

God Belief in South Korea-Israel Relations

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Abstract: Before the establishment of both Republic of Korea and State of Israel, Koreans and Jews had contacts in China. The outbreak of the Korean War is of great milestone-style meanings for the South Korea-Israel relations. After the Cold War and Madrid Middle East peace conference, bilateral relations experienced leaps and bounds and shared God belief constitutes the cornerstone. South Korean scholars, Christian groups and Christian politicians play important roles in advancing the South Korea-Israel relations. Religion's participation in international relations provides a new parallel path of analysis different from mainstream international relations theories with materialistic nature and more and more scientification.

Key words: South Korea-Israel Relations • Judaism • Christianity • Religion and International Relations

INTRODUCTION

South Korea's Middle East diplomacy reaches Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and nearly all the Arab countries with the exception of Syria and Palestine, its diplomatic field consists of three parts: 1) economic diplomacy, including energy diplomacy and construction diplomacy; 2) international contribution diplomacy, including UN peacekeeping operations and official development assistance (ODA); 3) cultural diplomacy. Korean Islamic groups play an important role in pushing forward South Korea's diplomatic relations with Middle Eastern Muslim countries [1]. As the sole non-Muslim country in the Middle East, Israel is an important target of South Korea's Middle East strategy. From the perspective of history as well as reality, South Korea and Israel have many similar encounters: in the aspect of territory and population, they are small countries either in the region or in worldwide; in the aspect of ethnic misfortune, both of the Korean nation and Jewish nation established the Republic of Korea and the State of Israel in 1948 after years of subjugation and exile which were due to a variety of factors and respectively encountered the Korean War and the First Middle East War which were concerned with their national survival; in the aspects of the current development, they all become world's economic and technological powers from the ruins of wars and have

developed into liberal democracy. All in all, South Korea and Israel are all the country of international influence. In addition to the close scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries, the common God belief constitutes the emotional cornerstone of the future political alliance and economic free trade zone between South Korea and Israel.

The Development Process of South Korea-Israel Relations: Although South Korea and Israel are located in both ends of East and West Asia respectively and far away from each other, the relationship between the two peoples can be traced back to the 1930s to 1940s in China. With the signing of "Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty" in 1910, Korean Empire had lost the national independence completely and became a colony with Japan's direct rule. The Japanese rulers' early high-handed policy directly led to the outbreak of "March 1st Movement" in 1919. Some Korean patriots fled to China and established a "Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea" (PGROK) in Shanghai on April 13th, 1919 with the aim of leading Koreans' anti-Japanese struggle. The resident building of the PGROK is built by the Jews. With the outbreak of Hongkou Park incident in which Japanese General Yoshinori Shirakawa was killed in 1932, PGROK was forced to withdraw Shanghai and relocated to Hangzhou, Zhenjiang, Nanjing, Changsha, Guangzhou,

Liuzhou and Qijiang progressively. At the same time, with the implementation of anti-Semitic policies since 1935 by the Nazi Germany, a large number of Jews left Germany and other European countries. Before the outbreak of the Pacific War from 1933 to 1941, Shanghai had accepted about 30,000 Jews from Central Europe; except the Jews switched to other countries through Shanghai, until the outbreak of the Pacific War, there were about 25,000 Jews in Shanghai, "this means that Shanghai accepts more Jewish refugees than those taken in by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India combined"[2]. Japanese troops concentrated the Jews to resettle them in Hongkou and did not meet Nazi Germany's extinction requirements. In 1939, Sun Ke (or Sun Fo), the President of China's Legislative Yuan, proposed to establish a Jewish Special Administrative Region in southwest China so as to absorb 100,000 Jews to join in its development; Sun's advice was supported by the President of China's Executive Yuan Dr. Kung Hsing-hsi and Chairman of China's National Military Council Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Because of many southwest China's provinces were occupied by Japanese army, Sun's project had to strand, but there were still hundreds of Jews settled in Chengdu and Chongqing who came from Shanghai and Kunming, some of them even got Chinese nationalities.¹ Almost simultaneously with some Jews moved to Chongqing, PGROK eventually moved to China's wartime provisional capital Chongqing in 1940. And it had stayed there until the victory of World War II, during which it had shared common living environment and preliminary contacts with the Jews in southwest China. Although there is no material showing whether PGROK in Chongqing had a clear attitude towards the Jews, PGROK was fully in favor of domestic and foreign policies of Chinese Nationalist Government. Chinese Government held compassion for the Jews, but there was evidence that the KMT had some kind of contempt mentality for the Jews due to its good relationship with Nazi Germany. Polish Jewish reporter who acquired Chinese nationality in 1950s, Israel Epstein pointed out that the KMT was "injected anti-Semitism into its attacks on some foreign reporters. I heard Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, furious at Time magazine correspondent Theodore White, describe him as 'that little Jew'"[3].

The Japanese military authorities in Shanghai and Chinese Nationalist Government in Chongqing affected the Korean view of the Jews respectively and these effects lasted for many years in the post-WW II period. Japanese authorities acted as the de facto protector of the

Jews in Shanghai for its pragmatic consideration. Japan's view of the Jews still has influence on Koreans living in Japan after the WW II, "as in Japan, the Korean popular image of Jews is distorted. There is Korean anti-Semitism", "there is a widespread belief that Jews supposedly control the world through shadowy governments and institutions, fanned by bestselling books and exposes"[4]. In 1945, Korean Peninsula achieved independence, PGROK moved from Chongqing to Seoul and the Republic of Korea Government established in 1948 is a heritage of the former. Many South Korean political leaders had long-time China experience, they implanted Chinese Nationalist Government's active attitude towards the Jews and "there are today only about half a dozen Korean converts to Judaism. Most of the Jews Koreans have met have been Americans, with either the US military or American businesses operating in Korea"[4]. From the history since the foundation of Republic of Korea, the ROK-US alliance has strengthened the United States' positive and active attitude towards Jews and Israel on ROK; many Koreans living in Japan have inherited Japanese government's views on Jews while keeping strong pro-North Korea tendencies. However, they don't constitute the mainstream view of the South Korean government and nationals on Israel.

During the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 and the eruption of the First Middle East War, Republic of Korea had not come into being. Israel was busy in the game with Arab world while South Korea was busy in game with North Korea, so Israel and South Korea did not have the possibility to build direct contact from 1948 to 1949. The outbreak of the Korean War is of great milestone-style meanings for the South Korea-Israel relations. Israel was pursuing the nonalignment policy before 1950 and tried to implement balance diplomacy between the East and the West, for example, during Mao Zedong's visit in USSR from the end of 1949 to early 1950, Israel conducted a secret contacts with China [5]. Israel even officially recognized the People's Republic of China in 1950, which was related with Israel's domestic political ecology. With the outbreak of the Korean War, especially after P. R. China was seen as an "aggressor" by the United Nations, Israeli government's attitude was reversed. For the fear of North Korea and Soviet communist regime's anti-Semitism, Prime Minister Ben Gurion even suggested sending Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to participate in UN troops to fight against the North Korean and Chinese armies and eventually afforded

¹ The Hong Kong Phoenix TV documentary film *There Is A 'Sichuan Fellow' in Israel* has a deep excavation of these.

medical and food aid due to the pressure of the domestic left-wing forces [6]. Due to the support of the United States and United Nations, Israel virtually opened up its support for South Korea. But throughout the 1950s, there had been controversy within the Israeli government about its South Korea policy, while Syngman Rhee administration's dictatorship and corruption implemented a great impact on Israel's attitude towards the South Korean government. It was not until Syngman Rhee left office that Israel formally recognized South Korea on July 9, 1961 and the two countries formally established diplomatic relations in April 1962. But in the whole 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Israel-South Korea relations was stagnated, Israel's security situation, South Korea's political chaos and South Korea's trying to cater to the Arab world were the main reasons. The oil crisis in 1973 and 1979 were of crucial impacts on South Korea, South Korea recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians and called on Israel to withdraw from "occupied territories"; meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan decided to shut down the Israeli embassy in Seoul in 1978 and claimed it was out of consideration for financial reasons. South Korean President Park Chung-hee sent a special envoy to Israel who has eventually failed his mission. The Israel-South Korea relations hit rock bottom, but had not yet ruptured and Israeli ambassador to Japan actually assumed the functions of the ambassador to South Korea [6]. South Korea embarked on the road of democratization since the successful holding of the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, which had laid a good foundation for the improvement of mutual relations. The outbreak of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War made the "Chief of Islam" Saudi Arabia more and more dependent on the United States and this also contributed to the improvement of South Korea-Saudi Arabia relations. Since the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, the Arab world achieved a preliminary reconciliation with Israel and South Korea gradually got out of the dilemma between Israel and the Arab countries. In this context, Israel reopened its embassy in Seoul in January 1992 and South Korea opened its embassy in Tel Aviv in December 1993. Since the 1990s, there have been frequent exchange of visits between South Korea and Israel officials and a large number of bilateral military, economic cooperation, such cooperation is mainly reflected in the high-tech fields; Moreover, the South Korean Christian groups frequently interact with Israel, the religious sentiments of "Ahava Israel" are an important civil thrust in South Korea-Israel relations.

The Position of God Belief in South Korea and Israel:

The re-foundation of the State of Israel is not for religious reasons. Before then, Zionists had considered Africa, Brazil and other places, but they ultimately chose Palestine where their ancestors lived. The ultimate founding of State of Israel in Palestine derived from Jewish tragic experiences in Europe, especially under Nazi rule and Zionists' tireless long-term promotion. This is a win-win situation both for Europe and the Jews. In the period of British mandate, Jews begun their immigration to Palestine and these early settlers had been welcomed by the Arabs. But with the increasing number of Jewish immigrants, Arabs began to feel the threat and put pressure on the British authorities. At this time, Arabs' panic was based on the consideration of national survival but not religious sentiments. The largest opposition group against Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel was the Orthodox Judaism, "among the most extreme Orthodox Jews, the Zionist movement was deemed heretical because it sought to 'force the End of Days' and preempt the hand of God in restoring the Jewish people to their Holy Land before the Messiah's advent" [7]. Under Arabs' pressure, British authorities progressively restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. After World War II, Britain gave up its mandate in Palestine and the United States began to lead the establishment of State of Israel.

US support for the founding of State of Israel came from President Truman's enthusiasm. Harry S. Truman is a devout Christian; he worked as pastor when he was young. In a conversation, Truman was praised for his help to create the State of Israel. Truman did not agree with that and said: "What do you mean, help create? I am Cyrus, I am Cyrus!"[8]. Cyrus the Great was of extraordinary significance for the Orthodox Jews, he allowed the Jews back to Jerusalem, which was recorded in the Old Testament, "the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him", "for the sake of my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me."² Truman's support for Israel was mainly out of the demand of Christian emotion of his. Although the founding of Israel was opposed by the Orthodox Jews, after all, Palestine is a sacred land of Judaism. Above all, the most sacred Temple ruins, the Wailing Wall is in the Holy Land Jerusalem, so many Orthodox Jews still moved to the State of Israel. Christianity and Judaism achieved much reconciliation in the founding of Israel issue, "Christian evangelical makes an all-out effort to support Israel. Its theological purpose

²Holy Bible: Old Testament: Isaiah 45.

is establishing a Christian kingdom in the whole world. The Old Testament shared both by Jews and Christians was a consolidation base of mutual recognition" [9]. Since the United States has paid the most steadfast and strong support to the establishment of State of Israel, the Orthodox Jews no longer openly oppose the establishment of the State of Israel and actively develop relations with Christian evangelicals around the world as well as urge them to act as a bridge between their countries' government and Israel. Although the Israeli government is a secular one, it makes use of religious sentiments to maintain the support from Christian countries and Christians around the world in the issue of State-foundation and Jerusalem's belonging.

Historically, Korea had been in the circle of Chinese culture for a long time, but its religious development context is different from that of China. Since the establishment of the Chosun Dynasty, Korean Kings pursued the religious policy of "respecting for Confucianism but Suppressing for Buddhism"; Buddhism and Folk Belief in witchcraft suffered a devastating blow and Confucianism itself is difficult to constitute a modern religion. In the end of the 18th century, Christianity entered Korea from China and soon faced with the repression of conservative court forces. After hundreds of years of suppression, the idolatry worship of Buddhism and civil witchcraft had little influence on Korean people, this was to a large extent a very favorable environment for them to accept the Christian faith, because Christianity is opposed to such acts of idolatry and witchcraft. The introduction of Christianity is Koreans' initiative; its early role was guiding the modernization of Chosun Dynasty. Korea suffered mainly Japanese Imperialist but not European Imperialist invasion and thus Christianity not only did not cause any negative impression, but it also had an important appeal to Koreans under Japanese rule for its spirit of equality and fraternity, "many Christian leaders strongly believed that the success of Christian missionary work among the Koreans was the best way to liberate Korea from Japanese rule"[10]. Christianity in Korea played the role of fighting against the foreign rulers. In the early 1940s, because of its many churches and Christians, Pyongyang was called "Jerusalem of the Far East" by the missionaries.

After the outbreak of Korean War, for the fear of Communism, large numbers of Christians fled to the South from the North of Korean Peninsula. The number of Christians in the Republic of Korea began to exceed the

DPRK. South Korea's survival benefited from the protection of the US-led United Nations forces; the United States had deep impact on South Korea and the role of Christianity in Korea had evolved from advancing the modernization, fighting against Imperialism into fighting against Communism. From the 1st President Syngman Rhee, South Korea government attempted to maintain the dictatorship rule which was followed by continuous military coups and one domestic anti-authoritarian movement after another. For Syngman Rhee's Christian identity and his fierce anti-communist policy, South Korean Christian groups kept relative silence under Rhee's dictatorship in the 1950s. In the 1960s, Christian groups played an important role in fighting against dictatorship while for democracy movements with other groups. After the Gwangju uprising, South Korea's democratization movement entered a critical period, "around 1980, for reasons unclear, the number of Korean Christians began to grow rapidly, until by 1992, 25 percent of the population of South Korea was Christian. Korea is also the home to the largest Christian church in the world with a congregation of more than 800,000." [11]. Although the number of Buddhists is slightly more than that of Christians, those who have great influence on the state power and society are mostly Christians. Christianity's long-time active involvement in Korean politics gave it unique influence and appeal which other religions cannot match. Although South Korea is not a religious state, the Christians have led the state power. Presidents of South Korea, such as Syngman Rhee, Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung and Lee Myung-bak are all Christians. No matter it is Christianity or Catholicism that is South Korea's fastest-growing religion, South Korea has also become world's second largest missionary-exporting countries after the United States. Korean Christians nowadays call South Korea the "second Israel".

The Korean Christians in the Advancement of South

Korea -Israel Relations: It is because of the confluence of Judaism and Christianity in the founding of State of Israel, as well as the long-term development of South Korean Christianity, that the South Korean Christians show their unilateral love for Israel based on religious emotion and this love penetrates into the social life and diplomacy of South Korea. The common God belief of South Korea and Israel has transcended mere material needs. South Korean Christians' civil diplomacy towards Israel is implemented through two types:

The first kind is through the efforts of the Korean Christian scholars. As early as March 1, 1992, the South Korean Christian scholars established Jerusalem Academy of Bible and Cognate Studies (JABCS), which consists of four departments: Biblical Studies; Historical Geography and Archeology; Linguistics; and Jewish-Christian Studies; until 2008, JABCS has 33 active members, of which there are more than ten South Koreans [12]. With their religious sentiment and willingness to deepen Christian study, a lot of Korean Christian scholars come to study in Israel and get degrees, especially in Jerusalem Hebrew University. According to Israeli *Haaretz*, in June 2008, Hebrew University granted 328 students Doctorate degree, among whom only six students from Bible Department received Ph.D.: two Israelis, one American and three Koreans, “the roster of newly awarded doctorates expressed the large number of Korean Students in the Hebrew University Bible and other departments, particularly those which offer Jewish studies”, Korean students’ “primary motivation is Protestant or Catholic religious faith”; Korean Catholic student Dr. Kim Myung-suk said that “I am religious and I wanted to discover the source of life”; her experience from religious sentiments to the understanding of modern Israel had gone through a subtle process, she pointed out that “I did not even know that it was a Jewish state. I didn’t actually know what a Jew was. Only after I arrived did I realize one day that I was among Jews” [13]. In fact, there are a much larger number of Korean students in Hebrew University. In 2006, an article entitled “The Heart of South Korea” issued in Hebrew University’s student newspaper *Pi-Haaton* pointed out that, there were 100-200 Korean students in Scopes Hill campus of the Hebrew University, “the Korean students mainly study the Bible, Archeology, Hebrew and History. They fund their studies through a scholarship from the church or the support of their parents”; a Korean student said “there is a problem in Christian religion in Korea, which has to do with the fact that it’s an imported religion. To make it more authentic, people want to come to Israel ... Eventually, Jesus wasn’t Christian, but Jewish, his language and culture were Hebrew; therefore, knowing the Jews and Hebrew has great value” [14]. Above is a microcosm of how those Korean Christians studying in Israel and those who have returned from Israel back to South Korea have vigorously promoted the advancement of South Korea-Israel relations. On December 2, 2008, Korean Institute of Israel Studies (KIIS) was officially established in the Israeli Cultural Center in Seoul, KIIS was initiated by 40 Korean Christian professors who got Master or Doctorate degrees in Israel, their purpose was “to become a certified

academic and research organization, or a think tank, which will provide the Korean people with information about Israel, Judaism, Hebrew and the Bible”. A hundred and fifty guests attended the inaugural ceremony, including KIIS Director Professor Choi Myung-suk and Israeli ambassador to South Korea Yigal Caspi [15]. All in all, South Korean Christian scholars who received education in Israel are mainly trying to promote bilateral relations in a non-religious way.

The second kind is through the advancement of the Korean Christian groups. A significant purpose is shown in the religious diplomatic activities of the Korean Christian groups. In order to carry out the missionary activities in the Middle East Islamic countries, the establishment of Islamic Research Institute, the pilgrimage to Israel and prayer for Israel and Middle East peace process are the concrete manifestation. Despite South Korean government’s forbiddance, on August 7 to 10, 2004, 2300 South Korean Christians still took part in the peaceful assembly between Israel and the Palestine [16]. First, various Christian groups within South Korea supported Israel with strong religious passion, especially the Good Shepherd Church. The Good Shepherd Church had organized a series of “Ahava Israel” activities praying for Israel and the Middle East peace, including: 1) “Pray for Israel General Assembly in South Korea”, has so far organized two sessions. The first session was held in Seoul on April 1, 2010 and the second session was held in Seoul on May 11 to 13, 2010 with the theme “The Covenant of God-Abraham and the Harvest”, with the teaching of some Israeli scholars; 2) “Asia to Israel International Prayer Gathering”, which was held at the Seoul Olympic Stadium on October 9, 2010. The theme is divided into three parts: the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Unity and the Kingdom of Heaven and the Harvest of the Kingdom of Heaven. It required the Christian participants from different countries to do fasting for one day [17]. 3) “The Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem throughout the World”, which is part of Christians prayer for Jerusalem around the world and the organization in charge of Korean affairs is Testimony Corps for Jesus (TCJ). TCJ was established in June 1991, the fixed pray day is the first Sunday of October each year [18]. Second, the South Korean Christian groups directly establish churches in Israel, including: 1) “Israel Hanin Gyohoe” (Israel Church), the Church was established in Israel in December, 1979. Nowadays, there are more than 100 adults and more than 40 children belonging to different denominations coming to pray in this church every week [19]. 2) “Jerusalem Korean Church”, which serves South Korean Christians living in Jerusalem.

Korean Churches in Israel and “Jae Israel Hanni Hoe” form the important organizations for Koreans living in Israel. South Korean Christian religious activities in Israel are closely linked with the “Back to Jerusalem Movement”.

From a practical point of view, there are important intersections between the Korean Christian scholars’ and Korean Christian groups’ activities towards Israel. On August 9 to 13, 2005, the Second Jerusalem Summit Asia held in Seoul, the resolutions of the Summit stressed that “the inalienable right of Jewish people to the entire Holy Land and Jerusalem as its eternal capital”, appealing to the participators to request their countries “to move their embassies to Jerusalem”, “to oppose anti-Israel resolutions in the United Nations”, “to cease funding the Palestinian Authority until effective safeguards are put in place to ensure the money is not diverted to terrorism”, “to support Israel and our Judeo-Christian values” and “to petition the local and international media for fair and balanced coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict”. Korean political scientist, media, Congress members as well as Seoul Mayor Lee Myung-bak attended the summit and Israeli participants include Christian Allies Caucus of Knesset members and academic experts led by Yuri Stern. President of Kindomizer Mission Alliance Moses Wang Lee said, “Jews are the living proof that God exists. If God exists, so do Truth and Lies and so do the Good and the Evil. Terror is absolute evil. Anti-Semitism and demonization of Jews are absolute evils. They cannot be justified by any political ends” [20]. There is high degree of consistency in dealing with the problem of Israel among South Korean politicians, academics and the Christian community. Despite that the South Korean Christian groups’ “Alternative Pilgrimage” was opposed to the neglect of the Palestinian people’s suffering just because of the pro-Israel religious tendency and that they called on Korean Christians who marched for pilgrimage in Holy Land to spend more money so as to stimulate the development of the Palestinian economy, the shared values and God belief between the mainstream of the South Korea and Israel cannot be altered.

CONCLUSION

Now let’s take a look at the development process of South Korea-Israel relations. Although the two countries have a long history of communication, the breakthrough of it is in the 1990s and the democratization since 1980s and development of technology in South Korea are the beneficial factors. South Korea’s democratization process

is largely due to the advancement of Korean Christians. The 1990s is the time when the Middle East peace process was initiated by the US and the Cold War was ended. Religion has returned back to international relations gradually from the “exile” in Westphalia, which includes both the practices and disciplines of international relations. Because of its transcendental qualities, religion’s participation in international relations provides a new parallel path of analysis different from the mainstream international relations theory with material nature and more and more scientification. The recognition of the Chosen People status of Jews in *Old Testament*, the confirmation of the relation between the rebuild of the State of Israel and Jesus Adventist by Christian evangelicals, as well as modern Israel and the Palestine are the protagonists of the recorded history in biblical times with the owning of Jerusalem, are the South Korean political and religious circles’ emotional destination. South Korea’s mainstream secular politicians as well as most of the social elites (especially the scholars) are Christians, which greatly shaped the proportion of Christianity in South Korea’s national image; while Christian religious groups conduct direct contacts due to the common God belief with Israel and these religious exchanges can be seen as pure theological experience and seen as activities of religious groups and religious participation in politics within secular international relations. South Korea tries to build a special relationship based on God belief between “the second Israel”-South Korea and Israel, which is similar to the US special relationship with Israel. All in all, the God belief constitutes the emotional cornerstone in South Korea-Israel relations. It is not just the attachment of the material cornerstone of South Korea-Israel high-tech cooperation and the emotional and material exchanges to a large extent are two parallel faces of South Korea-Israel relations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is the research work for the Program (KA159225) financed by Key Research Bases of Chinese Education Ministry and Program (Contemporary East Asian-Middle Eastern Corporative Relations) funded by the Academic Innovation Team of SHISU.

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