

# Social Contributions of the Catholic Church and Regional Solidarity: Analysis of the Korean-Japanese Conferences of Catholic Bishops

Young-Kyun CHOI

## Abstract

*This study focuses on the history of regional solidarity among Catholic churches in East Asia as civil society organizations within the axiological frame of peace and social order. This paper endeavors to show the significant role of the Korean-Japanese Catholic bishops conferences, which have developed over 20 years, not only in contributing to civil and social solidarity but also to congeniality between the Korean and Japanese people. The cooperative activities of the Korean and Japanese bishops, which have their origins in efforts to deal with the historical issues between Korea and Japan, are considered purposeful undertakings in support of peace and order in the East Asia region. With the passage of time, the solidarity of the bishops has developed toward solving diverse regional social dislocation issues. The thrust of the bishops' unified action can be seen in two aspects. The first is the bishops' view that society, to become peaceful and mature, requires structural changes, and thus the cooperative efforts of the Korean and Japanese bishops have a socio-political orientation. The second aspect is its role as social charity, that is, volunteer work on behalf of the impoverished and social minorities. When regional peace and cooperation are threatened by the self-interests of nation-states, the case of regional cooperation by a religious organization demonstrates how civil society is able to contribute to the progress and peace of a given region beyond the efforts of national governments.*

**Keywords:** civil society, Catholic Church, bishop solidarity, East Asia, cooperation, local peace

---

Young-Kyun CHOI is an adjunct professor at Suwon Catholic University. E-mail: nichts12@naver.com.

## Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, unbridled neoliberalism has been generating new conflicts and violence around the globe. Such conflicts and violence are prominent in the domains of finance, energy, and trade. Further, interracial and interreligious conflicts, as well as the historical legacies of the Cold War era, are recognized as stumbling blocks toward global development and peace. These are recognized as problems not just for one country, but for many countries and regions. In turn, shared concerns over both internal and external threats and confrontations has also led to a new political trend of solidarity between countries sharing a socio-geographical region.<sup>1</sup>

The 1997 Asian financial crisis sparked the need for cooperation between the countries of East Asia in particular. In the wake of the financial crisis that began with the collapse of the Thai Baht, Japan asked Western nations, including the United States, to grant currency stabilization funds to Asian countries to assist with financial recovery, but the International Monetary Fund, which was under the influence of the United States, opposed Japan's proposal and demanded instead reforms of financial systems and the implementation of austerity measures (Ohashi 1999, 17–30). Such a series of events also triggered Asian solidarity movements in a variety of domains, including economic ties (such as Asian Monetary Fund), environmentalism, and human rights, for the future prosperity of East Asia (Satou 2006, 1–16).

However, for more than 20 years, implementation of the ideas and policies of these government-led East Asian solidarity initiatives in the social, economic, and political spheres has been irregular, with many are

- 
1. The emergence of modern East Asian solidarity dates to approximately the second half of the 19th century. This tendency did not emerge spontaneously and intrinsically, but rather as a reaction by East Asian countries to the extrinsic factor of imperialist incursions by Western powers. However, as Japan openly exposed itself as an imperialistic nation, Asian transnationalism transformed into a violent fascism in the form of East Asian cooperativism and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (K. Kim 2011, 27–102). More recently, the need for a regional solidarity that can mediate between national interests and the economic development so vital to the neo-liberalistic world system, has led to the establishment of intergovernmental apparatuses, such as the EU, NAFTA, and ASEAN.

still lost in abstractions or mired in political stalemate. Thus, an alternative solidarity movement, beyond the realm of national governments, is required to overcome the problems commonly faced by countries in the East Asian region (Baik 2000, 13–47). From the viewpoint of regional peace and human development, in particular, this hope for solidarity cannot be abandoned. In this regard, for the East Asian community Tanaka Hitoshi has advocated a valued community, which is based on the functional solidarity to ensure security on such issues as regional conflicts, the environments, and inequalities (Tanaka 2005). In this view, the economic community of East Asia will be able to achieve its goals when each country shares common humanist values based on mutual trust (Wada 2003).

In this context, this paper seeks a social model of solidarity at the civil society level within the axiological framework of such values as peace, social order, and the human environment in the East Asian region. The history of and reality of cooperation between the Catholic Church in Korea and Japan as helping to secure the values of peace and human dignity in East Asia is the particular focus of this paper. Thus, I pay close attention to the Korean-Japanese Catholic bishops conferences, which manifest the axiological meanings of such solidarity.

Through a literature review and interviews, this paper establishes the Korean-Japanese Catholic bishops conferences as a case of solidarity by an element of civil society in East Asia, and analyzes the history, issues, and axiological implications of this solidarity. For its literature review, the study analyzes Catholic newspaper articles and bishops conferences publications from both countries. Qualitatively, I have supplemented this with an analysis of speeches by early members of these gatherings, notably those of Bishop John Jang Ik<sup>2</sup> of Korea and Bishop Paul Kazuhiro Mori<sup>3</sup> of Japan.

- 
2. John Jang Ik was born in Seoul in 1933 and graduated from the Universität Innsbruck in Austria. In March 1963, he was ordained as a priest, and worked as a chief secretary of the bishop, archdiocese of Seoul and a parish priest of Sejongno Catholic Church. From his ordination as bishop in 1994 to his retirement in 2010, he worked as bishop of Chuncheon Diocese and served as president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea.
  3. Paul Kazuhiro Mori was born in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan in 1938. He graduated from Sophia University in Tokyo and was ordained as a priest in 1967. From his ordination as

This paper begins by delineating the critical approach and methodology of this study. It continues by exploring the historical background of the Korean-Japanese bishops conferences. Next, it moves on to analyzing the social contribution of the Catholic Church within the context of the bishops' solidarity. Following this, the bishops conferences as a political movement and social charity are reviewed. Finally, I endeavor to identify and assess the religious implications and civil-social meaning of the solidarity demonstrated in the bishops' gatherings.

### **Background to the Korean-Japanese Bishops Conferences**

The exchanges between the episcopates of Korea and Japan can be considered a civil case model of East Asian solidarity. The Korean-Japanese bishops conferences have their original impetus in private exchanges between Bishop Stephen Fumio Hamao, then vice-president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, and Archbishop Paul Lee Moon-Hee, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea, at the general meeting of the 6th FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference) in Manila in 1995.

The Korean-Japanese bishops conferences began with a critical mindset: with historical conflicts and national interests beginning to threaten regional peace, the bishops of Korea and Japan, animated by a friendship and solidarity based on faith, considered that cooperative activities and communion among them could contribute to the peace and order of the East Asia region.<sup>4</sup> On February 16, 1996, Paul Lee Moon-Hee, the Archbishop of Daegu, along with Peter Kang U-Il (Auxiliary Bishop of Seoul) and Ignatius Park Seok-Hee (Bishop of Andong), paid an unexpected visit on Bishop Stephen Fumio Hamao in Japan, and together they held a meeting on Korea-Japan issues, especially historical disputes.<sup>5</sup> This was the

---

bishop in 1985 until 2000 he worked as an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Tokyo and as secretary-general at the Japanese Catholic Bishops Conference. Since his retirement, he has been conducting rehabilitation and prevention activities for suicide attempters.

4. *Catholic Weekly of Japan*, December 26, 1996.

5. Archbishop Lee Moon-Hee presented three directions for the Korean-Japanese Bishops Union 1) The episcopates of Korea and Japan shall begin efforts to seek a common historical

beginning of the Korean-Japanese bishops conferences. Bishop Mori well delivers the thoughts of Bishop Hamao on the intent behind the gatherings:

The late Bishop Hamao raised the need for cooperation with the Korean Catholics. Because the two countries had strong ties both historically and culturally, and were geographically proximate, he thought that solidarity between two Churches would be able to contribute not only to the development of the Churches but could ease the historical conflicts between the two countries.<sup>6</sup>

From the outset of the conferences, solidarity between the Korean and Japanese bishops was based upon the common conviction that through historical reconciliation, regional peace could be achieved. From the 1990s, criticisms began to be strongly raised in Asian countries that Japan needed to take greater responsibility for its imperial past, and the Japanese Catholic Church reacted to this in the form of historical reflection. For Japan, Korea was perhaps the most suitable subject of its self-reflection due to its geographical, cultural, and historical proximity.

The bishops of Korea and Japan were in accord that mutual understanding and reconciliation between their two countries could be an important impetus for the development of both the religious mission and humanity in general in East Asia. Worth noting, not many years before the inauguration of these bishops conferences, the Japanese Church confessed to Japan's historical wrongdoings in Asia. In this regard, Bishop Mori also criticized the Japanese mindset:

Japan is an island, so the Japanese have never experienced the pain of being invaded by other peoples or nations. But Korea and China are continental countries so they feel pain, such as the overthrow of dynasties

---

perception; 2) circles of youth from both countries shall be organized so that they may develop common historical perceptions; and 3) the creation of a common history textbook to be used in Catholic schools in both countries. See *Catholic Weekly of Japan* (February 25, 1996).

6. Bishop Paul Kazuhiro Mori, interview by author, the Society of the Divine Word Center, Tokyo, Japan, January 14, 2017.

or the invasion of other countries. Japan has not experienced this. Not once. ... However, the efforts by Japanese to view the past straightforwardly and frankly does not exist in the Japanese gene. This is a huge defect of the Japanese.<sup>7</sup>

According to Bishop Mori, although the Japanese Catholic Church was itself a victim of Japanese nationalism in the era of imperialism, from the early 1990s, upon witnessing the historical and political conflicts between Japan and other East Asian countries that were occurring in the long process of decolonization, the Catholic Church of Japan recognized the role it could play in reconciliation and alleviating such turmoil.<sup>8</sup> Such reflections and concerns found sympathetic ears at the Japanese Bishops Conferences, and the need for understanding the Churches of neighboring countries and undertaking exchanges with them was naturally broached. In this context, the Korean-Japanese bishops conferences dealt with the historical problem of Japan's occupation of Korea up until the publication of the history auxiliary textbook in 2004.<sup>9</sup>

---

7. Bishop Paul Kazuhiro Mori, interview by author, the Society of the Divine Word Center, Tokyo, Japan, January 14, 2017.

8. In this spirit, the Japanese bishops released, *Resolution for Peace: On the 50th Anniversary of the End of the War* (Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, 1995). In this text, the Japanese Church faces the historical tragedy of World War II straightforwardly, offering self-reflection as a participant of the Japanese Empire, realizing its role in leaving indelible scars on the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region, and vowing to spare no efforts in the realization of future peace.

9. The publication of this textbook was suggested at the first conference in February 1996, but when, in 2000, Japan's Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture granted its approval to a distorted history textbook published by the Japanese right-wing group, *Rekishu gyoukasho kaiseikai* (Society for History Textbook Reform), diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan were harmed, and the bishops' plans to publish an alternative textbook were accelerated. The bishops of Korea, suggested that the history Japanese students should know be put into a book to serve as a new history guide, a plan for which the bishops of Japan showed their hearty approval. After a two-year effort, under the leadership of Korean professors Lee Won-Soon, Jung Jae-Jung, and Seo Eui-Sik, the alternative textbook was published for use in Catholic schools in Japan. In 2004, a junior history supplementary textbook was published at the 10th Korean-Japanese Conference. For this text, the advisors, including Prof. Kazuhiko Kimishima of Japan, cooperated actively. Lee Won-Soon, Jung

The bishops of both countries thought that a common historical perception at the civilian level was necessary to alleviate the historical conflicts between former colonies and colonizers, and the need for a history textbook for young people was raised. From the first conference in February 1996, Korean and Japanese bishops discussed the issue of historical awareness seriously and sought to form a common sense of history by promoting the interchange of historians, visiting historical sites, and holding seminars and lectures.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the first task of the Korean and Japanese bishops was the arrival at a mutual understanding of Korean-Japanese history and the development of an alternative textbook can be regarded as a significant event from the viewpoint of regional solidarity at the civil-social level. This is because the Churches of the two countries addressed not internal religious issues, such as a religious revival or a sharing of religious resources, but rather points of contention between their countries that threatened peace in East Asia. The fact that as a civil society element—the Catholic Church—took the initiative for historical peace, transcending national interests, may serve as both encouragement and inspiration for national governments and academic circles.

---

Jae-Jung, and Seo Eui-Sik, *Gakkap godo gakkau nararo: Hanguk-gwa Ilbon* (To Close and Near Countries: Korea and Japan). The Japanese version of this text is, *Wakaimononi tsutaetaikankokuno rekishi* (The History of Korea that We Want to Tell to Young People).

10. At the Korean-Japanese bishops conference held on December 18–19, 1997, Korea's Prof. Lee Won-Soon and Prof. Lee Je-Jung first met with Prof. Kazuhiko Kimishima of Japan to discuss the publication of a supplementary textbook for history. Currently, although Japan's 15 varieties of history textbook tend to break away from the historical view of Japanese imperialism and colonization of Korea as an effort at modernization, and to describe it in terms of aggression, it is the textbooks with conservative tendencies that are cited in the actual college entrance examination. In this context, as an alternative or a supplementary textbook, the joint Korean-Japanese effort to write a history textbook was officially launched. See *Catholic Times of Korea* (January 1, 1997).

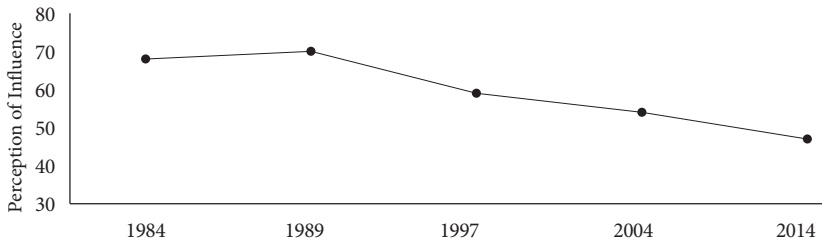
## Realization of Social Contributions of the Bishops Conferences

The bishop exchanges between Korea and Japan that started with discussions of historical issues have continued to this day, the meeting locale alternating between the two countries each year and with participation by the bishops strictly voluntary. These meetings seek out new Church agendas in the context of the current state of affairs of East Asia, determining how the Church might contribute to the peace and order of larger society.<sup>11</sup> That is, through episcopal solidarity the Church hopes to make a social contribution that will produce sustainable social advances and also have a synergy effect in the both the religious and secular realms.

These days, with the acceleration of secularization, the Catholic Church concentrates more on its social contribution. Figure 1 depicts the trend in Korean perceptions of religion's influence on society. The situation is similar in other countries.<sup>12</sup> It seems that the perceived weakness of religion's social influence is a result of the secularization of consciousness or the marginalization of religion, not a decrease in the religious population (H. Choi 2015).<sup>13</sup> In the context of secularization, the Catholic Church's effort to make social contributions may be interpreted as a counterstrategy to this secularization. Put another way, the Church's pursuit of a social contribution may be regarded as a missiological way adapted to a secularized society.

- 
11. The Korean-Japanese bishops conferences have three main aspects. First, aware of the problems that Korean, Japanese, and East Asian societies are facing, there are group discussions for learning in pastoral and civil social contexts. Second is their aspect as an experience of mutual cultural understanding. Third, they are opportunities for strengthening ties of personal friendship. See the personal blog of Bishop Kikuchi Isao for a more detailed description of an exchange. See Kikuchi (website).
  12. There are 443,721 Catholics in Japan, or 0.35 percent of the population. The growth rate in numbers of Catholics has been stagnant for quite some time. It has even been said that there is no difference between the number of Catholics today compared to the Sengoku period, some 400 years ago (Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan 2017, 188).
  13. According to Gallup Korea, the population considering themselves deeply pious is in decline, from 41.2 percent in 1984 to 33.7 percent in 2004 (Gallup Korea 2015, 23).





**Figure 1.** Social influence of religion in Korea (1984–2014)

Source: Gallup Korea (2015).

Note: A survey of 1,500 men and women aged 19 and over across South Korea (excluding Jeju) who replied “no” to the question, “Has religion’s social influence increased compared to the past?”

The trend toward social activism on the part of the Catholic Church ministry began with the Second Vatican Council (1961–1965).<sup>14</sup> The Catholic Church before the 1970s was highly conservative and only pursued the status quo, distancing itself from politics. But in contrast to the period under Popes Pius XI and Pius XII, who emphasized a conservative anti-communism, from the Second Vatican Council, social participatory ideas deemed part of a new way of religious mission came to hold sway in the Catholic Church led by Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II.

In this regard, the Korean Catholic Church supported the establishment of liberal democracy and respect for individual human rights, with many priests agreeing that the Church should actively intervene in social issues. During the 1980 Gwangju uprising and the June 1987 democracy uprising, the Catholic Church, as a pioneering civil society organization, contributed greatly to the democratization of Korea. And these efforts by the Korean Catholic Church on behalf of democratization have helped gain it the trust of Korean society (Chu 2009). Since democratization in the 1990s, the number of new Catholics in Korea has greatly increased, in great part due to the Korean Catholic Church’s social contributions. Therefore, after the democratization of

14. On the theological aspects of actual participation of the Catholic Church in social issues after the Second Vatican Council, see Emeis (1996, 31–35).

Korean society, the Korean Catholic Church has continued to concentrate on social welfare, ever looking for a new social sphere for its efforts.

On the other hand, ever since the Meiji Restoration (1868), the Japanese state has kept Japanese Catholics out of the public sector. The particularly negative attitude towards foreign Christians has hindered Catholic Church growth in Japan (Huzimoto and Sukata 2011). Traditional proselytizing methods did not work in Japanese society, which displayed a negative social consensus towards Christianity and a tendency toward secrecy when it comes to one's religious beliefs. Therefore, the Japanese Catholic Church has done its ministry in the fields of social charity and school education without explicitly promoting the religiosity of the mission. From the 1970s in particular the ministry of the Japanese Catholic Church began to tend towards social contributions. As Bishop Mori remarked, "The social interest of the Japanese Church began in 1970s, due to influence from the [Second Vatican] Council."<sup>15</sup> The spectrum of social involvement also broadened: community movements, environmentalism, minority activism, and issues of socio-political justice, as well as conventional charity.

In this context, it is not surprising that the bishops conferences have dealt with questions of the Church's potential social contributions. The bishop's solidarity seen in the Korea-Japan history issue was extended to not only internal problems of the Church, but also various social issues faced by East Asian countries and societies. Indeed, as time went on, the themes and focus of the bishops conferences have become increasingly social in nature.<sup>16</sup> In its early days, only a small number of bishops participated in the

---

15. Bishop Paul Kazuhiro Mori, interview by author, the Society of the Divine Word Center, Tokyo, Japan, January 14, 2017.

16. From 1996 to 2016, these themes have been, in order: 1) Korea-Japan historical conflict; 2) compilation of a history textbook; 3) Korea-Japan historical issues; 4) historical issues and pastoral exchange; 5) East Asia evangelical mission; 6) characteristics of Korean and Japanese cultures; 7) atomic bomb and peace, small Christian community movement, etc.; 8) Korean delegation and Okinawa history; 9) family in the Diocese of Suwon; 10) pastoral solidarity; 11) history and culture of Okinawa; 12) current status of priestly formation in the Churches of four Asian countries; 13) martyrdom in Korea and Japan; 14) immigration issues and pastoral care; 15) life and vision of the late Cardinal Stephen Kim Sou-Hwan; 16) each man has to be responsible for his own life; suicide problem; 17) ecological theology;

meetings, but from 2000 the majority of active bishops in Korea and Japan have participated.

These conferences between Korean and Japanese bishops, with historical reconciliation as a medium, naturally helped foster mutual understanding and trust, and this in turn created bishop's solidarity not only for attaining religious goals, but also for goals in non-religious spheres. The Catholic Church recognizes social activism as embodying its own identity. Such social interest is defined as a specific act that also embodies a religious aspect. The Church feels it has been endowed with conscientious authority to defend the freedom that is a gift from the Absolute (God). The Church teaches that when the individual is threatened with the loss of liberty, impoverished, or made powerless, the Church must give them priority. Church acts always contain a social element, and they serve as a constant reminder that these acts are in accordance with service for the Absolute (Zerfaß 1996, 87–88). In this sense, the bishops' solidarity is a religious act to protect the freedom and dignity of both the individual and society.

The interests of the Korean-Japanese bishops lie not only in the realm of the neo-civil movement, but also in tackling local political and economic issues, such as nuclear weapons, security, and poverty.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the bishops of Korea and Japan have turned their eyes to the social problems facing their two countries and East Asia more broadly from the mindset that helping mend the dislocation of a social environment accords with the Church's larger mission. As one of the institutional authorities of civil society, the Church should regulate the order of society and champion those norms and justice that match Christian ethics (Furger 1991, 140–189).

---

18) denuclearization and nuclear power phase-out; 19) peace: focusing on bylaw "peace on earth"; 20) efforts toward social peace beyond the hedge of religion and the realization of universal values of mankind; 21) how have the Catholic Churches in Korea and Japan lived the Gospel in society during the 70 years since World War II? and 22) the munitions industry and media that threaten world peace.

17. For neo-civil movement, refer to Milbrath (1984). The idea behind and activism produced by the bishops conferences is no different from what J. Habermas said was the aim of civil movements on behalf of humanistic, egalitarian-based liberal values against capital and power. It is an important task of civil society (the public sphere) to defend personal autonomy and humanistic values of life from their colonization by state power and money logic (Habermas 1981, 2:469–618).

## Features of the Bishops' Solidarity toward Social Activism

The consolidated approach to social issues by the Korean and Japanese bishops can be generally divided into two features or perspectives. One is its political aspect (macro) and the other is its aspect as social charity (micro). The political movement aspect takes the perspective that there are problems in the structure of society that produce security issues (conflicts between countries), environmental destruction, and inequalities among minorities. And further, that solving (changing) these structural contradictions and problems is a fundamental religious mission of the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the bishops conferences may be considered the politicization of religion, or a civil movement.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, from the social charity point of view, the mission of the Church is to comfort the poor and to focus on solving the urgent problems they face. However, the political movement perspective and social charity perspective need not be seen as mutual antipodes. The political movement and social charity perspectives are more meaningful than value orientation. Of course, these two sometimes overlap, and there is room for controversy depending on the point of view, but I will view and analyze each of these points of view.

First, let us examine the political movement view. The fact that the early Korean-Japanese bishops conferences focused on historical conflicts between Korea and Japan contains a certain message aimed at the political and civil societies of both countries. Actually, these historical conflicts have threatened peace between Korea and Japan, while interlinking with regional conflicts related to issues of international security following the Cold War (Y. Choi

---

18. In particular, civil society is a space that does not belong to a formal state apparatus and where political interaction with the state takes place. It functions to check capital and power and to maintain the common good and the dignity of the individual. The Church as a part of civil society does not insist upon its identity, but calls for structural changes to state and capital power within the boundaries consistent with evangelical values. See Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea 1991; 2014; 2015.

19. However, the neo-civil movement aims for new values within the system, while not questioning the system itself, whereas a civil movement by nature aims for radical system change.

2017c, 244–255). Here I introduce some representative cases.

The 7th bishops conference in Hiroshima (2001) held seminars and discussions on conflicts surrounding nuclear weapons and security that threatened peace. This point can be seen as a fork in the road, where the theme of the bishops' meetings started to bear more on political and social enlightenment. The 11th conference was hosted by Naha Diocese in Okinawa, Japan (2005), where lectures and discussions were held under the theme of "separation of religion and politics in Japan." The bishops criticized Japanese politicians' visits to Yasukuni Shrine to pay tribute to Japan's war dead. In Gyeongju (2012), the bishops decided the theme of the exchange to be denuclearization, with the shared recognition that after Fukushima nuclear power plants were threats to life and peace in East Asia.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the 21st Korean-Japanese bishops conference in Yokohama (2015) dealt with issues related to environmental destruction and regional security. In Yokohama, a city located near a large-scale naval base that threatens the security of East Asia, the sacrifice of the region for the US military's housing construction and military support emerged as sensitive issues. The Japanese Catholic Church developed a movement for establishing peace through political campaigns and demonstrations with local civil groups.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, ecclesial solidarity is more imperative for Japan than Korea because of differences in the social context of each country. Christianity and Buddhism have developed in Korea through secret coalitions with political power. Politics needed the power of religion, religion also needed the support of political forces for institutional expansion. Because religion is very useful for politics while politics is very helpful for religion, unlike Japan,

---

20. See *Catholic Peace Times* (November 25, 2012); The Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan (2011).

21. The support and solidarity of the Korean Catholic Church has always been emphasized through concrete comparisons with Korean society: "Korea is also pursuing the construction of a US military base on Jeju Island. We are having a hard time fighting with authorities and opinions are divided among believers [Catholics]. We are going through the same experiences as those of Mr. Iwa, a civil campaigner who lectured at the bishops conferences. The structure in which government power suppresses citizens is similar," said Bishop Peter Kang U-II (*Catholic Weekly of Japan* [November 18, 2015]).

religion in Korea has belonged to the public realm (sphere) rather than the private (Jeon 2013, 75–101). Thus, Sirahase insists that the solidarity with the other (Korean Church) can function as a strategic enforcement of the Japanese Church's social influence (Sirahase 2012, 74–89; 2013, 55–63). Accordingly, the Japanese Catholic Church has conflicts with the government over issues such as shrine worship, foreigner issues, which have prompted the Japanese Church's cooperation with the Korean Church and other religious and non-religious organizations (Hayasi 2011).

From the political movement perspective, however, ideological confrontation becomes the factor making solidarity difficult, as in secular society. According to Bishop Jang Ik, ideological conflict between the political left and right, not only in the episcopate of both countries but also in the body of believers, is very serious. Bishop Jang Ik remarked that differences in opinion or ideology were natural in any society or organization. Thus, the role of the Church is to recognize these differences and compensate for the conflict and repression that arises from such differences:

If there are several siblings in a family and two fight, the other members of the family should understand both sides without bias. But they are usually at either extreme .... There should be a neutral compromise. It is important to keep a middle course. There is no middle side when they blame the opposite side. Punishing others cannot make us righteous. We can be righteous when we are merciful. Can you believe certainly that you are on the right side? It depends on how you think. ... Jesus Christ doesn't discard you. So, let's embrace others, not scold them.<sup>22</sup>

Realistically, however, formulating concrete strategies for coordinating and integrating the ideological segments of their respective societies surrounding the issues they address, and how best to deliver a religious voice (justice), are the real challenges facing the Korean and Japanese bishops' solidarity.<sup>23</sup>

---

22. Bishop Jang Ik, interview by author, Namchuncheon, South Korea, March 4, 2017.

23. The focus of the bishops conferences on social issues has gradually increased. One key factor in this trend has been Pope Francis's tenure and his emphasis on social causes, but

Let us take a look at this solidarity in the realm of social charity. Historically, social welfare has been the conventional realm wherein religion could take an active part. The participation of the Church in social welfare as a function of the modern state has made positive contributions to the economic and social expenditures of the state. The Church could realize its ontological aim, that is, the practice of love, in the area of social charity. The Korean-Japanese bishops conferences have also been focusing on social charity in Japan, Korea, and the greater East Asia region.

Here, social charity refers specifically to small-scale, volunteer activities on behalf of those in need. Notably in Japan, because the charity functions of the Catholic Church were reinforced with the enactment of the NPO (non-profit organization) Act in 1998, societal views of the Church have been changing positively as the Church developed social charity and social education efforts on behalf of the impoverished, foreigners, and the mentally ill.<sup>24</sup> These activities have also attracted major attention to the bishops conferences (Y. Choi 2017c, 247).

I present here two examples of cooperative activities by the Korean and Japanese bishops in the area of social charity. During the 17th bishops conference in Sendai (2011), the bishops observed the destruction of the Fukushima disaster of March 2011 and offered physical and spiritual support to relief activities. Bishop Jang Ik related his memory of Sendai as follows:

---

other factors include the acceleration of economic competition among East Asian countries and the rise right-wing nationalism worldwide, which have pushed the bishops toward emphasizing universal values of order and progress.

24. When the Great Hanshin earthquake occurred in 1995, the damage was exacerbated by the inadequate management of government organizations. Voluntary citizen services greatly mitigated this situation. At that time, the Japanese government became convinced that the participation of citizen organizations in the public sphere could be a factor in reducing social costs to the government. Consequently, the NPO Act was legislated in 1998, and aid and support for civil society groups engaged in social volunteer activities came to be guaranteed within the framework of NPO law. The Catholic Church has also strengthened its own social identity within this system. Because of Japanese sentiments, the Catholic Church (as well as Protestants) has avoided practicing its own religiosity and conducted volunteer work in a variety of areas for its value as social contribution. Since the 2011 Fukushima earthquake, Japanese Christianity has been strengthening its missionary identity in the arena of social activism (Sakurai and Inaba 2012, 3–4).

Soon after the earthquake in northeastern Japan, I visited the place. We paid our respects to the deceased, as well. [silence] The bishop of Sendai is a very good person. I emptied my purse [in support of relief work]. Churches all over Japan also provided support. ... I viewed sites all over the place soon after the earthquake and tsunami had occurred. ... It seems that [being with them on the spot] is more important than just giving money to them. The Japanese Church is small but it does a lot of volunteer work in the event of earthquakes.<sup>25</sup>

According to Bishop Jang Ik, all the Catholic Dioceses of Japan came together to volunteer, and these activities by the Church improved its image in Japanese society.

The 16th bishops conference in Cheongju, Korea in 2010 was themed “the pastoral response to the suicide issue.” Korea and Japan have the highest suicide rates in the world.<sup>26</sup> Sociological analysis of the suicide phenomenon in the two countries, and discussions on the pastoral consideration of suicide victims and the families of suicide victims, were the main contents of the lectures. Discussed were not just religious interpretations and judgments on suicide, but the structural problems of society that contribute to suicide, and also, from a pastoral perspective, consideration was given as to how to care for the bereaved families of suicide victims as well as strategies to prevent suicide (Y. Choi 2017c, 249). Currently, Bishop Mori’s ministry is focusing on suicide prevention and counseling families of those who have committed suicide. In terms of the praxis of the Church, he stated.

---

25. Bishop Jang Ik, interview by author, Namchuncheon, South Korea, March 4, 2017.

26. In 2009, there were 15,400 suicides in Korea, making it the fourth leading cause of death. With 31 suicides per 100,000 population, Korea has the highest suicide rate among OECD countries. In 2009, Japan had 32,800 suicides, or 25.8 per 100,000 population. The economic downturn and the resulting unemployment rate has caused an especially dramatic rise in suicide rates for those in their 20s and 30s and became the highest among those in their 40s. The bishops urged that in the end, the Church needs to help in reconstructing social values and views of life. In one interview, Bishop Mori also singled out “suicide prevention and healing programs for the families of suicide victims” as the pastoral area to which the Japanese Catholic Church should pay the most attention (*Catholic Weekly of Japan* [December 5, 2010]). See also, Mori (2009, 42–50).



According to Pope Francis' thinking, there is a rank to ecclesial doctrine. The most important role of the Church is the understanding and acceptance those who have undergone pain and grief on account of the sin [of suicide]. Pope Francis is teaching, "We never consider the rank of the doctrine, just pay attention to the essential doctrine [mercy]."<sup>27</sup>

As Mori's own statements reveal, the essence of the Church ministry is to stand by the poor and marginalized.<sup>28</sup> The identity of the Catholic Church may be understood as maintaining solidarity with the poor through religious values beyond secular social power. The leaders of the Catholic Churches in both countries should stand for social justice, but the essence of this should be mercy and love.

## Conclusion

The Korean-Japanese bishops conferences have promoted the notion that the Church as a member of civil society can contribute to Korea-Japan harmony for the sake of peace in East Asia. With this awareness, the bishops of Korea and Japan focused on issues of historical attitudes and reconciliation in the hopes of decreasing social conflict and the antagonism between their countries through cooperative history-writing projects and cultural exchange.

Beyond historical issues, the bishops have worked together to establish

---

27. Bishop Paul Kazuhiro Mori, interview by author, the Society of the Divine Word Center, Tokyo, Japan, January 14, 2017.

28. The Korean and Japanese bishops have had differences in their views of suicide. The Japanese bishops have been more compassionate about suicide, whereas the Korean bishops tend to think such a compassionate approach will not help prevent suicides. Korean bishops assert that it is more effective to hold on to the more decisive and ethical position because the compassionate approach is not helpful for suicide-prevention it that it can create the perception that the main agent of life is not God but the individual. Of course, it is valid to think that this distinction results not from the issue of values but from divergent experiences and strategies for decreasing suicides and improving the social environment. For differences in the opinions of Korean and Japanese bishops on suicide, see *Catholic Weekly of Japan* (December 5, 2010).

pastoral policies and visions on issues concerning politics, the economy, the environment, security, and minority rights. This paper has focused on the social contributions of the Korean and Japanese bishops working in solidarity. The social activism of the bishops may be categorized into two aspects. The first is its characteristic as a movement with a political orientation for structural change in both societies. The second is its social charity aspect, which is defined as the practice of charity and volunteer work for the poor or marginalized. From the viewpoint of civil society, this may be considered the actions of a non-government organization for the order and progress of society. In other words, these solidarity activities based on Christian social ethics aim at changing the social structure for the integrity of humanity (Steigleder 1989, 242–247).

The Catholic Church, by maintaining an ethically just perspective on and action towards the specific social and historical problems facing the East Asia region—a stance consistent with the Church's missiology in terms of justice and peace—creates solidarity among regional churches, which in turn may serve as inspiration for larger civil society. Firstly, from the viewpoint of civil society, geographical proximity, race and cultural homogeneity can be very helpful in finding a deeper understanding and solutions to the Church's current challenges related to social dislocation. The sharing and accumulating of the networks and resources of each local church can contribute to the enforcement of ethics and the social order within East Asia. In other words, whereas regional solidarity may be deadlocked at the state level, the solidarity of the bishops may be able to stimulate the possibility of solidarity at the level of civil society. Prior to regional solidarity for economic prosperity, it is more important to achieve values such as peace, reconciliation, environmental sustainability, mutual care, and human dignity if one is to have authentic regional prosperity, and this possibility could be awakened through episcopal solidarity.

Secondly, in terms of the Church mission, when the solidarity of local churches focuses on social contributions, this will have a tremendous missionary effect and is itself perhaps the best way of representing the Church and its mission. It reveals that the Church as a member of civil society is a concrete manifestation of Christian identity in that it can also

contribute to the development of secular societies in the region. Such social contributions will contribute not only to social development, but to the formation of positive images of the Catholic Church.

The solidarity of local churches, as with the Korean-Japanese bishops conferences, aims at ethical universalism beyond the norms of particularism based on culture and nationality. Therefore, I claim that this universalism may be discovered in the moral ethos of humanity and the acme of religious conviction. Further, in the present day, where any treatment of regional issues becomes deadlocked by national egotism, I believe the Korean-Japanese bishops conferences have established the belief that activities of East Asian solidarity can contribute to some extent to the peace and worth of the region. In other words, with the growing skepticism that any East Asian community can realistically be realized at the national or governmental level, successful solidarity efforts at the civil and social levels help confirm that East Asian solidarity has some practical possibilities.

The Catholic Church is actively expressing its identity not only within the transcendental realm but also within the secular. The religious faith of the Catholic Church can cover both sanctity and mundanity, and the social can also be the subject of understanding and field of action of faith (Bader 1991, 107). According to Catholic social teaching, solidarity implies sharing the pains that individuals and communities experience, such as when justice is ignored or denied. Further, it includes protecting communities from misfortune and actively assisting them, even if it means accepting the risks of a community in certain situations (Sesboüé 1991, 416).

---

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Choi, Young-Kyun. 2017a. Interview with Bishop Mori, Kazuhiro. January 14.  
\_\_\_\_\_. 2017b. Interview with Bishop John Jang Ik. March 4.

- Gallup Korea. 2015. *Hangukin-ui jonggyo 1984–2014* (The Religion of Koreans 1984–2014). Seoul: Gallup Korea.
- The Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan (CBCJ). 1995. *Resolution for Peace: On the 50th Anniversary of the End the War*. Tokyo: CBCJ. <https://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/1995/02/25/5053/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. *Genshiryoku hatsuden wa “ondan-ka” boshi no kirifudade wanai! Chikyujō no seimei kankyo ni totte sai waru no sentaku...* (Nuclear Power is Not a Trump Card to Prevent ‘Global Warming!’ The Ultimate Choice for Life on Earth...). Tokyo: CBCJ.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. *The Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan Year Book 2017*. Tokyo: CBCJ.
- The Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea (CBCCK). 1991. *Centesimus Annus* (Hundredth Year). Seoul: CBCCK. <http://ebook.cbck.or.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=73114>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2014. *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). Seoul: CBCCK. <http://ebook.cbck.or.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=214481#p=4>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015. *Laudato Si’* (Praise Be to You). Seoul: CBCCK. <http://ebook.cbck.or.kr/gallery/view.asp?seq=214561#p=2>.
- The Catholic Peace Times*. 2012. “Hanguk-Ilbon-gyohoe jugyodan ‘Talhaek’ juje jugyogyoryumoim” (Korean-Japanese Church Bishops’ Conference on the Subject of ‘Denuclearization’). November 25.
- The Catholic Times*. 1997. “Lee Moon-hee daejugyo teukbyeolgigo—yeoksa gongdong insigeul wihan hanil jugyo gandamhoe gyeolgwa” (Archbishop Lee Moon-hee’s Special Report—Results of the Korea-Japan Bishops’ Meeting for the Common Recognition of History). January 1.
- The Catholic Weekly of Japan*. 1996a. “Nikkan gyokasho mondai” (Japanese-Korean History Problem). February 25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996b. “Nikkan gyokasho mondai kondankai” (A Meeting of Japanese-Korean Textbook). December 26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. “Jisatsuo te-makara manabu” (A Learning from the Theme of Suicide). December 5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2015. “Sengo70neng katorikkugyokaiha shakaino nakade hukuino donoyouniikitekitaka” (How did the Catholic Church Practice the Gospel during the 70 years after War). November 18.

## Secondary Sources

- Bader, Erwin. 1991. *Christlich Sozialreform: Beiträge zur Sozialphilosophie in einer veränderten Welt; mit dem Text der neuen Sozialenzyklika* (Christian Social Reform: Contributions to Social Philosophy in a Changing World; With the Text of the New Social Encyclical). Freiburg: Herder.

- Baik, Yong-Seo. 2000. *Dongasia-ui gwihwan: Jungguk-ui geundaeseong-eul munneunda* (The Return of East Asia: Ask about China's Modernity). Seoul: Changbi.
- Choi, Hyeon-Jong. 2015. "Sahoejinbo-wa jonggyo-ui yeokal" (Social Progress and the Role of Religion). *Damron 201* (Discourse 201) 18.1: 101–120.
- Choi, Young-Kyun. 2017c. "Hanil jugyogyoryu-eseo silhyeondoeneun yeondae-ui donghak" (The Solidarity of Korean-Japanese Bishops and Its Dynamism). *The Catholic Theology* 31: 221–264.
- Chu, Gyo-Yun. 2009. *Hangukcheonjugyohoe-ui dodeokjeog gwonwi-wa sahoejeog yeokal* (Moral Authority and Social Role in the Korean Catholic Church). Incheon: Wiz and Biz.
- Emeis, Dieter. 1996. "Glaubensgehorsam angesichts der 'Zeichen der Zeit'" (Faithful Obedience Facing up to the 'Sign of the Time'). In *die Kirche in der Welt von heute-und morgen?* (What is the Church in the World Today and Tomorrow?), edited by Lange Günter, 31–44. Bochum: Brockmeyer.
- Furger, Franz. 1991. *Christliche Sozialethik: Grundlagen und Zielsetzungen* (Christian Social Ethics: Foundations and Objectives). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. *Theorie des kommunikativen handelns* (Theory of Communicative Action). 2 vols. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Hayasi, Hisashi. 2011. *Isiga sakebu* (The Stone Shouts). Tokyo: Iwanam.
- Huzimoto, Rua and Hotaka Sukata. 2011. "Seijito shuukyō—gendainihonno seijimondai" (Politics and Religion—Political Issues of Modern Japan). In *Shuukyōto shakaino furontia* (Religion and Frontier of Society), edited by Takahasi Norihumi, Tasukada Hotaka, and Okamoto Ryosuke, 197–215. Tokyo: Keisou.
- Jeon, Myeong-Su. 2013. "Hanguk jonggyo-wa jeongchi-ui gwangye-Daetongryeong sungeo-reul jungsimeuro" (The Relation of Korean Religion and Politics: An Analytical Approach to Presidential Election in Korea). *Damron 201* (Discourse 201) 16.2: 75–101.
- Kikuchi, Isao. "Dai 15-kai nikkan shikyo koryu-kai kaisai" (The 15th Korean-Japanese Bishops Conference Held). Last modified November 21, 2008. <http://bishopkikuchi.cocolog-nifty.com/diary/2009/11/15-586e.html>.
- Kim, Hak-Jae. 2013. "Dongasia naengjeon-ui segaji pyeonghwamodel: Panmunjeom, Jeneva, Bandung-ui pyeongwagihoeok" (Three Peace Regimes in East Asia during the Cold War: Panmunjom, Geneva and Bandung). *Yeoksabipyyeong* (Critical Review of History) 105: 236–279.
- Kim, Keong-Il. 2011. *Jegug-ui sidae-wa dongasia yeondae* (The Age of the Empire and East Asian Solidarity). Seoul: Changbi.
- Lee, Won-Soon, Jae-Jung Jung, and EuI-Sik Seo. 2004. *Gakkabgodo gakkau nararo: Hanguk-gwa Ilbon* (To Close and Near Country: Korea and Japan). Seoul: Sol.

- Milbrath, Lester W. 1984. *Environmentalist: Vanguard for a New Society*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Mori, Kazuhiro. 2009. *Ningenga kowareteiku: nihonshakai to hitonoariyouwo gangaeru* (Human is Shipwrecked: Japanese Society and Thinking of a Human Being). Tokyo: Josipaurokai.
- Ohashi, Hideo. 1999. "Ikigaitaikoku to asean: keizaikikisiganmondaiwo chusin" (The Great Country Out of the Region and Asenan: Applying Problem of the Economic Crisis). *Kokusaimondai* (International Issue) July: 17–30.
- Sakurai, Yoshihide and Keishin Inaba. 2012. *Aziano Shuukyoto sosharukepitaru* (Asia's Religion and Social Capital). Tokyo: Akasishoko.
- Satou, Kouichi. 2006. "Higasiaziakyoudoutaikousou to nihon" (East Asia Community Design and Japan). *Aziakenkyuu* (Asia Research) 52.3: 1–16.
- Sesboüé, Bernard. 1991. *Gesù Cristo l'unico mediatore-Saggio sulla redenzione e la salvezza: 1* (Jesus Christ the Only Mediator—Essay on Redemption and Salvation: 1). Milano: Edizione Paoline.
- Sirahase, Tatsuya. 2012. "Ikizurasato shukyou—shukyono atarasi shakaisankano katachi" (The Pain of Life and Religion—The Way of New Social Participation of Religion). In *Shuukyouto shakaino furontia* (Religion and Frontier of Society), edited by Takahasi Norihumi, Tasukada Hotaka, and Okamoto Ryosuke, 74–91. Tokyo: Keisou.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2013. "Shohyou nihonkatorikku sikyoukyougikai shakaisikyoiinkai hen—'Naze kyoukaiwa shakaimondaini kakawaruka'" (Book Review of Social Archbishop's Committee of the Japanese Council of Catholic Bishops—'Why the Church Gets Involved in the Social Issues'). *Shuukyouto shakaideki kouken* (Religion and Social Contribution) 3.2: 55–63.
- Steigleder, Klaus. 1989. "Probleme angewandter Ethik" (Problem of Applied Ethics). *Concilium* 25.3: 242–247.
- Tanaka, Hitoshi. 2005. "Dongasia-ui mirae-reul hyanghaeseo" (Towards the Future of East Asia). *Hallym Ilbonhak* (The Hallym Journal of Japanese Studies) 10: 241–263.
- Taniguchi, Makoto. 2004. *Higasiaziakyoudoutai: keizaitougounoyukue to nihon* (East Asian Community: The Orientation of the Economic Integration and Japan). Tokyo: Iwanamishinsho.
- Wada, Haruki. 2003. *Higasiaziakyoudoutai: keizaitougouno yukueto* (East Asia Community: The Future of Economic Integration and Japan). Tokyo: Heibonsha.
- Zerfaß, Rolf. 1996. "Kirche in der Minderheit-Gott in ihrer Mitte?" (Is There a Church among the Minority Gods?). In *Die Kirche in der Welt von heute und morgen?* (What is the Church in the World Today and Tomorrow?), edited by Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Ruhr-Univ. Bochum, 65–89. Ruhr: Universitätsverlag.