrying an even smaller child on her back to the young widows trying desperately to make ends meet for their children.¹⁹ Koreans were simply “human beings like ourselves,” but unlike Americans, they were struggling to survive in the harshest of material conditions.²⁰ To explain to readers the scope of the humanitarian crisis in South Korea, he made a comparison with Germany. Most Americans would accept that the displacement of ten million Germans as a result of World War II was one of the “great catastrophes . . . of our troubled times.” However, if adjusted for the size of the population, the number of displaced Germans would need to have been three times greater for Germany’s refugee crisis to be comparable to what South Korea was facing.²¹

Fey further stressed, as he had in “A Great Church in Seoul,” that even in the face of this humanitarian crisis and a “misery beyond comprehension,” Korean churches were maintaining their faith. For this reason, Americans should feel proud to claim a “kinship” with Koreans.²² In other words, the racial differences between American and Korean Protestants were not as great as the kinship they shared as members of a common faith. In fact, Fey bluntly stated that Korean churches surpassed many American ones in terms of religious zeal. South Korea deserved to survive, and Americans needed to aid their South Korean (Christian) brethren.

In subsequent articles, Fey described the suddenness with which millions of Koreans had become refugees in their own land, the relief programs currently in place, and the roles that Christians, especially Korean Christians, were playing in relief measures.²³ The final two articles in the series presented a challenge to American churches. In the first, he outlined the shrinking presence of American Christians in South Korea. Prior to 1945, Fey wrote, the only American an average Korean would ever meet was

¹⁷Fey, “A Great Church in Seoul,” 1506, 1509.

¹⁸Fey, “A Great Church in Seoul,” 1509–1510

¹⁹Harold E. Fey, “Will Korea Perish?” *The Christian Century*, January 16, 1952, 66.

²⁰Fey, “Will Korea Perish?” 66.

²¹Fey, “Will Korea Perish?” 67.

²²Fey, “Will Korea Perish?” 66.

²³Harold Fey, “How Refugees are Made,” *The Christian Century*, January 23, 1952, 98–100; “Who Helps the Koreans?” *The Christian Century*, January 30, 1952, 122–124; and “How the Churches Help Korea,” *The Christian Century*, February 6, 1952, 156–158.

a missionary.²⁴ These missionaries were familiar with Korean culture and society and spoke the language. Many had gotten married and raised their children in Korea; they had made the country their home. In contrast, since 1945, and especially after the start of the Korean War, Koreans had become increasingly likely to encounter US soldiers. Though perhaps well intentioned and doing their best to assist those in need, the soldiers were mostly young men who, in the eyes of Koreans, had “strange manners” and engaged in shocking behavior. Of equal importance, they hated being in Korea and were vocal about wanting to leave. Should Christian America allow these soldiers to be the face of US benevolence? Or should missionaries (and by extension Christian America) regain their position as the primary conduit through which aid was distributed in Korea and the faces that Koreans would associate with American altruism?²⁵

Fey’s final article emphasized that the religious struggle in the country was no “rear-guard action.” Instead, what had been a tidal wave in terms of communism’s spread in Asia had suddenly crashed and halted on the breakwall of South Korea and its Christian community. In the global struggle between communism and Christianity, the battle in the Korean Peninsula was critical. He wrote colorfully that Korea might be “the place on earth where Christ and communism for the first time really come to grips, not theoretically but actually in a life-and-death struggle, with Christ the victor.”²⁶ Nearly 500 pastors and more than 5,000 lay leaders had died at the hands of communist forces. Even in the face of such losses, Korean Protestants persevered. Would American churches come to the aid of South Koreans, who were working so hard to not only survive but thrive for God’s kingdom?²⁷

In sum, Fey argued that the Korean War was not simply a political conflict. It was a religious battle between the forces of communism and Christianity. Fey went beyond merely arguing that a Christian America needed to protect South Korea from communist aggression; he cast South Korea as a Christian country and vital American ally. Korean Christians were suffering from hardships that could not be properly expressed in words. Yet they stood firm in the faith they shared with Americans. Koreans were not “foreigners.” They were fellow Christians, who needed help to regain their footing and continue their fight against communism. Through Fey’s series, *The Christian Century* dramatically downplayed the issue of racial difference.

III. From Murder to Death

The narrative of South Korea and the US as allies in a common struggle against the spread of communism pitched by Harold Fey, missionaries, and political leaders on both sides of the Pacific often broke down. The murder of Pang Hwa-il represented an especially shocking challenge—shocking not simply because of the circumstances of the murder, but also because of the way the incident came to light and how the trial and verdict proceeded.

At approximately 2:00 a.m. on the night that Pang Hwa-il stopped at his brother’s house, a US Army lieutenant, James Goff, and three enlisted soldiers appeared at the front door. They ordered everyone to wake up and gather outside. Pang’s brother, who was not at home at the time, was a foreman working on a US military project

²⁴Harold E. Fey, “Let the Churches Help Korea!” February 13, 1952, 190.

²⁵Fey, “Let the Churches Help Korea!”

²⁶Harold E. Fey, “Korea Must Live!” *The Christian Century*, February 20, 1952, 216.

²⁷Fey, “Korea Must Live!” 217.

in P'yōngt'aek, and the soldiers accused him of having stolen goods from the base. When Pang Hwa-il stepped forward to tell them, in English, that he was merely a visitor and a pastor, the lieutenant pistol-whipped him on the head and continued to beat him—apparently thinking Pang was his brother. They took him to the military post and charged him with theft. Once the soldiers left, Pang's sister-in-law rushed to the army chaplain to explain the situation. The chaplain went to the military post to verify that Pang was not his brother and that he was, in fact, the associate general secretary of the KNCC. At this point, Pang was flown by helicopter to a hospital ship in In'chōn harbor. He died from his injuries on December 10.

There are numerous questions surrounding the story of Pang's murder that the sources do not directly or fully address. Specifically, the motivation for and timing of the attempted arrest of Pang's brother are unclear. The search does not appear to have been officially sanctioned or planned, nor was the reason given urgent enough to justify visiting the house at 2:00 a.m. Adding to the mystery, early reports alleged that Goff and the three privates had been drinking and that disgruntled Korean workers, who supposedly held a grudge against Pang's brother, falsely accused him of theft from the construction site and directed the soldiers to Pang's home.²⁸ (Goff's defense team would contest this claim at the trial and argue that he, along with the other three soldiers, were sober.)

Regardless, the boldness with which Goff and his men entered the house and required everyone to appear outside for a relatively minor offense suggest that such intrusions were a frequent occurrence. In addition, the timing of Goff's attempt to arrest Pang's brother and the casualness with which he struck Pang indicate that Goff and his men had little fear of repercussions. Indeed, an aid-worker, stationed in South Korea at the time, stressed that such incidents were common, and the only difference this time was the social stature of the individual attacked.²⁹

Goff's actions were in line with the violence and dehumanization of Koreans perpetrated by many US soldiers during the war. From referring to South Koreans with the racist epithet "gooks" to massacring upwards of 300 South Korean villagers at Nogun-ri in July 1950, members of the US Army often viewed the value of South Korean life as cheap.³⁰ Military officials largely swept these incidents under the rug. Indeed, it would be nearly a half-century before the general American public would learn of events like Nogun-ri perpetrated by the US Army.

The US military's initial reaction to the murder of Pang Hwa-il was the same as its reaction to incidents like that of Nogun-ri: silence. Army officials acted as if the assault

²⁸"The Church in Korea: The Death of Mr. Pang," February 7, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

²⁹"Excerpt from Letter from Billy Asbury, Public Relations man for The Christian Children's Fund," ND, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS. .

³⁰In 1999, the Associate Press reported on a massacre that took place near the village of Nogun-ri during the Korean War, in July 1950. This was not the first attempt by survivors to publicize the event or have the US government accept responsibility for the massacre. The article did, however, raise public awareness and lead to a formal investigation. In 2001, the US Pentagon officially recognized that American soldiers had killed civilians at Nogun-ri, though it refrained from stating that soldiers had orders to do so. For detailed examinations of Nogun-ri and other related incidents during their Korean War and their long lasting impact on South Korean society, see Dong-choon Kim [Kim Tongch'un], *The Unending Korean War: A Social History* (Larkspur, CA: Tamal Vista Publications, 2009); Heonik Kwon, *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Charles J. Hanley, "No Gun Ri: Official Narrative and Inconvenient Truths," in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Korea: Between the Present and Future of the Korean Wars*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (New York: Routledge, 2013), 68–94.

and resulting death never occurred. Little was done to reprimand Goff for his actions. He was not placed on leave, nor was he investigated for beating an innocent man to death. Finally, in an action that reportedly angered Koreans, while Pang's brother was soon reinstated as foreman of a team working on a building project for the US Army, Goff was assigned to oversee this work detail. This situation called into question the original charge that Pang's brother had stolen equipment from the army base; it also spoke to the insensitivity of the US Army, forcing Pang's brother to work under the man who had allegedly murdered his sibling.

Neither the Korean nor the international press publicized Pang's murder. Nor was there active reporting or protest from either Korean churches or the mission societies. Not until early January, when Daniel Hoke—a foreign correspondent for a small periodical, *Christian Life*—submitted a news story on this incident did the tale reach a broader audience. *Chicago Daily News* picked up Hoke's story and ran an article on the case on January 10, 1953. *The Christian Century* was based in Chicago, and on January 12, Harold Fey called John Coventry Smith of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA (BFMPCUSA) to ascertain the facts surrounding the case.

Armed with the information he gathered from Smith, Fey penned an editorial for the January 21 edition of *The Christian Century*. Fey's editorial reported that four American soldiers had "invaded" the house of Pang's brother, claiming they were looking for a thief, and struck Pang with a pistol. They beat him and did not stop even when he told them "in English, he was a Christian minister."³¹ Fey stressed that Pang's wife had already been driven "insane" because of the torture she had experienced at the hands of North Korean communist forces in 1951. She was unable to care for herself, let alone her four children. What would happen to this pastor's family—which suddenly lost a father not because he had been executed, as so many other pastors had, at the hands of North Korean forces but because of the actions of American soldiers? Given the severity of the case, *The Christian Century* called for a full investigation and urged that the case not be "whitewashed."

The Christian Century followed up its January 21 editorial with another in the next issue. This time, the editorial emphasized that the KNCC had issued a formal protest on January 14 to General Mark W. Clark, head of United Nations Command. The complaint called for UN forces, which were predominantly comprised of units from the US military, to ensure that soldiers respect the human rights of Korean citizens. In a related and perhaps more significant point, the complaint called for United Nations Command to ensure that the rights and safety of ordinary Korean citizens—those who were even less privileged than Pang—were protected. This protection would be necessary until UN soldiers, especially Americans, came to understand that Koreans were their "equals."³²

In this manner, *The Christian Century* gave public voice to the issues of race and racism that seemed to permeate all aspects of Pang's case—from the lack of reporting to the failure to have Goff and the other assailants arrested and prosecuted. The January 21 editorial opened by stating indignantly that it was still a mystery why this murder had been kept from news outlets for a month. It further insinuated that Koreans were suffering not only because of the hardships wrought by attacks from communist forces but also from the racism of UN soldiers stationed in Korean Peninsula.

³¹"Editorial," *The Christian Century*, January 21, 1953, 67.

³²"Editorial," *The Christian Century*, January 28, 1953, 99.

Though subjected to ridicule and discrimination, Koreans bore these hardships “in silence . . . for the sake of good relations.”³³ The murder of Pang, however, seemed to be a tipping point.

The Christian Century's report was followed by articles from other outlets such as *Time* and the *New York Times*, prompting the US Army to investigate this case. In late January 1953, nearly six weeks after the incident took place, US officials announced that James Goff would be court-martialed on the charge of “unpremeditated murder and unlawful entry.” The trial took place from February 2 to February 4, 1953. But justice was still elusive. After deliberating for approximately ninety minutes, the eight-member panel found Goff not guilty of unpremeditated murder. Instead, it voted to find him guilty on a lesser charge of “assault with intent to commit grievous bodily harm” that resulted in a death. In explaining this verdict to John Coventry Smith, Arthur Emmons of the US State Department noted that, though Goff did strike Pang with a pistol, there was evidence that one of the enlisted men may have also struck him. Since it was unclear who had delivered the fatal blow, Goff was found not guilty on the charge of unpremeditated murder.³⁴

The missionaries, the Korean Protestant community, and the general American public were incensed by this verdict. Their anger was only exacerbated by the court's ruling that instead of receiving the maximum penalty permitted, five years, Goff would be sentenced to just two years of hard labor in prison. Otto DeCamp, a missionary stationed in Korea and a close friend of Pang, was so furious he told a correspondent for the *New York Times* that the light sentence was a great blow to Christianity in Korea.³⁵ The verdict called into question the moral authority of the United States, a supposedly Christian nation, and indicated that rhetoric of partnership and unity between South Korea and the United States was hollow. Indeed, Chŏn P'ilsun, an influential Presbyterian pastor, was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating: “The verdict cannot be understood by the Korean people. It is obvious now the life of a Korean means nothing to the United States Army. A life is precious to Americans only if it is an American life.”³⁶

An exchange between Ivan Bennett, the head of the US Army's chaplaincy program, and Earl Adams of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCUSA) reveals that many in the US military indeed valued American lives more than their Korean allies. In late April 1953, Bennett wrote to Adams to say that the chaplaincy was limited in the assistance it could render to Pang's bereaved wife.³⁷ Still, he noted that chaplains in South Korea had taken steps to address this grievous situation once news of the incident circulated, collecting money for Pang's family shortly after his death. At the same time, Bennett stated that from the very beginning the chaplaincy had also urged both Americans and Koreans to exercise “moderation in their prejudice” of Goff and the other soldiers to avoid provoking undue anger or jeopardizing their rights. To give weight to the wisdom of avoiding “prejudgment,” he stressed that the trial had caused suffering to Goff's father, mother, and wife, who were all having difficulties processing the news coming from South Korea. In response, Adams assured Bennett that neither the missionaries nor NCCUSA were motivated to report with malice

³³“Editorial,” *The Christian Century*, January 28, 1953, 99.

³⁴Arthur Emmons to John Coventry Smith, March 3, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

³⁵E. Otto DeCamp to Ed, February 9, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

³⁶“Officer Gets 2 Years for Killing of Korea,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1953.

³⁷Ivan L. Bennett to Earl F. Adams, April 30, 1953, RG 8, Box 5, Folder 30, PHS.

against Goff. Rather, they were motivated by a desire to secure “justice for the family of the *victim*.”³⁸ That Adams had to remind Bennett that the focus should be on the injustice of Pang’s murder speaks to the insensitivity with which even the US chaplaincy office approached this tragedy and its relative lack of concern for the “suffering” of Pang’s wife and children and of the Korean (Protestant) community more generally.

To those who were attempting to convince Americans that the United States and South Koreans stood in solidarity with one another in fighting communism, the public breakdown of the myth of partnership in the wake of Pang’s murder was alarming. As one reader of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote, not only the actions of the American soldiers but also the absurdly light punishment was a “shameful disgrace to our country.”³⁹ This individual could not help but wonder how many similar cases had simply been “hushed up” and questioned how it was possible that “in the theatre of war Americans are becoming calloused to brutality and human suffering.” Pang’s murder forced Americans to confront, if only briefly, the truth about their unequal treatment of Koreans. No one could accuse Pang of being a communist, an agitator, or a malcontent. He was a prominent church leader, had close ties to missionaries, and had access to people with social and political influence. But even with his clear anti-communist stance, elevated social status, and foreign connections, Pang was not protected from being beaten and killed by an American soldier.

IV. Securing Reparations: The Worth of One Korean Protestant Leader’s Life

Prior to *The Christian Century* first contacting the BFMPCUSA regarding Pang’s murder in early January, it refrained from taking formal action. In contrast, once it learned that the periodical would report on this incident, the BFMPCUSA suddenly became proactive in seeking justice for Pang and his bereaved family.

On January 12, 1953, the same day Harold Fey first called to inquire about the murder, John Coventry Smith wrote to fellow board members confirming that Pang had been a Presbyterian pastor. In addition, he forwarded a December 15, 1952, report regarding the murder sent by missionaries stationed in South Korea.⁴⁰ The following day, January 13, Smith wrote to Arthur Emmons, informing him of the case and stating that the board had originally planned not to publicize the incident,⁴¹ but now that news of the matter had started to circulate, the board would use its own news channels to disseminate relevant facts. In closing the letter, Smith posed two questions: How would the US government compensate and care for Pang’s family? And how would the US government ensure that a similar event would not occur again?⁴²

³⁸Earl F. Adams to Ivan L. Bennett, May 6, 1953, RG 8, Box 5, Folder 30, PHS. Emphasis added.

³⁹The author of this letter to the *Christian Science Monitor* was Elizabeth M. Vining of East Peoria, IL. See “Following is a Copy of a letter appearing in the column ‘The Reader Writes’ in the CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, February 21, 1953,” RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴⁰In a separate document, Smith claimed that the board had only received news of Pang’s murder in the first week of January. This is a plausible explanation, since Smith only referenced mail that he had received from the field, dated December 15 and December 16. However, by this time, missionaries had faster means of communication—including the telephone—than mail. If the case had been urgent in the minds of missionaries, other forms of communication could have been used. In addition, the missionaries had US Army Post Office (APO) privileges, and mail to and from South Korea and the United States was relatively quick. See *John Coventry Smith to Rowland Cross*, January 12, 1953; and *John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons*, January 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴¹*John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons*, January 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴²*John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons*, January 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

These questions, Smith implied, were related. He sought to address Korean anger in the present caused by this specific case and any anger that might be caused in the future by a similar incident. As noted above, activities like the forced entry of US military personnel into the homes of Koreans and attacks on civilians were allegedly frequent occurrences. Smith and other missionaries opined that though South Koreans were generally grateful to the US and military forces, acts such as these would eventually foment anger and undo all the positive accomplishments of the United States in the country.⁴³ Moreover, the US Army acted as though nothing had occurred. Not only was Goff still working, but no effort had been made to reach out to the family of the bereaved. Indeed, the missionaries stationed in Korea argued that one of the many upsetting aspects of Pang's case was the lack of any reparations to his family.

The missionaries pursued the issue of securing financial restitution for Pang's widow and children along two lines. The first was fundraising and securing donations. For example, in late January, the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) announced that it had placed Pang's children on the list of children of pastors who had died due to the Korean War. The CCF pledged a modest monthly stipend to the family until Pang's children turned 17 years old.⁴⁴ But as the case gained publicity, private American citizens forwarded donations for Pang's bereaved family. One woman submitted to *Time* a check in the amount of \$5.00 and a message that she hoped Pang's wife would soon learn that the "stupidity and evil of some Americans" were not representative of all.⁴⁵ In another instance, a church in Galeston, Pennsylvania, wrote to the BFMPUSA inquiring whether the stories in *Time* were accurate. Stating that its community was by no means "rich," the church declared that on learning of the "barbarism and brutality" of Goff's actions, it had decided to provide financial assistance to Pang's family.⁴⁶ In response, John Coventry Smith assured the church that the accounts in the media were accurate and that the BFMPUSA was striving to ensure that a special fund would be designated to support Pang's widowed wife and children. He welcomed any contributions the church would like to make.⁴⁷

Even US soldiers (but not the US Army) collected funds for the family. After *The Christian Century* and *Time* reported on the incident, it became a topic of discussion among the troops stationed in South Korea. *Stars and Stripes*, which was published by the US military, started to run articles regarding Pang's murder and subsequent trial.⁴⁸ Perhaps because of these articles and the discourse they produced, many soldiers in South Korea appeared willing to contribute to support Pang's family. For instance, the day after the conclusion of the trial, Pang's brother reportedly pressed a US officer for some form of financial assistance for the family. Within 48 hours, some \$500 had been collected, and in the end about \$5,300 was given to the family.⁴⁹

⁴³Statement of the Rev. Dr. Edward Adams, field representative in Korea of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA concerning the murder of the Rev. Pang Wha Il by an American Soldier," February 6, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴⁴Ecumenical Press service, "Church Group Seeks Action in Death of Korean Church Leader," January 28, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴⁵"Death of a Preacher," February 23, 1953, *Time*.

⁴⁶*Basil E. Harris to Board of Foreign Missions*, February 24, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴⁷*John Coventry Smith to Basil E. Harris*, March 5, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁴⁸US Officer Faces Trial in Murder of Korea," *Stars and Stripes*, January 25, 1953; "Witness Says Officer Beat Korean Cleric," *Stars and Stripes*, February 3, 1953; and "Lieutenant Gets 2 Years in Korean Cleric's Death," *Stars and Stripes*, February 6, 1953.

⁴⁹*E. Otto DeCamp to John Coventry Smith*, March 21, 1953; and *George Patrick Welch to William C. Martin*, May 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

While the BFMPCUSA welcomed private donations, its leaders also pursued a more formal and official commitment from a US agency. Simply put, the BFMPCUSA believed that the US government should shoulder this responsibility, if only to mitigate the anger about Pang's murder, the US Army's initial hesitation to prosecute Goff, and the verdict. Thus, on February 18, Smith wrote again to Emmons to inquire what measures government agencies would take to support Pang's family on a long-term basis. He noted pointedly that as of February 9, no US officials had made any inquiries into the status of the family, either by formal visit or by letter.⁵⁰ Emmons responded several weeks later, stating that Goff had been found not guilty of murder but guilty of aggravated assault. Moreover, he noted that US property had been found on the premises. In other words, Emmons implied that Goff and the other soldiers had at least some justification for entering the house. Finally, he informed Smith that the Eighth Army Headquarters had instructed Pang's brother that he could be appointed overseer of Pang's estate and then file a claim for damages. (Pang's wife was unqualified because of her mental state.) However, no payment could be made until the Foreign Claims Act had come into effect in Korea.⁵¹ The clear import of Emmons's reply was that US agencies had fulfilled all of their legal obligations and would do no more.

The BFMPCUSA was not satisfied with this response. Otto DeCamp, John Coventry Smith, and other missionaries believed that Koreans were seething, at least internally, over the way Pang's case had been handled from the beginning. In early March, Smith wrote back to Emmons stating that the BFMPCUSA understood the position of the State Department and the Department of Defense.⁵² On the issue of filing a claim, the board likewise recognized that this was a legal issue; the US Army was legally restricted in how it could compensate Pang's family.⁵³ However, Smith warned that in the eyes of many Koreans, the United States was shirking its responsibility. Action was quickly needed to assuage the Koreans' anger and resentment.⁵⁴ Given this situation, he informed Emmons that the NCCUSA was preparing a document for President Dwight Eisenhower regarding the situation and requesting his immediate intervention to redress this wrong.⁵⁵

⁵⁰John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons, February 18, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵¹Arthur Emmons to John Coventry Smith, March 3, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS. In 1942, the United States passed into law the Foreign Claims Act, which authorized the government to compensate a foreign citizen for damage to property, personnel injury, or death. However, Emmons informed Smith that as of 1953, the law did not cover South Korea.

⁵²John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons, March 11, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵³When reading these missionary documents, especially correspondence with government officials, it is critical to understand these were like "diplomatic" missives. They must be read against the grain. The letter Smith sent to Emmons appeared understanding on the surface, but a close reading clearly reveals disgust and anger. Corroborating this reading is a letter Smith sent to Edward Adams in which he noted that writing to Emmons was not effective, as Emmons's response provided simply a "factual treatment" of the case. In his letter to Emmons, Smith essentially stated that he would go straight to the top, to the President of the United States, to address this issue. See *John Coventry Smith to Edward Adams*, March 12, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵⁴John Coventry Smith to Leslie G. Elmes, March 4, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵⁵In this letter, Smith emphasized the need to act because of Korean anger, which endangered the partnership between South Korea and the United States. Left unstated, but reasonable to assume, was that Smith and his colleagues were also concerned that Pang's murder and the failure of the US to take responsibility were shaping opinion on the United States' presence in South Korea. As examined later in this article, pressure from the American public eventually motivated the US Congress to authorize a one-time payment in support of Pang's bereaved family.

The NCCUSA's appeal to the president was a failure. The White House referred the matter back to the army, which gave the NCCUSA essentially the same response it had given to Smith.⁵⁶ Yet on March 30, 1953, Senator Styles Bridges, who at the time was president pro tempore of the US Senate, put forth a bill to authorize a payment to Pang's estate in the amount of \$10,000. It is not clear why Bridges wrote and sponsored this bill. However, he did indicate to church leaders that his office had received numerous letters from Americans concerned about Goff's actions. He thus felt it was imperative that the United States government take some responsibility for providing relief to Pang's remaining family members.⁵⁷ The bill passed both houses of the US Congress in August and was sent to the White House for the president's signature.

In the end, Pang's life proved worth \$10,000 to the US government. On the one hand, this was a significant sum, especially given the general economic conditions of South Korea at the time. For perspective, when the missionaries and the KNCC established a committee to look after Pang's wife and children, they estimated that at least \$70 a month would be required for food and other basic expenses for the family and one housekeeper. On the other hand, even if the family abided strictly by the \$70 monthly budget, \$10,000 would last only fifteen years. Factoring in expenses like home maintenance, unexpected medical needs, and (of course) taxes, the amount would in reality last a far shorter time.

V. Silence and Self-Censorship: Questions of Power, Questions of Race

Weeks after the trial, Winslow G. Fox, an army medical doctor, wrote in a personal capacity to Edward Adams, a long-serving missionary to Korea. Inquiring how he could contribute money in support of Pang's bereaved family, he remarked that "the sentence and *delay* indicate a callousness bordering on indifference" on the part of the US army was disturbing.⁵⁸ The delay in responding was not limited to the US military. Missionaries and members of the press were aware of the murder in early December, shortly after it occurred. Indeed, Fox first learned of Pang's case when he shared a train with Adams from Pusan to Seoul weeks before the US military announced that the court martial would be held. Missionaries, soldiers, and many others were discussing Pang's murder in private quarters but refrained from widely publicizing it.

There were likely multiple reasons for the missionaries' initial silence and inaction. Most obviously, many were inured to violence against Korean civilians. As indicated by *The Christian Century*, American soldiers in general were young, disliked Korea, and were supposedly unruly.⁵⁹ Violence against Korean civilians at the hands of the US military was apparently common; most instances failed to reach a larger audience or provoke a response. At the same time, Korea was a warzone, and the military controlled access over entry of both personnel and relief goods into the peninsula. Thus, maintaining friendly relations with US Army officials was crucial for mission societies and aid organizations. The army could easily restrict their work in South Korea, even expelling those deemed to be engaged in subversive activities.

⁵⁶George Patrick Welch to William C. Martin, May 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵⁷Styles Bridges to Rowland M. Cross, May 25, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁵⁸Winslow G. Fox to Edward Adams, February 27, 1953, RG 197, Box 4, Folder 36, PHS. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹Fey, "Let the Churches Help Korea!" 190.

Many in South Korea who spoke on Pang's murder did so with caution or censored themselves. For example, Bill Asbury, who worked in public relations for the Christian Children's Fund, submitted a report on the incident shortly after it took place. In describing his submission, Asbury stressed that "he alone" had submitted the report and had done so without claiming credit for it. His goal was to avoid incurring the wrath of army censors.⁶⁰ Asbury's reaction was not an aberration.

Missionaries took a similar posture. Pang Hwa-il was a Presbyterian, and the BFMPUSA in particular was concerned with his murder. Notably, however, at no point did any official communication from the BFMPUSA to a US government agency take an accusatory tone or engage in a petty or unproductive argument. For instance, John Coventry Smith and his coworkers believed the argument that Goff's forced entry was justified by the discovery in the house of items with the logo of the US Army was weak, if not spurious. Otto DeCamp wrote to Smith about the absurdity of this argument, noting that, having served in the army, he himself possessed numerous pieces of army equipment, from field jackets to socks.⁶¹ These items had been lent to him "legally" during the course of his work, and some had been purchased from the market. That Pang's brother had these items was not proof of theft. Indeed, given that most of these items had been returned to Pang's brother—and given that the US Army continued to employ him—DeCamp argued it was unlikely these items had been stolen in the first place. If there was theft related to this case, it had occurred *during* the incident: DeCamp claimed that Pang Hwa-il had approximately \$110 in his briefcase and this money had not been returned. However, despite DeCamp's evident anger and accusatory tone, no public report or official letter from the BFMPUSA to the US government engaged in an argumentative attempt to re-prosecute the case or levy an accusation. Smith and other leaders of the mission board understood that offending US officials was not an effective strategy for advancing their aims.

Having lost the battle to secure legal justice for Pang, his family, and Koreans in general, the BFMPUSA turned their efforts to securing financial stability for Pang's family and preventing this incident from further dividing an already fractured Korean Protestant community. Each letter or public announcement from the Board was carefully considered. More important documents, such as the letter to President Dwight Eisenhower and news reports, underwent several revisions before being dispatched; the BFMPUSA wanted to avoid inflaming the situation by angering Koreans, the United States government, or the US public.⁶² In early February, for instance, the Board prepared a press release describing the events that had led to Pang's "untimely death." In an early version, the press release carried the title "The Church in Korea: The Murder of Mr. Pang." But in revision, the word *murder* was crossed out and replaced with *death*: "The Church in Korea: The Death ~~Murder~~ of Mr. Pang."⁶³ In this manner, Pang's murder was erased, as the BFMPUSA voluntarily reclassified the case, downplaying the severity of the crime committed, to avoid accusatory rhetoric.

⁶⁰Excerpt from letter from Bill Asbury, Public Relations man for the Christian Children's Fund, December 10, 1952," RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁶¹E. Otto DeCamp to John C. Smith, March 21, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁶²In a statement submitted to the BFMPUSA, Edward Adams stated that the missionaries in Korea sought to avoid creating any "unfriendly relations between groups of people." [NA] to The Board of Foreign Missions, February 6, 1953, RG 140, 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁶³"The Church in Korea," February 7, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

Another power differential in the case led to another kind of silence. Race and racism were implicit elements of Pang's murder and the events that followed in more ways than one. James Goff was White. The three enlisted men who accompanied him, however, were Black. In the early 1950s, the leaders of the progressive wings of the mainline Protestant denominations in the United States had been grappling with racism, seeking to address such inequities as segregation laws. Issues of race were prominent in many of the articles that populated the pages of *The Christian Century* during the late 1940s and into the 1950s. The participation of three Black enlisted soldiers in the beating death of Pang troubled the leaders of the BFMPUSA. They seem to have feared that the general US population would immediately assume that this incident was one in which Black soldiers had ruthlessly beaten a Korean. In fact, some missionaries in Korea appear to have held this view. In one report, Henry D. Appenzeller—who at the time was director of Korea Church World Service—described the event in the following manner: “He [Pang] was bludgeoned to death in Plyentaik [P'yōngt'aek] (just north of Taejon) by 3 colored soldiers who in drunken fury forced their way into the house and were questioning his sister-in-law.”⁶⁴

The image of three drunk “colored soldiers” barging into the home of a Korean woman in the middle of the night, while her husband was away, could not be divorced from the tense racial debates taking place in the United States during the 1950s. The BFMPUSA was so concerned that Pang's case would be cast as a racial issue that when Harold Fey first wrote the Board seeking further information in early January, the reply he received stressed the sensitive nature of the fact that three of the soldiers were Black.⁶⁵ John Coventry Smith emphasized that moving forward, the BFMPUSA would simply refer to the participants as four US soldiers and would intentionally not mention race. He concluded his letter by requesting *The Christian Century's* support in this matter. Fey complied, and in the initial articles, the periodical made no mention of the racial identity of the four “US soldiers.”

Leaders like Smith were concerned that this incident would be viewed by Americans in racial terms, and specifically as an example of “colored soldiers” being unable to control themselves. Perhaps because of this fear, neither missionaries nor *The Christian Century* made an accusation that the murder, delayed trial, verdict, or initial lack of reparations was influenced by racism. Race was erased in the case of Pang Hwa-il.

VI. Conclusions

During the 1950s, many Americans viewed the Korean War in religious terms. The US government, societal elites, and church leaders often characterized South Korea as a Christian ally, standing firm against the aggressive actions of communist North Korea. However, as Pang's murder and its aftermath reveal, regardless of any special treatment that the US military may have given to mission societies and to the Koreans associated with them, it would be a mistake to treat the US military, the mission societies, and Korean churches as a unified group or partnership. Their relationships were defined by hierarchies and marked by inequities. The US Army dominated the Korean Christians and the mission societies, which had limited means of recourse in the face of abuses of power.

⁶⁴John Coventry Smith excerpted this quote from a letter Appenzeller had submitted, dated December 16, 1952. See *John Coventry Smith to Arthur Emmons*, January 13, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

⁶⁵*John Coventry Smith to Harold Fey*, January 12, 1953, RG 140, Box 18, Folder 19, PHS.

The one effective protest tool that the mission societies possessed was publicity. Historically, in Korea, they had turned to the presses to oppose actions taken by the state. They had, for instance, publicized Japanese colonial violence in the wake of the March First demonstrations of 1919 and raised an outcry about the colonial government's demand that all school children, including those attending mission-run institutions, bow at Shinto Shrine ceremonies during the late 1930s. Yet, curiously, in the case of Pang's murder, the mission societies refrained from using the media to apply public pressure on the US government. News of the event was broken by people who stood outside the mission societies' immediate circle. Only after the news had been released did the mission societies act—and even then, with caution.

One other important silence has not yet been mentioned. Neither the South Korean government nor the Korean press protested the killing of Pang Hwa-il.⁶⁶ Syngman Rhee and his “Christian” administration did not come forward to demand justice for Pang or reparations for his family. Rhee was not a timid president who simply followed the dictates of the United States: he was well known for carving his own path based on what he believed were Korea's best interests. Thus, the lack of active or overt protest should not be taken as a sign of caving to US pressure. Could it be that Rhee himself did not value Pang's life or the support of Korean Protestants enough to speak out?

Pang's murder was not the first and would not be the last time the US government and Americans in general treated Koreans with indifference or violence. His case reached a broader Western audience only because of his status as a leader in the Korean Protestant church. However, this case reveals a flash of the discontentment and anger that were simmering within Korean society and even within Protestant communities during the 1950s. Many Korean churches were both grateful for US aid and angry about US discrimination. In the Korean War and the Cold War contexts, the latter emotion could not be expressed.

Paul S. Cha is Assistant Professor of Korean Studies at the University of Hong Kong. He thanks Jae-Jung Suh, Paul Chang, Franklin Rausch, and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript. Revisions for the final version of this article were made while in residence at the Harvard-Yenching Institute as a visiting scholar. Research funding for this article was provided by the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (General Research Fund Project # 17600721).

⁶⁶Korean newspapers also refrained from reporting on the murder. Only after the trial did a Korean newspaper finally report on the incident—and rather than speaking with a critical voice, the article emphasized the “heavy sentence” Goff received, of two years of hard labor. See “‘Kopū’ Sowi e chunghyōng” [Lieutenant's Goff's Severe Punishment], *Kyōngnyang sinmun*, February 7, 1953

Cite this article: Cha, Paul S. “The Murder Death of Pang Hwa-il: Erasing American Violence, Producing Christian Allies During the Korean War.” *Church History* 92, no. 3 (September 2023): 626–642. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640723002111>.