

**Attitudes of 1.5 Generation Korean-American Christians
Toward Missions to North Korea**

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Since the first group of Koreans left Korea for Hawaii as laborers of sugar and pineapple plantations in 1902 (Anonymous, 1998; Orr, 2003), the Korean American population in the United States grew rapidly throughout the twentieth century. Such rapid growth of Korean American population was mainly due to large scale Korean migration into the United States after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated immigration discrimination based on national origin (Kim, 1997). Many of these Korean immigrants were family members of those who had come to the United States or were professionals seeking better career opportunities. For example, between 1965 and 1977, more than 13,000 Korean medical personnel migrated to the United States (Kim, 1997). By 2000, the Korean American population numbered 1.1 million (Barnes and Bennett, 2002). About 74% of them resided in the following nine states: California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Texas, Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania (U.S. Census, 2003).

Research has indicated that a large percentage of Korean immigrants were Protestants before they came to the United States (Huh & Kim, 1990). With more than 70% of Korean Americans claiming to be Christians, the number of Korean American churches increased dramatically from four in 1905 to more than three thousand by the end of the twentieth century (Kim, 1997). Other than the religious function, scholars believe that Korean American churches are important to Korean immigrants because of various social and cultural functions provided by the churches. These functions include being a place of social gathering with fellows from Korea, a center to educate young Korean Americans native language and culture, and an advocate for Korean Americans outside the Korean community (Huh & Kim, 1990). Since many Korean American churches are established by Korean immigrants who maintain strong ties with the Korean culture and Korea, it is not surprising that Korean American churches are greatly impacted by the “missionary-sending” movement in South Korea. Data indicated that South Korean church has become the second-largest overseas missionary sending church in the world. Specifically, the South Korean church has sent out over 10,600 missionaries to 156 countries worldwide (Park, 2002). More than that, reaching to the unreached people has become the mission focus among South Korean churches in recent years. One indication of this focus is the large percentage of Korean missionaries now working in the “10/40 Window” (Park, 2002).

With the positive influence of the South Korean church, the Korean American church has also been actively involved in the worldwide mission. For example, under the direction of the Korean World Mission Council for Christ (KWMC), the first Korean World Missions Conference held in 1988 at Chicago drew more than 2,400 Korean American Christians (Guthrie, 1992; Kim 1989). Since then the quadrennial mission conference has mobilized at least 300 Korean Americans to be missionaries. The KWMC also works closely with Korean churches in both the United States and Korea and together they have channeled more than 7,000 missionaries to 138 countries. Another recent project of KWMC is to mobilize 1,000 Korean American short-term missionaries, particularly among Korean Americans who are not first generation immigrants (Korean World Mission Council for Christ, n.d.)

The existence of generation gaps among congregation members is one of the unique factors affecting the future of Korean American churches. There is a vast difference in life

experience between first generation Korean immigrants and the American-born second generation. Consequently there are differences in ministry approaches, vision and church-related needs between the two generations (Kim, Warner, & Kwon, 2001). For example, the structure of the first generation church is typically more patriarchal, male-centered, and hierarchical than the second generation church. Additionally there is another unique group in Korean American churches who is the so called 1.5 generation, referring to those who migrated to the United States when they were young and grew up under the influence of both the Korean and American cultures. This diverse cultural background may contribute to the 1.5 generation Korean American Christians being good missionary candidates to other countries including North Korea.

Missions to North Korea have drawn serious attention in recent years. Some prominent ministries focusing on outreach to North Korea include but are not limited to the Fourth River Project, the World Center for North Korea Missions, the Overseas Missions Fellowship International, the Durihana Missionary Foundation, and the North Korea Study School. The importance and urgency of missions to North Korea have been clearly illustrated by the vision of the World Center for North Korea Missions (n.d.):

Over 20 million people in North Korea are completely isolated from the outside world and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, over the past several years the political-economic system of North Korea has been failing as approximately 3 million people have died from starvation and related causes. North Korea may collapse at any moment (as did the Soviet Union). However, the Christian Church is terribly unprepared for the evangelization of North Korea. First, very few Christians are aware of the dire conditions in North Korea. Second, very little knowledge sharing or training for North Korea missions is taking place. Third, no network is in place to coordinate a mass mobilization of missionaries and mission teams in the scenario of a sudden collapse. As a result, aberrant cults such as the Unification Church are probably more prepared and could likely have greater success in North Korea than the Christian Church.

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to examine the attitudes of 1.5 generation Korean American Christians toward missions to North Korea. The research also explored factors that may affect their willingness to be involved in missions to North Korea. Specifically the research questions for this project were as follows:

1. Do 1.5 generation Korean American Christians believe Korean American churches should play an active role in missions to North Korea?
2. Do 1.5 generation Korean American Christians believe involvement in missions to North Korea can bring spiritual and cultural benefits to Korean American churches and Christians?
3. What is the attitude of 1.5 generation Korean American Christians toward their local church's involvement in missions to North Korea?
4. How much do 1.5 generation Korean American Christians currently know about the missionary ministries and situations of North Korea?
5. What areas about North Korea would 1.5 generation Korean American Christians like to know more?
6. How do 1.5 generation Korean American Christians currently learn about mission/mission news?

7. To what extent are 1.5 generation Korean American Christians willing to be involved in missions to North Korea (i.e., sense of responsibility, short-term mission, long term mission, prayer support, and financial support)?
8. What possible factors (i.e., local church support, social support, faith maturity, age, number of years in the U.S., short-term mission experience, gender, educational level, and marital status) may contribute to the willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians?

Method

Participants

A total of one hundred-and-one 1.5 generation Korean-American Christian adults were recruited from three large Korean American churches in a metropolitan city. All of them met the following criteria: (a) currently at least 18 years old, (b) migrated to the United States before 18 years old, and (c) have lived in the United States permanently for at least 3 years. Among the participants, fifty-six were male (55%) and forty-five were female (45%). Their average age was 26 (S.D. = 4.97) and their average number of years living in the United States was 13.3 (S.D. = 6.7). In terms of education level, most participants had a bachelor's degree or above (77%).

Research Design

A survey research with purposeful sampling procedure was used to collect data. Participants were purposely recruited based on the pre-determined criteria and asked to complete a survey questionnaire.

Instruments

A survey questionnaire entitled "North Korea Mission Survey Questionnaire" was developed for the study. The development of the instrument consisted of two stages. During stage one, a focus group study involving four 1.5 generation Korean-Americans was conducted. The participants were asked about their attitudes towards missions to North Korea, areas of services in which they were interested, and factors that might affect their involvement in missions to North Korea. Data were transcribed and then analyzed to obtain the common themes among participants.

During stage two, a survey questionnaire was developed based on the data collected from the focus group. There were 3 sections in the questionnaire. The first section collected data on various issues related to missions to North Korea (e.g., attitudes, knowledge, and willingness to be involved in missions to North Korea). The second section collected data on the participant's faith maturity. The instrument used in this section was the "Faith Maturity Scale" developed by Benson, Donahue and Erickson (1993). The third section collected data on demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, and means used by participants to learn about mission/mission news.

This initial questionnaire was then translated into Koreans. The bilingual questionnaire (English and Korean) was field tested by three 1.5 generation Korean Americans who met all the pre-determined criteria. Based on their feedback, the final version of the questionnaire was developed.

Procedure

The three largest Korean churches in Philadelphia, USA agreed to recruit their 1.5 generation Korean American members to participate in the study. Participants were first informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the study. Then they were invited to complete the survey questionnaire. Participants were free to choose either the English only or the bilingual (English and Korean) questionnaire. A total of one-hundred-seventeen participants completed the questionnaire, but mistakes or incomplete information were found in 16 questionnaires. Therefore the study had a total of 101 usable questionnaires for data analysis.

Result

The role of Korean American Churches in missions to North Korea

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), participants were asked to rate whether missions to North Korea is important to Korean Americans, whether Korean American churches have the responsibility of bringing the gospel to North Korea, and whether Korean American churches should be actively involved in missions to North Korea and mobilize their congregations to be thus involved. The total average score was 4.2 (S.D. = 0.8), indicating that participants in this study believed Korean American churches should play an active role in missions to North Korea (See Table 1).

Positive impact of missions to North Korea on Korean American churches

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), participants were asked to rate whether missions to North Korea can increase their exposure to Korean culture and bring spiritual growth to them as well as Korean churches. The total average score was 3.9 (S.D. = 0.8), indicating that participants believed involvement in missions to North Korea can bring positive impact to them and to Korean American churches (See Table 1).

Attitudes towards local church's involvement in missions to North Korea

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), participants were asked to rate whether their local churches should provide more information and should be more active in missions to North Korea. The total average score was 3.8 (S.D. = 0.8), indicating that participants believed their local Korean American churches should be more actively involved in missions to North Korea (See Table 1).

Table 1

Attitudes of Missions to North Korea among 1.5 Generation Korean American Christians

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
An Active Role for Korean American Churches -----	4	4.2	0.8
Bring Positive Impact to Korean American Christians & Korean American Churches-----	4	3.9	0.8
More Active Involvement by local Korean American Churches--	4	3.8	0.8
Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Uncertain 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree			

Knowledge of missionary ministries and situations in North Korea

Participants were asked about their current knowledge of missionary ministries and situations in North Korea. As shown in Table 2, participants were ignorant of most of the missionary ministries and situations in North Korea. Specifically over 60% of participants did not know about the following areas of North Korea: mission organizations, mission opportunities, North Korean churches, North Koreans' perspective on their country and the world, social culture, health care system, social welfare system, education system, and economy system. Only about 50% of participants indicated they knew about the military system, government system, and the existence of religious persecution and child abuse and abandonment in North Korea. Approximately 80% of participants reported that they know about the existence of famine in the country.

Table 2
Current knowledge about North Korea among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Yes (%)</u>	<u>No(%)</u>
Famine-----	82	18
Religious Persecution-----	55	45
Military System-----	54	46
Government System-----	45	55
Child Abuse/Abandonment-----	42	58
Economy System-----	39	61
North Koreans' Perspective on their Country/World----	33	67
Education System-----	29	71
Social Culture-----	25	75
North Korean Churches-----	19	81
Social Welfare System-----	17	83
Mission Organizations-----	16	84
Health Care System-----	13	87
Mission Opportunities-----	11	89

Table 3 indicates situations in North Korea that 1.5 generation Korean American Christians would like to learn more about. Approximately 50% of participants would like to know more about mission organizations, mission opportunities, North Korean churches, and the educational system.

Table 3

Areas of North Korea that 1.5 generation Korean American Christians would like to learn about

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Yes (%)</u>	<u>No (%)</u>
Mission Organizations-----	61	39
Mission Opportunities-----	57	43
North Korean Churches-----	62	38
Religious Persecution-----	40	60
Famine-----	26	74
Child Abuse/Abandonment-----	35	65
North Korean's Perspective on their Country/World----	35	65
Social Culture-----	34	66
Health Care System-----	28	72
Social Welfare System-----	30	70
Education System-----	47	53
Economy System-----	38	62
Government System-----	28	72
Military System-----	23	77

Current means of learning about mission/mission news

Table 4 indicates the current means of learning about mission/mission news among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians. The data show that most participants relied on their local church leaders (66%) and local church fellowships/small group (50%) for mission news and information.

Table 4

Means of learning about mission/mission news among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Yes (%)</u>	<u>No (%)</u>
Local Church Leaders-----	66	34
Local Church Fellowships/Small Groups-----	50	50
Missionary Reports from Local Church-----	49	51
Local Church Conferences-----	38	62
Media (Christian TV/Radio) in the U.S.-----	36	64
Internet-----	36	64
Christian Mission Conferences-----	27	73
Newsletters from Mission Organizations-----	24	76
Media (Christian TV/Radio) in Korea-----	22	78
Christian Books-----	18	82
Christian Magazines-----	8	92

Willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), participants were asked to rate their personal sense of responsibility toward North Korea missionary work, their willingness of involvement in short-term and long-term missions, their willingness of being prayer and financial supporters for the missions. The average scores for sense of responsibility, short-term mission, long-term mission, prayer support, and financial support were 3.3 (S.D. = 1), 3.5 (S.D. = 1), 2.7 (S.D. = 1), 3.9 (S.D. = 0.8), 3.5 (S.D. = 0.9), and 3.4 (S.D. = 0.7), respectively. The total average score of willingness was 3.4 (S.D. = 0.7). Table 5 presents a more detailed result of analysis with the median score (50th percentile) for each area. The data suggest that participants tended to be more willing to be involved in short term mission and be prayer and financial supporters, but were unsure about the extent of their personal sense of responsibility and long term missions.

Table 5

Willingness of Involvement in Missions to North Korea among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Personal Sense of Responsibility	3	3.3	0.1
Short-term Mission	4	3.5	1.0
Long-term Mission	3	2.7	1.0
Prayer Support	4	3.9	0.8
Financial Support	4	3.5	0.9

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Uncertain 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Factors contributing to the willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea

A standard regression analysis was conducted to determine if a 1.5 generation Korean American Christian's total willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea was predicted by his or her local church support, social support, faith maturity, age, number of years in the US, short-term mission experience, gender, educational level, and marital status. The full model of this regression was found to be significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, with $F = 13.22$. The R^2 was 0.58, indicating that the full model accounted for 58% of the variability in the criterion variable of a 1.5 generation Korean American Christian's total willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea. However, out of the 9 predictor variables entered, only 2 were found to be significant. Specifically, both the local church support and social support were significant positive predictors of involvement in missions to North Korea ($p < 0.01$).

In other words, a 1.5 generation Korean American Christian is more willing to be involved in missions to North Korea under the following two conditions: (a) his or her local church is actively involved in missions to North Korea, actively provides information about the culture and life in North Korea, and actively provides information about mission opportunities in North Korea, and (b) his or her participation in missions to North Korea receives peer support as well as parental support (see Table 6).

Table 6
Regression Analysis Summary for Nine Variables Predicting 1.5 generation Korean American Christian's total willingness of involvement in missions to North Korea

Variable	<u>B</u>	<u>SEB</u>	<u>Std. Coeff.</u>
Total Church Support	0.461	0.077	0.527**
Total Social Support	0.177	0.054	0.271**
Faith Maturity	0.120	0.079	0.124
Age	-.004	0.013	-.026
Number of years in the U.S.	-.010	-.010	-.093
Short-term Mission Exp.	-.006	0.113	-.004
Gender	-.095	0.102	-.070
Education	0.016	0.059	0.024
Marital Status	0.100	0.170	0.047

Note. $R^2 = 0.58$ ($N = 97$, $p < 0.01$).

** $p < 0.01$.

Implications

In sum, this study found that 1.5 generation Korean American Christians recognize the importance of involvement in missions to North Korea and the potential spiritual and cultural blessings of such involvement to them and to the American Korean churches. But participants reported that they were ignorant of most of the missionary ministries and situations in North Korea. Approximately 50% of participants would like to know more about mission organizations, mission opportunities, North Korean churches, and the educational system. Most participants relied on their local church leaders (66%) and local church fellowships/small groups (50%) for mission news and information. Participants also indicated that they are more willing to be involved in short term mission and be prayer and financial supporters, but were uncertain about the long term missions. Their willingness to be involved in missions to North Korea is positively associated with stronger local church support (i.e., involving in missions to North Korea, providing information about the culture and lives of North Korea, and providing information about mission opportunities in North Korea) and stronger social support (i.e., encouragement from peers and parents).

These findings suggest that the following strategies will be helpful in mobilizing 1.5 generation Korean American Christians to reach out to North Korea:

1. The focus of mobilization may not be on the importance and necessity of the missions, but on assisting the 1.5 generation Korean American Christians to take concrete actions to engage in missions to North Korea.
2. One major detriment in missions to North Korea among 1.5 generation Korean American Christians is ignorance about mission organizations, mission opportunities and situations of North Korea. It is therefore essential for mission organizations to provide information

via regular meetings, educational programs, and seminars in local churches regarding the current situation in North Korea and mission opportunities. Such information would expose 1.5 Korean American Christians to concrete mission needs so that they can be involved gradually.

3. Most 1.5 generation Korean American Christians rely on their local church leaders and small groups/fellowships for mission news. Therefore in coordinating mission conferences and seminars for Korean Americans, mission organizations may need to emphasize more on targeting local church leaders (i.e., pastors, elders and small group leaders) rather than the general congregation. In addition, rather than conducting nationwide conferences, it may be more effective for mission organizations to hold local mission conferences. Other possible means of mission mobilization are the internet and Christian TV broadcasts or the radio in the U.S.
4. Local Korean American church leaders should play an active role in reaching out to North Korea in order to mobilize their congregation members to be involved in missions to North Korea. Church leaders could organize regular short-term mission trips, support existing missionaries to North Korea, and provide specific information on North Korea and mission opportunities to their congregation. Local churches should first encourage their 1.5 generation congregation to support the missions to North Korea prayerfully and financially. They should then only mobilize them to be involved in short-term missions. As the exposure to North Korea missions increases, it is likely that more 1.5 generation Korean American Christians are willing to commit themselves to long-term missions.
5. Not many local Korean American churches have enough resources to independently conduct conferences, seminars, or mission programs about missions to North Korea. Collaboration among local Korean American churches is necessary to offer these mission programs to 1.5 Korean American Christians. Local churches also need to collaborate with international or national mission organizations that are already engaging in missions to North Korea.
6. Other than reaching out only to the 1.5 generation Korea American Christians to recruit them as missionary candidates, effective mobilization should also involve reaching out to their parents. Seminars, testimonies, and visitations may allow family members to have a better understanding of the ministry. Peer groups should be organized to provide spiritual, emotional and material support for the missionary. Such encouragement from parents and peers would increase the willingness of 1.5 generation Korean American Christians to engage in missions to North Korea.

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